

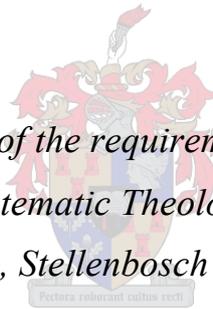
Performing Christ

A South African Protest Play and the Theological Dramatic Theory of Hans Urs
von Balthasar

by

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Marthinus Johannes Havenga

April 2019

Abstract

In the latter part of the 20th century, against the backdrop of incidents such as the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto Uprising, theatre became one of the principal means of ‘artistic resistance’ in apartheid South Africa. An important play from this time was a work titled *Woza Albert!*, which was created and performed by the actor-duo Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Ngema in 1981, with the help and creative input of the renowned theatre-maker and political activist, Barney Simon. What made this piece of protest theatre so powerful and provocative was the fact that it retold the Christ-narrative, as found in the Gospels, in the context of apartheid South Africa, with Jesus, or Morena (as he is called in Sesotho), arriving at the Pass Office in Albert Street, Johannesburg, to preach the Good News to the poor and to liberate the oppressed, who were suffering under the apartheid regime.

This dissertation will aim to provide a theological reading of this important protest play, informed by the theological dramatic theory of the Swiss Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar. It will begin by conducting an investigation into the nature, task, and scope of theology, before offering an extensive engagement with Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as developed in his five-volume work, *Theo-drama* (the second installment of his trilogy on ‘beauty’, ‘goodness’, and ‘truth’). This will be followed by an exploration of the history of (protest) theatre in South Africa, and a discussion of how *Woza Albert!* came into being. Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory will then be used to give a theological reading of the play.

Opsomming

In die tweede helfte van die 20^{ste} eeu, teen die agtergrond van gebeure soos die Sharpeville-slagting en die Soweto-opstande, was teater een van die vernaamste maniere waarop die kunste weerstand teen apartheid in Suid-Afrika gebied het. ‘n Belangrike protes-toneelstuk wat in hierdie tydperk die lig gesien het, was ‘n werk getiteld *Woza Albert!*, wat in 1981 deur Percy Mtwa en Mbogeni Ngema, met die hulp en kreatiewe inset van die bekende dramaturg en politieke aktivis Barney Simon, geskep en opgevoer is. Wat hierdie protes-teaterstuk so treffend gemaak het, was die feit dat dit die Christusverhaal, soos dit in die Evangelies vervat is, in die konteks van apartheid oortel het, met Jesus, of Morena (soos hy in Sesotho genoem word), wat onverwags by die Paskantoor in Albertstraat, Johannesburg, opdaag om die Goeie Nuus aan diegene wat onder die apartheidsregime ly, te verkondig.

Hierdie doktrale verhandeling het ten doel om ‘n teologiese lees van hierdie belangrike protes-teaterstuk te bied, wat deur die teologiese dramatiese teorie van die Switserse Katolieke teoloog Hans Urs von Balthasar geïnformeer is. Eerstens, sal daar ondersoek na die aard, taak, en omvang van teologie ingestel word, waarna Balthasar se teologiese dramatiese teorie, soos dit in sy vyf-volume werk *Theo-drama* (die tweede gedeelte van sy trilogie aangaande ‘skoonheid’, ‘goedheid’, en ‘waarheid’) ontwikkel is, onder die loep geneem sal word. Hierna sal die geskiedenis van (protes) teater in Suid-Afrika, asook die agtergrond van die toneelstuk *Woza Albert!*, bespreek word. Laastens sal Balthasar se teologiese dramatiese teorie as lens aangewend word om ‘n teologiese lees van *Woza Albert!* weer te gee.

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As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

Gerard Manley Hopkins¹

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 141.

– 1 –

Introduction

“More than a mere instrument to be used in the worship of God, the body is also a site and weapon of protest, as we see in art and theatre both sacred and profane.”

Frank C. Senn²

“Theology ... meets us at every turn in our literature, it is the secret assumption, too axiomatic to be distinctly professed, of all our writers; nor can we help assuming it ourselves, except by the most unnatural vigilance.”

John Henry Newman³

1.1. South African Protest Theatre

Throughout history, it has often been seen how the most abhorrent realities can serve as a setting and stimulus for some of the most inspired works of art; how the most terrible of situations and darkest of hours can call forth the Muses of Parnassus, and instigate some of the most powerful and transformative artistic creations. This has also been the case in a country such as South Africa, where institutionalised apartheid reigned supreme for nearly five decades in the 20th century.

Amidst the discrimination and dehumanisation effected by the apartheid state, South Africa saw a remarkable upsurge in “extraordinarily rich” artistic works, in and through which artists endeavoured to expose, oppose, and dismantle the evils of the day.⁴ The realities of apartheid, the struggle for freedom, and the promise of a better tomorrow indeed engendered, in the words of John de Gruchy, an “outburst of creative energy”, an “explosion of art in all its many and different variations”, as it was recognised that the arts can speak a “liberating language”, and help bring about transformation and hope in a country desperately in need thereof.⁵

When considering this “explosion” of artistic activity during the apartheid years, it is interesting to see that one art form, or medium of artistic expression, which, in particular, rose to prominence amidst, and in response to, the atrocities committed in South Africa at the time, is that of theatre. Especially in the latter part of the 20th century, against the backdrop of the Sharpeville Massacre and the Soweto Uprising, the performance of drama texts became one of

² Frank C. Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), xix.

³ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996 [1899]), 56.

⁴ Sue Williams, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 9.

⁵ John De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 206.

the central means of ‘artistic resistance’ in South Africa, as a number of playwrights, directors, and actors, from different strands of society, created powerful theatre productions that confronted the realities of life under the apartheid regime head-on. Due to the subject matter of these plays, which were typically staged in community centres, church halls, and fringe theatre complexes (like the Market Theatre in Newtown, Johannesburg), those involved, including the audience members who attended performances, were often victimised, harassed, and even detained by the South African police force. Productions were also regularly censored and banned by the authorities.⁶ Yet, despite severe opposition from the apartheid government, these playwrights, directors, and actors relentlessly continued to create and stage influential works, which challenged the *status quo* and vocally stated what many South Africans knew to be the truth, but were often too scared to say themselves. And people listened, from all over the world.

These plays that were created and performed during the heyday of apartheid, could then be seen and described as works of protest theatre. For this is exactly the function that they had, namely, *to protest* – firstly, against the evils of apartheid which affected the lives of millions of South Africans on a daily basis; and secondly, also against injustice in a broader and more universal sense, as the playwrights, directors, and actors involved knew that the ills they were speaking out against were not confined to their own country, but affected humanity at large. Another reason why these productions could be seen and described as works of protest theatre has to do with the etymological roots of the word ‘protest’. It is important to note that the Latin word from which the English word ‘protest’ stems, *protestari* (*pro-* + *testari*), refers to a ‘testimony for’ something. And this is what these protest plays also aimed to provide. Far from only being ‘vehicles of revolt’, decrying the iniquities in South Africa and beyond, most of these productions concurrently endeavoured, with “defiant joy”, to ‘attest to’ that which could be considered good, true, and beautiful in this world.⁷

My first exposure to these anti-apartheid protest plays occurred while I was still at school in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, when we were taken on an end-of-semester outing to the very Market Theatre in Newtown, mentioned above. The play that we saw on this occasion was Athol Fugard’s *Boesman and Lena*, which vividly depicts the dreadful realities of apartheid South Africa, by giving an account of the tragic existence of a ‘coloured’ couple who have

⁶ See Brian Crow, ‘A Truly Living Moment: Acting and the Statements Plays,’ in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, eds. Geoffrey Davies and Anne Fuchs (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 13.

⁷ Mary Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon: Bare stage, a Few Props, Great Theatre* (Cape Town: Galvin and Sales, 1997), 121.

been forcefully removed from their home by the apartheid authorities, and are now aimlessly wandering through the Swartkops mudflats, outside Port Elizabeth. This first encounter with anti-apartheid protest theatre made an immense impression on me and completely changed the way I thought about art and the theatre, going forward. Up until this point, I was under the impression that works of artistic creation, whether music, film, fine art, or theatre, solely belonged to the realm of leisure and entertainment, and presented humanity with the opportunity to momentarily forget about, and escape from, the realities of everyday life. However, after seeing *Boesman and Lena*, I became aware of the way in which the arts, and especially the theatre, could be used to portray, uncover, and speak out against injustices in the world; how it could give a voice to the voiceless, and challenge and subvert the wrongs that are present in society. For me, this was an “art awakening”, to use the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, who had a similar experience one Sunday afternoon in the mid-1960’s, when he heard an African-American ‘work song’ over the University of Michigan radio station for the first time.⁸

Following this initial exposure to South African protest theatre, I began visiting the Market Theatre as often as possible. I also began spending many hours in the excellent Africana bookstore, opposite the theatre complex on Mary Fitzgerald Square, which stocked copies of most of the plays that were being performed across the road. These visits to the Market Theatre continued after I finished school and moved from Johannesburg to Stellenbosch, in order to commence with my theological studies. Whenever I came home for the holidays, one of the first things I would do was to go and see the works that were currently being performed at the Market Theatre. As was the case with *Boesman and Lena*, this would often include newly-

⁸ Wolterstorff writes that, up until this fateful Sunday afternoon, he was of firm conviction that art only existed as an “end unto itself”, and that it did not, and could not ever hope to, serve any external purpose. As a university professor, teaching a course in philosophy of art at the time, this was also then what he communicated to his students in the classroom. He notes that the textbook he prescribed for the module was Monroe Beardsley’s *Aesthetics*, which propagated that works of artistic creation belonged to a special autonomous sphere of human existence, and that these works should solely be appreciated for art’s sake (to follow the 19th century French expression, *l’art pour l’art*). All of this changed, however, when the University of Michigan radio station decided one Sunday afternoon to devote its programming not to classical music (as was the custom), but to African American ‘work songs’ – pieces of sung music that originated in the era of slavery and described and decried the abysmal conditions the singers had to work and live under. Upon hearing these songs, Wolterstorff writes, he immediately realised that – although these compositions could undoubtedly be described as works of art – they were clearly not created for mere artistic enjoyment and disinterested contemplation but were intrinsically tied to the context in which they originated and fulfilled a very definitive social and political function. He, accordingly, while listening to these ‘work songs’ came to the realisation that the understanding of art which he had held throughout his life was highly deficient; that works of artistic creation could, in fact, fulfil certain social and political functions in society – for this is exactly what these ‘work songs’ that were playing on the radio were doing. From this moment onwards, Wolterstorff would come to focus most of his philosophical work in the field of aesthetics on the social and also political dimensions of art. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-4; and also, Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Beyond Beauty and the Aesthetic in the Engagement of Religion and Art,’ in *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, eds. Oleg V. Bychkov and James Fodor (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 119-134.

commissioned productions of earlier protest plays, which, while stemming from the dark years of apartheid, remained disturbingly relevant to the current situation in the country.

From very early on, one of the things that fascinated me the most about these productions, besides the way in which they gave witness to, spoke out against, and attempted to help transform the socio-political realities in the country, was the fact that many of their plots were saturated with religious themes and imagery, and often referred to, and even retold, biblical narratives. I indeed came to realise that there is a “powerful presence of, and predilection for, religious discourses” in several South African protest plays, to use the words of Martin Orkin.⁹ Although I was curious about why this was the case, and how these “religious discourses” functioned within these works, I did not really make any conscious connections between the theology that I was studying at university and the theatre productions that I was attending while at home. To my mind, Stellenbosch and Johannesburg, the Theological Faculty and the Market Theatre, were worlds apart. As the early North-African theologian, Tertullian, might have said: ‘What has Newtown to do with Stellenbosch?’¹⁰ Towards the middle of my fourth and final year of undergraduate studies, this neat distinction that I had maintained between theology and the world of protest theatre was, however, challenged in a profound manner, as I went to see one of the most important and “politically potent”¹¹ protest plays from the apartheid years, which was being performed at the Market Theatre during that winter holiday. This play was the 1981 production, *Woza Albert!*, created by by the actor-duo Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, with the help and creative input of the political activist, director, and co-founder of the Market Theatre, Barney Simon.¹²

What made *Woza Albert!* such a significant and provocative work, also then for me, as a young theology student, was the fact that it explicitly recasts the story of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, as told in the Bible, so that it takes place in South Africa during the apartheid years. *Woza Albert!* is indeed a creative retelling of the Christ-narrative, with Jesus, or Morena (as he is called in Sesotho), arriving in apartheid South Africa to preach the Good News to the poor and to liberate the oppressed, who are suffering under the apartheid regime. In the play, this ‘performance’ of Christ leads to strong opposition from the South African government, who imprisons him on

⁹ Martin Orkin, ‘Whose Popular Theatre and Performance,’ in Davies and Fuchs, 52–3. See also Bhekizizwe Peterson's remarks in this regard in his article, ‘Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 241, 243–4.

¹⁰ Cf. Tertullian, ‘The Prescription Against Heretics,’ in *The Ante-Nicean Fathers, Volume III*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Peter Holms (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 246.

¹¹ Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 118.

¹² This particular three-month long run of *Woza Albert!* at the Market Theatre starred Siyabonga Twala and Tony Kgoroge, and was directed by Sello Maake ka Ncube.

Robben Island (the same prison where Nelson Mandela was being held), and also eventually brings an end to his life, not by means of a cross, but by dropping a nuclear bomb on his head (which, in the process, blows up the whole of Cape Town and Table Mountain). As in the Gospels, this is, however, not the end of the drama of Christ's mission on earth. After three days, Morena is brought back to life, and in the climactic final scene of the play, he begins to raise a number of black leaders who have also died, while fighting against apartheid – leaders such as Steve Biko, Lillian Ngoyi, and Albert Luthuli (hence the play's name, 'Woza Albert!', which means, 'Rise up, Albert!', in Sesotho).

1.2. A Theological Engagement with *Woza Albert!*?

After seeing this performance of *Woza Albert!* and reading the script of the play for the first time, I was rather puzzled about what to make of this piece of protest theatre – especially as a theology student, who, incidentally, had to work on a number of essays on matters pertaining to Christology during that holiday. The questions I asked myself included: Could and should theology care about, and attempt to enter into conversation with, the world of theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular? Or, should theology rather keep to its own focus-areas, whether it be the doctrine of the Trinity, or the Scriptures (studied in Greek and Hebrew, of course), or the divinity of Christ, or the life of the Christian Church, thereby leaving things such as drama performances to other, more suitable academic disciplines, whether it be theatre and literary studies, or even the political sciences (given the political importance of the play *Woza Albert!*)? During my undergraduate studies, I attended extra philosophy courses that were not part of our theological curriculum, and one philosophy professor, in particular, always told us that there is a reason why the Faculty of Theology stood on the one side of Stellenbosch's famous Victoria Street, while the rest of the university could be found on the other side. In his opinion, 'this-worldly' phenomena, such as the play *Woza Albert!*, clearly belonged on the university's side of the road and not on that of the Faculty of Theology.

As I returned to Stellenbosch to complete my final year of undergraduate studies and, with time, enrolled for a postgraduate degree in systematic theology (with the aim of writing a thesis on the idea of the beauty of God),¹³ I kept thinking of the play *Woza Albert!* that I had seen at the Market Theatre, wondering if it would not perhaps still be possible and, importantly,

¹³ This master's study in theological aesthetics ultimately focused on the American Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart's use of the *analogia entis* in his monograph, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. See Marthinus Johannes Havenga, *The Infinitude of Beauty as Expression of the Beauty of the Infinite? A Critical Evaluation of the Use of the Analogia Entis in the Theological Aesthetics of David Bentley Hart* (Stellenbosch: Unpublished Master's Thesis, 2014).

permissible, to say something about this work from within the field of theology. It was during this time, while doing research for my master's thesis, that I became better acquainted with a number of contemporary theological voices who were developing constructive systematic theologies that were not only grounded in, and drawing on, the riches of the Christian intellectual and spiritual tradition throughout the ages, but also deliberately entering into conversation with the social, political, and cultural realities of this world, from a theological point of view. For me, an important voice in this regard, came to be the Anglo-Catholic theologian, Graham Ward, who, from the very beginning of his theological career, set out to construct what he called a 'culturally engaged' systematic theology, which attempted to move beyond the modern-day dualisms separating God and the world, and theology and the other academic disciplines, so as to speak to, and engage with, the realities of people's everyday lives on earth, including cultural realities, such as the arts.

By reading the work of Graham Ward, and that of other contemporary theologians with a similar theological vision, it thus became evident that the play *Woza Albert!* could definitely be investigated theologically, which was a very encouraging thought. However, as I started doing further research in this regard, also then with this doctoral project in mind, I increasingly began to wonder whether such a study, even if it was theoretically possible and permissible, would be a wise and sensible project to undertake. The reason for this uncertainty had to do with the animosity that has existed between Christianity and the theatre throughout history. Ever since the patristic age, I came to learn, the Christian Church had continually spoken out against, and attempted to encumber, the theatrical arts and the profession of the actor,¹⁴ prompting many thinkers to declare that Christianity and the stage were irreconcilable realities, that should best be kept apart.¹⁵ Fortunately, however, as I was working through the writings of Ward and others, I also became better acquainted with number of theologians of previous generations, who helped inspire their theological thinking. In this process, I was re-introduced to a Swiss Catholic theologian who, as I discovered, not only set out to engage theologically with the time-and-space-bound realities of creaturely existence, but, in doing so, explicitly entered into conversation with, and attempted to construct a theology on account of, the theatre. This theologian was Hans Urs von Balthasar, arguably one of the most important, innovative, and provocative Catholic thinkers of the previous century.

¹⁴ See, for example, Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 60ff. Cf. also Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 19-50.

¹⁵ See, for example, Samuel Gover Winchester, *The Theatre* (Philadelphia: William S. Marten, 1840), 232.

1.3. Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Theological Dramatic Theory

Contrary to the majority of theological voices throughout history, Hans Urs von Balthasar indeed believed that the theatre could be regarded as a “promising point of departure” for theology.¹⁶ Following his seven-volume work in theological aesthetics, which focuses on the beauty and glory of God (a work which came to play an all-important role in my master’s thesis), he thus composed a five-volume work in theological dramatics titled *Theodramatik* (or *Theo-drama* in English). In this work, he develops a theological dramatic theory, in which he engages with, and utilises certain resources from, drama and the world of the theatre in an attempt to unify, augment, and bring to fulfilment different strands of modern theology, including, importantly, ‘political theology’, which deals with the liberation of the oppressed.

When working through this theodramatic project by Balthasar, it is seen that the initial two volumes primarily focus on, and attempt to give an exposition of, the critical intersections and correspondences between drama, as performed on the theatre stage, and the drama of real life, as it is acted out on the world stage. Balthasar is particularly interested in how the theatre offers us language to describe our individual and communal lives on earth, while also serving as a mirror that reflects and thereby “illuminates” the drama of human existence (and certain pertinent themes in this drama such as ‘finitude and death’, ‘the struggle for the good’, as well as the ‘question of human freedom’).¹⁷ According to Balthasar, one of the great benefits of the theatre, also for theology, is that it shines a “ray of light into the confusion of reality”, helping humanity, as actors on the world stage, to better understand, and even come to new convictions about, the role that they have been called to play in their day-to-day lives.¹⁸ At the outset, Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory is thus mainly concerned with the dramas that we, as human beings, partake in on earth, whether in the theatre itself, or on the stage of life.

As his theological dramatic theory progresses, Balthasar, however, increasingly turns to more theological subject matter, and from the third volume of *Theo-drama* onwards, he deliberately embarks on an extensive exploration of the dramatic performance of Christ on the world stage, a performance he regards as the ‘drama of all dramas’, which definitively reveals God’s goodness in and for the world. For Balthasar, the drama of the Christ-event, consisting of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, is the all-defining turning point in history, which not only brings about redemption and liberation for humanity and the whole created order, but also in-forms

¹⁶ See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume I, Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 9-12.

¹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 10, 17-8.

¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 10, 17-8.

and gives new meaning to all other dramatic activity on earth, both on the world stage and, importantly, on the theatre stage. This dramatic Christology that Balthasar develops in conversation with the world of theatre, serves as the highpoint of his theological dramatic theory (and, arguably, his whole theological project), and opens up a myriad of new possibilities to think about, and to engage theologically with, the dramatic arts.

In the light of all that has been said above, it thus seemed fitting to do doctoral research on Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory – firstly, to see how theology could think about, enter into conversation with, and develop a Christology on account of drama and the world of theatre; and secondly, also to try and understand how systematic theology could potentially make sense of, and engage with, a play such as *Woza Albert!*, with its dramatic depiction of the Christ-narrative in the context of apartheid South Africa. And this is how this PhD-project came into being.

1.4. Research Question, Chapter Outline, and Research Methodology

In what follows, my aim will indeed then be to engage theologically with Mtwala, Ngema, and Simon's play, by making use of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory. This will be done in order to answer the following question: *How would a theological reading of the anti-apartheid protest play Woza Albert!, informed by Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, potentially look?* On my way to answering this question, I will also, amongst other things, conduct an investigation into the nature and task of theology; look at Graham Ward's notion of a 'culturally engaged' systematic theology; introduce Hans Urs von Balthasar as a 'culturally engaged' systematic theologian; give an exposition of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory and his understanding of the drama of the Christ-event (as espoused in his five-volume work *Theo-drama*); as well as explore the history of theatre in (southern) Africa. The initial investigation into the nature and task of theology, as well as the discussion of Ward's theological vision and Balthasar's life, work, and theological method, will take place in Chapter Two. Chapters Three and Four will offer an extensive engagement with Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, and Chapter Five will aim to give an overview of theatre in South Africa, from pre-colonial times until the early 1980's, when *Woza Albert!* came into being. Towards the end of Chapter Five, as the culmination of the dissertation as a whole, Balthasar's theological dramatic theory will be used to offer a theological reading of *Woza Albert!*, so as to answer the research question, as stated above. Chapter Six will then consist of a brief overview of the dissertation and draw everything to a close, by means of a few concluding remarks.

With regards to the methodology used, this dissertation will take the form of a literary study that will employ key insights from theological texts by theologians such as Graham Ward and, importantly, Hans Urs von Balthasar, in order to ‘perform’ a theological reading of the anti-apartheid protest play, *Woza Albert!*, towards the end of the dissertation. By ‘performing’ this theological reading, the dissertation will attempt to do theology in a ‘culturally engaged’ manner, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. Given the fact that I belong to the Reformed tradition, this dissertation will naturally be an ecumenical study that will set out to work across denominational borders, while taking the particularity of different traditions seriously. It can be argued that Hans Urs von Balthasar himself was an ecumenical thinker, who, as a Roman Catholic priest and scholar, continually called for conversation across denominational lines, and throughout his life engaged with, and learned from, scholars from other traditions. This dissertation, which came into being under the guidance of various Reformed, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran mentors, was written with this ecumenical vision in mind.

1.5. Performing Christ

As the epigraph of this dissertation, I have chosen the sonnet, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, by the poet-priest Gerald Manley Hopkins, a thinker who was well-loved by Hans Urs von Balthasar and who holds an important place in his theological aesthetics.¹⁹ In this poem,²⁰ Hopkins starts out by vividly describing how “each mortal thing” in God’s good creation does what it has been created and called to do. Kingfishers, he writes, “catch fire” as the daylight brings their plumage to a radiant glow, just as dragonflies “draw flame” as their wings reflect the sun’s golden rays. Stones “ring” in a certain manner when they are flung into “roundy wells”, and “each hung bell” loudly jingles when its string is “tucked”. When a bow is plucked, it also “finds tongue to fling out broad its name”. He then goes on to propose that when human beings do what they have been created and called to do, which is to seek justice, to “keep grace”, and to keep all their “goings graces”, it is as if Christ himself ‘plays’ – or is ‘performed’ – “on ‘ten thousand’ stages” all over the world.²¹ This is indeed, then, what this dissertation will ultimately concern itself with: the performance of Christ – on the stage of first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, yes, but also on the stage of the Market Theatre, and in “ten thousand other places”, as people re-enact, and give further expression to, the drama of his existence through the dramas of their own day-to-day lives on the world stage.

¹⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume III, Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989), 353-99.

²⁰ Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 141.

²¹ Angus Easson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Routledge, 2011), 97.

– 2 –

A ‘Culturally Engaged’ Systematic Theology

“The object of theology is God and all things in God. Theology is chiefly concerned with God the Holy Trinity, first in his inner works, his supremely abundant and perfect life as Father, Son, and Spirit, and then in his outer works, the missions of the Son and the Spirit as they effect the Father’s purpose. Derivatively, theology is concerned with created things, those realities to whom God has given the gift of life.”

John Webster¹

“Theology is concerned with everything created and as such it necessarily draws upon every science (as Aquinas saw in the opening questio of his *Summa Theologiae*).”

Graham Ward²

“... I would like to express a conviction, formed during my peregrinations and shared by the great men I was privileged to know, namely, that ... if [the Church] is to impart her highest values to the modern world, she must not meet it as a stranger or as an adversary but rather encounter it from within, assimilating whatever may be valid within its new systems. Not extrinsically, but in such a way that whatever is new would recall older treasures, treasures which have always been present, but were forgotten or which have not yet even been discovered ...”

Hans Urs von Balthasar³

2.1. Introduction – The Task of Theology?

As stated in the introductory chapter, an important question that could be raised at the outset of this study is if theology, which as the name indicates could in rudimental terms be understood as a word or discourse (*logos*) concerning God or the divine (*theos*), should examine cultural (and, in this case, also political) phenomena, such as drama-scripts and theatre performances? Some might indeed wonder if something like South African protest theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular, fall within the bounds of what theology ought to, and, importantly, is capable of, investigating, if it is still to remain ‘theology’ in the proper sense of the word? This concern is rooted in, and opens up to, larger questions about the nature and task of theology, as well as the vocation of the theologian (that which the

¹ John Webster, ‘God, Theology, Universities,’ in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Volume II, Virtue and Intellect* (London: T&T Clarke, 2016), 159.

² Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 140.

³ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good: An Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar by Angelo Scola* trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 13. It should be noted that, as I have decided not to tamper with the direct quotations from Balthasar and others, there are certain passages which might include gender-exclusive language, as is the case here. The rest of the dissertation, however, will make use of gender-inclusive language.

theologian is ‘called to do’) – questions that have again become very prominent and pressing in our day and age, inside and outside of academia.⁴

In this second chapter, I would like to concentrate on these important questions and, in doing so, attempt to lay the foundations for what is to follow in the subsequent sections of the dissertation. I will begin by looking at one of the important classical understandings of what theology is, and what its scope and foci ought to be, as found in the work of the 13th century theologian, Thomas Aquinas, before examining ways in which theology has often been seen and understood after this view was initially put forward. This will be followed by a discussion of the Anglo-Catholic theologian Graham Ward’s notion of a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology, as a ‘corrective of’ and a ‘way beyond’ the dualisms that underlie certain strands of ‘modern theology’. This ‘culturally engaged’ approach to theology, as presented by Ward, will then be used as a key to introduce the life and work of the Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of Ward’s chief influences, whose theological dramatic theory will be investigated in the following two chapters, on our way to engaging with the play *Woza Albert!*, in Chapter Five.

2.2. God and Everything in Relation to God

It could be said that, up until the late Middle Ages, ‘Christian theology’,⁵ on the whole, was not only concerned with the so-called supernatural realm, but with ‘all that is’.⁶ As the entire cosmos was understood to be the contingent and gratuitous handiwork of God, as well as the setting (or, indeed then, theatre) of salvation, nothing was deemed to be beyond theological reflection; everything asked to be examined and explored in relation to the triune God in whom, to quote Paul, we “live, and move and have our being”.⁷

⁴ See Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1-11.

⁵ To use the word ‘theology’ with regards to the earliest Christian thinkers, is obviously somewhat anachronistic. Although the word Greek word ‘*theologia*’ was in circulation from the time of antiquity – and was indeed used by thinkers such as Eusebius, Tertullian, Augustine, and Gregory Nazianzus (who, from quite early on, was given the name ‘Gregory the Theologian’), it was not necessarily the standard description for early Christian thinkers’ reflection on God in the early years of the Church. Christian thinkers would rather have thought of their ‘theology’ (as we would call it today), as ‘Christian philosophy’. It was only by the 12th century that terms like ‘theology’ and ‘theologians’ really entered common usage. See Yves Congar, *A History of Theology* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 25-36; Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 35-6.

⁶ Cf. Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 33-4.

⁷ Romans 17:28.

Already with the patristic thinkers in the East and in the West, there was a strong sense that as this world, while ontologically distinct from God,⁸ is intrinsically tied to, and participates in, the life of the divine, Christian theology cannot solely be focused on a transcendent ‘beyond’, but should also attend to the realm of creation itself. Amidst the growing influences of Gnostic theosophy, which aimed to denounce the ontic world, and reduce salvation to a mere “spiritual technology”,⁹ the Church Fathers, in thinking about the life of the divine, deliberately strove to include the concrete, space-and-time-bound realities of our material existence on earth in their theological reflections. They did theology in this manner, as they were convinced of creation’s primordial, God-given beauty and goodness, and held fast to the redemptive efficacy of the bodily life, death, and resurrection of Christ, God’s Word who became flesh, in order to restore and renew the “the whole order of contingent earthly existence”.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the diverse dogmatic positions that were often promulgated and adhered to in the patristic era, there was an almost universal recognition, especially in the face of gnostic dualism (in its different manifestations), that creaturely existence should be seen in a sacramental light,¹¹ and that it should play an important role in what the theologian thinks and says about the reality of the transcendent God.¹²

As time went by, this early understanding of Christian theology, as a comprehensive undertaking which should turn its gaze towards both God and the world that God creates,

⁸ David Bentley Hart writes that, from the very beginning of Christianity, there has been consensus on the fact that, since creation did not ‘emanate’ from God’s being (as, for example, Gnostic thinkers believed), but was freely and deliberately summoned from nothingness, there is a radical *ontological* distinction between God and creation. This understanding would be challenged in the late Middle Ages (with, arguably, disastrous effect), as will be seen later in this chapter. See David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite, The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 249-73. On this point see also Ian McFarland’s *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 7, 19–20; and David Ferguson’s *Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 21.

⁹ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Darton, Cowley Publications, 2003), 33ff. Williams notes: “Despite the enormous variety of Gnostic ‘stories’ about the cosmos... there is a clear central motif, summed up by some modern scholars as the doctrine of the ‘alien God’... God and the world are strangers to one another. Thus, the historical and temporal order, the world of condition and determination, is in no way within the purposes of God; it is an abortion, a calamity (34).

¹⁰ Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, 59.

¹¹ Cf. Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 23. Boersma writes that this word, ‘sacramental’, implies that God, who is above all things, is also *really present* in and through all things. Cf. also Orthodox scholar, Alexander Schmemmann’s small booklet on this subject, namely, *The World as Sacrament* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965).

¹² For a comprehensive study of the way in which different patristic thinkers from the East and the West engaged with the reality of creation in their theological thought, see Paul M. Blowers’ monograph, *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 249-394; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 35; as well as the following writings by Louis Dupré: *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics in Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 168-73; *Metaphysics and Culture (Aquinas Lecture)* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 43; ‘The Glory of the Lord,’ in David L. Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 191.

sustains, and redeems, would continue to influence and underlie theological reflection in the Christian East and West, especially as theology became a more formalised area of study and was being taught in monasteries and Cathedral schools, and eventually, at universities that developed out of these religious institutions. It would also then, in many ways, reach its apex in the 13th century, with the theology espoused by someone such as the Dominican friar, preacher, and professor, Thomas Aquinas, who wrote or dictated a staggering eight million words of theology and philosophy in his life,¹³ and who is often referred to as the Church's Common or Angelic Doctor.¹⁴

Aquinas' understanding of what theology entails, and what its scope and foci ought to be, an understanding which indeed stood in strong continuity with, and can be regarded as a culmination of, the patristic theological tradition's views in this regard,¹⁵ is expressed in a mature form in the first *questio* of his *Magnum Opus*, the *Summa Theologiae*, where he asks “what Christian theology [*sacra doctrina* in the original Latin]¹⁶ is and what it covers?”¹⁷

¹³ These eight millions words of theology and philosophy that Aquinas produced in the 25 years of his working life are divided as follows: “two million of commentary on the Bible, a million on Aristotle, with the rest divided between records of the disputations at which he presided, many short works, and three large compendia of Christian doctrine [his commentary on the sentences of Peter Lombard; his *Summa Contra Gentiles*; and, last but not least, his three-part work, the *Summa Theologiae*, a work which he wrote, in his own words, to “hand on what relates to the Christian religion in a way that is appropriate to educating beginners”]. See Fergus Kerr, *St. Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I, Christian Theology (1a I)*, ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1964]).

¹⁴ For remarks on these titles see the sections, ‘Common Doctor’ and ‘Angelic Doctor’, in Francis George’s essay ‘Saint Thomas: Timeless and Timely,’ in *Thomas Aquinas: Teacher of Humanity*, eds. John Hittinger and Daniel C. Wagner (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 4-6 and 6-8. See also Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 1999), 103 and Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Angels of the Schools* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), 124ff.

¹⁵ Aquinas was first introduced to patristic theology during his childhood years at the abbey of Monte Cassino (where he received his schooling before the abbey was abruptly closed by Frederik II, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire at the time, who was in conflict with Rome, and had shortly before been excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX). From the very beginning, the patristic thinkers made an immense impression on him, and they remained loyal companions to his thinking throughout his life. It is often said that no one during his lifetime – not even his master Albert – knew more about early Christian theology than Aquinas. One of his most celebrated works (which was by far his most read book well into the 16th century), is his *Catena Aurea* (the ‘Golden Chain’) – a 4-volume anthology of patristic exegesis of the biblical texts. John Henry Newman, himself a celebrated patristic scholar, wrote the following of this work: “[It is] perhaps nearly perfect as a conspectus of patristic interpretation ... Other compilations exhibit research, industry, learning; but this, through a mere compilation, evinces a masterly command over the whole subject of theology”. See Kerr, *A Very Short Introduction*, 15; and James Ginther, ‘The Fathers and Scholasticism,’ in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics*, ed. Ken Parry (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell Publishers, 2015), 417.

¹⁶ Gilby writes that the reason Aquinas himself did not use the word *theologia* (even though, in our modern idiom, this is indeed what is meant by *sacra doctrina* – hence the use of ‘theology’ is this translation, which is regarded as the authoritative English rendering of the *Summa*) is that the word, *theologia*, was also sometimes used in the field of philosophy, and Aquinas hoped to distinguish his work from mere philosophical reflection (as his reflection, as will be said, is grounded in revelation). See Gilby’s description of this point in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 63-6.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1*. As is the case in the rest of the *Summa*, each *questio* is answered through a number of ‘articles’ (*articulorum*), in which a concern is raised by a hypothetical opponent, which is then followed up by a short contrasting position (which is in line with Christian teaching), by way of quoting a passage of scripture or from a Church Father (this part is usually introduced with the words “on the other hand” [*sed contra*]), before Aquinas

Before Aquinas turns to the more dogmatic subject matter of his *Summa* and puts forward his doctrine of God, his understanding of humanity's movement towards God, and, as the highpoint or culmination of the work, his Christology, he first takes, as good theologians often do, a step backward, so as to explain, in a somewhat programmatic prolegomenon, what theology "is like and how far it goes".¹⁸ This was, as is the case today, a rather controversial question at the time, as there was a growing uncertainty (especially in the changing world of the 13th century) about what the role of theology in the university setting should be, and how it ought to relate to other (more empirical, and to an extent, more exact) sciences.¹⁹

Aquinas commences this opening section of his *Summa* by outlining in *Article 1* what the distinguishing property of theology is, namely, the fact that it always stems from God's revelation, which is received in and through faith.²⁰ He also then argues in *Article 2* that while theology, in comparison to the other sciences, does not initially work with "premises recognised in the innate light of the intelligence" (as is the case with, for example, "arithmetic, geometry, and sciences of the same sort"), but with what God graciously reveals to humanity, it still ought to be seen as a legitimate science among the other sciences, which can and should be taught at university, because it flows "from founts recognised in the light of a higher science, namely God's very own which he shares with the blessed".²¹ According to Aquinas, theology is thus a science, not because it proceeds from *our* knowledge, but "from what God knows", from 'divine knowledge', from the 'truth' that is evermore vested in the Godhead.²² This assertion is followed by a number of articles which describe what the nature, scope, and foci

ultimately gives his position in a section titled "reply" (*responsio*). The structure of the subsections in Aquinas' *Summa* can thus be seen as being dialogical. For more on the internal structure of the *Summa's* *questiones* and their sub-articles, see Thomas Gilby's remarks in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 45ff.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1 pr.*

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that Aquinas received his initial university training at an institution deliberately founded apart from the Church, namely, the University of Naples, which was established by Frederick II (the very same ruler who closed down the abbey of Monte Cassino where Aquinas received his schooling). It was, however, mainly at the University of Paris – the university where he later studied theology and held academic positions during two different times of his life – where Aquinas was most acutely confronted with these questions. See Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas*, 14-5.

²⁰ Divine revelation can indeed, for Aquinas, be seen as that "on which Christian teaching rests", which differentiates theology from all other academic fields. Brian Davies notes, however, that this is not some form of naïve fideism: "Aquinas does not think that we lack reason when believing what is believed by those who have faith ... In *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1,6, Aquinas says that those who assent to the truth of faith do not believe foolishly (*non leviter*) even though these truths are above reason. He speaks of revelation being given with 'fitting arguments' and accompanied by what he takes to be miracles, that he thinks confirms its divine origin. His idea seems to be: 'If you believe Christ and what Christ taught, you will not do so without reason' ..." See Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae, A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 21.

²¹ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*, 20.

²² Davies, *Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*, 20.

of this science of theology is, and what its relationship to the other academic disciplines should be.

In *Article 3*, which asks if theology is a “single science”, that is, if it has a definite focus, Aquinas answers in the affirmative, saying that it should indeed be deemed to be a “single science”, as its primary focus is God.²³ But, he continues, because creation comes from God, and the creaturely and the divine cannot therefore be said to be “counterbalancing” realities, ‘holy teaching’ also pronounces “on creatures in relation to [God], who is their origin and end”.²⁴ This point is repeated in *Article 7*, in which Aquinas explicitly asks what the subject matter of theology should be. Here again, he answers that theology’s main subject of study is God, and since this is the case, it also deals with God’s creation and everything in it, in relation to God. He writes: “[A]ll things are dealt with in holy teaching in terms of God, either because they are God himself or because they are relative to him as their origin and end”.²⁵

Given this fact that theology, in reflecting on the reality of the transcendent God, should also focus its attention on God’s creation, Aquinas states in *Article 5* that it is permissible, and even advisable, for it to “borrow from the other sciences”, for “greater clarification of the things it conveys”.²⁶ Not only should theology thus reflect on the created order, but it should also, in doing so, learn from and appropriate the findings of the other sciences. While Aquinas undoubtedly regards theology as the ‘queen of the sciences’, as it deals with divine knowledge and ‘truth’-proper, as revealed by God, he does not disregard or negate other branches of knowledge, as he realises that, in its quest to reflect on God and all things in relation to God, it needs these fields’ expertise and, importantly, language, to better understand and describe the world that comes from God, and is redeemed and renewed through God’s Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁷

²³ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1.3. ad 2.*

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1.3. ad 2.*

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1.7. ad 1.* The original Latin text of this important passage reads as follows: “*Omnia autem tractantur in sacra doctrine sub ratio Dei, vel quia sunt ipse Deus vel quia habent ordinem ad Deum ut ad principium et finem*”. Aquinas is very careful not to equate God and creation. He also thus writes, in order to clear out any misconceptions, that all things, settled in Holy Scripture, “are embraced in God, not that they are parts of him – such as essential components or accidents – but because they are somehow related to him”. *ST 1a.1.7. ad 2.*

²⁶ Aquinas, *ST 1a.1.5. ad 2.*

²⁷ In this regard, Aquinas was strongly influenced by his teacher and mentor, the Swabian polymath, scientist, theologian, and later Bishop of Regensburg, Albert Magnus, also known as Albert the Great. Albert was convinced that theology should be in constant conversation with the other academic disciplines, and in his own theological work he attempted to incorporate insights from the developing natural sciences and, for example, Aristotelean philosophy. Albert’s conception of Christian theology had a profound impact on Aquinas’ thinking and would, in many ways, act as a catalyst and inspiration for his theological endeavours. See Henryk Anzulewicz, ‘The Systematic Theology of Albert the Great,’ in *The Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences*, ed. Irven Resnick (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2013), 15ff.

In reading the first *questio* of the *Summa*, it can thus be seen how, for Aquinas, theology (or ‘holy doctrine’ as he refers to it) should indeed be regarded as a comprehensive undertaking, which is “expansive in vision and not enclosed, cosmopolitan and not parochial”, as it attempts to investigate all that ‘is’ in relation to the mystery of God.²⁸ This also makes it an interdisciplinary enterprise that constantly remains open to, and seeks to learn from, the other sciences. In working through the rest of the *Summa*, as well as the other works written by Aquinas – works in which he continuously draws on the witness of Holy Scripture,²⁹ the theological insights of those who came before him (especially the early patristic theologians), and indeed also, following his mentor, Albert, on Aristotelean philosophy³⁰ – it becomes clear why it is possible for him to hold this view; why he can regard theology as something which explores all “reality in light of the Holy Trinity” and “respect and even assimilate the authentic insights [of the other sciences]”.³¹ The reason, it could be said, is the following: For Aquinas, as was the case for the patristic thinkers, the created world is certainly not a self-sufficient, autonomous entity, buffered off from the realm of the divine, but is intrinsically connected to God – firstly, because it is brought forth *ex nihilo* by God (resulting in an analogical relationship between the uncreated Creator and creation), and secondly, since God sent God’s Son to become flesh, not to save humanity from the corporeal world, but to restore and renew the whole of creation in its creatureliness.

It can be said that one of the foundations of Aquinas’ thought (in continuity with Christian thinkers throughout the ages), is the idea that God is the wellspring of everything that exists, the fount from which the whole of creaturely being continually flows,³² and that all creation is thus dependent on, bound to, and expressive of God’s divine life. While, for Aquinas, there undoubtedly is a radical ontological difference between God and creation, as God, as the *ipsum*

²⁸ Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord, A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 2.

²⁹ Aquinas was, at heart, a biblical scholar, and Holy Scripture (especially the Gospels, as Marie-Dominique Chenu has shown), played an all-important role in his theology. See Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Towards Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. Albert M. Landry (Washington: Regnery Publishing Company, 1964), 44ff and 233ff. Chenu writes: “Here, then, in the fact: Saint Thomas, Master in Theology, took the text itself of the Old and New Testament as the subject matter of his official course...”.

³⁰ Due to the accidents of history, the writings of Aristotle were unknown to the Christian theological world up until the 12th century, when it was rediscovered and translated into Latin (the *lingua franca* of the day). Following this occurrence, the thought of Aristotle became very prevalent in medieval theology, and influenced most scholastic thinkers, including Aquinas. It is, however, important not to overestimate Aristotle’s influence on Aquinas. Although Aristotle clearly plays an important part in his thought, the main source of his theology always remained Holy Scripture and the Christian theological tradition throughout the centuries. See Gilles Emery, ‘Central Aristotelean Themes in Aquinas’ Trinitarian Theology,’ in *Aristotle in Aquinas’ Theology*, eds. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1; and especially also Janet Soskice, ‘Aquinas and Augustine on Creation and God as Eternal Being,’ *New Black Friars* 95, no. 1056 (March 2014): 191.

³¹ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 2-3.

³² See Nicholas Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 82.

esse subsistens, exists necessarily, whereas creaturely reality, brought forth from nothingness, only exists contingently and is thus defined by a “real distinction” between *essentia* and *esse*,³³ he nonetheless affirms that, within, and as a result of, this dissimilarity, a similarity also transpires. The reason for this similarity is the fact that creation receives its finite instance of existence from God and, therefore, participates in, points towards, and expresses something of, God’s infinite and completely other ‘being’, which is its transcendent source and end.³⁴ According to Aquinas, the ontological relationship between God and creation is thus not marked by equivocity (where God and the world are wholly severed from one another), nor by univocity (where the creaturely and the divine are placed on the same ontological plane, with the result that they are only seen to be quantitatively, rather than qualitatively, different than one another), but by the ‘third way’ of analogy, which refers to a very real similarity, which is framed by, and comes to the fore amidst (and, one could even say, because of), an ever greater ontological dissimilarity.³⁵ This analogical understanding of the relationship between God and

³³ Edward Oakes explains this ‘real distinction’ in Aquinas’ thought as follows: “[To Aquinas] we owe what has ... been known as the ‘real distinction between essence and being’. What this means is that the act of existing that inheres in each individual is distinct from what that individual is. Each actual existing individual is, *qua* existing, a thing distinct from its own essence. Not only does it not have to be, it owes its existence to an act of being, an *esse*, that is itself not derived. What the so-called real distinction implies is that ‘to be’ is the supreme act of all that is. The real distinction tells us that the form of a lion makes it to be a lion, but it does not make it *to be*: for that is owed to the act of *esse* itself, and nothing in the essence of a thing can make an inherent claim on being. The being of all essences is a received being, bestowed upon the forms by virtue of no claim that inheres in the essence of the thing. But God’s essence *is* to be. Here there is no case of a ‘definition’ that ‘happens’ to be instantiated in being. In God we cannot think of a distinction between his essence and his existence”. See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 30-31.

³⁴ See Aquinas, *ST 1a.4.2*; *1a.8.1.*, and *1a.45.1.*

³⁵ In response to the question “Can creatures be said to resemble God?”, Aquinas answers as follows: “[There is an] analogy that holds between all things because they have existence in common. And this is how things receiving existence from God resemble him; for precisely as things possessing existence they resemble the primary and universal source or all existence... Hence: As Dionysius says, when the scriptures state that nothing is like God, they are not denying all likeness to him. For the same things are like and unlike God: like in so far as they imitate as best they can him whom it is not possible to imitate perfectly; unlike is so far as they fall short of their cause, not only in degree (as less white falls short of more white), but also because they do not share a common species or genus. Creatures are ... related to God ... as to something outside of or prior to all genera. Creatures are said to resemble God, not by sharing a form of the same specific or generic type, but only analogically, inasmuch as God exists by nature and, and other things partake existence”. Aquinas, *ST, 1a.4.3*. See also *ST 1a.5.3*; *1a.44.3*; *1a.93.1*; as well as *De Veritate 2.11* and his *Sentences 1.19.5, art 2*. For an extensive discussion of analogy in Aquinas’ thought, see Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics and the Act of Faith* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2011). It is important to emphasise that, in postulating an analogical relationship between God and creation, Aquinas is not guilty of what Heidegger and his disciples in the late-20th century have called onto-theology (where God is seen as the ‘highest’, ‘supreme’, or ‘first’ ‘being’, and acquainted with Being [*ontos*], as such). For, in Aquinas’ understanding, ‘God’ is not a being amongst beings, and does not fall under, or somehow constitute, existence (in a creaturely sense), but is the transcendent source of ‘all that is’. See, on this point, Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self. An Essay ‘On the Trinity’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41, where she calls the onto-theological critique as applied to Aquinas and the Christian theological tradition, mere “shadow-boxing”. See also Jean-Luc Marion’s essay, ‘Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theology,’ in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, eds. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 38–74, wherein he admits that he had wrongly included Thomas Aquinas in the onto-theological charge in his book *God Without Being, Hors-Text Second Edition*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012 [1991]). It is also interesting to see how Emmanuel Falque, another eminent French Phenomenologist, turns his back on many of his predecessors in this regard. He states: “[W]e should ask ourselves today, in light of the endless quest, if this putative metaphysics understood as onto-theology – namely

creation would, with time, be called the principle (or even doctrine) of the *analogia entis*, something we will return to again later in this chapter when the theological thought of Graham Ward, and especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, is discussed.

For Aquinas, together with the whole theological tradition that came before him, it is, however, not only on account of God's act of creation that one can and should affirm that the creaturely realm is and evermore remains bound to, and expressive of, the divine. It is also on account of the incarnation, where God, who is the fount of everything that exists, enters and becomes part of the creaturely world in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, so as to redeem and renew humanity, and to reconcile all finite reality to Godself. Aquinas' understanding of creation, as something which is analogically tied to, partakes in, and expresses the reality of, God, indeed lays the foundation for, and culminates in,³⁶ his Christology and Soteriology, which can be described as "uncompromisingly orthodox" and "resolutely incarnational".³⁷ In continuity with Chalcedon, which lies at the very heart of his Christological thought, Aquinas understands the incarnation to be the moment in history where God's Word, the One in and through whom all things were made, and who, together with the Father and the Spirit, ontologically sustains creaturely existence, becomes flesh, while, importantly, simultaneously remaining fully God.³⁸ In the incarnation, it is thus seen how God and the world, Creator and creation, 'meet' in the

the act of leading being *qua* being (*ontos*) back to God as the super Being (*theos*) – is not another one of those paradises that is illusory... The recent history of philosophy in France provides sufficient evidence to answer in the affirmative. So-called onto-theology has been reduced to a discourse with ever-diminishing returns... Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Bonaventure, also Aquinas... cannot be framed within the putative historical scheme of onto-theology. After all, ontotheology is actually a concept derived from the work of Thomas Erfurt (the pseudo-Duns Scotus), which the young Heidegger himself studied; he then extended his project (inappropriately?) to the whole history of philosophy. See Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 134.

³⁶ It has often been argued that, for Aquinas, Christology is of lesser importance, as it is only treated comprehensively in the third volume of his *Summa*. Someone like Joseph Wawrykow, however, argues that the fact that Aquinas' Christology is at the end of the *Summa*, does not mean that it is not important to him. According to Wawrykow, the whole *Summa* can, in fact, be said to lead up to, and find its consummation in, this last part. See Joseph Wawrykow, 'The Christology of Thomas Aquinas in its Scholastic Context,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, eds. Francesca A. Murphy and Troy A. Stefano (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 233-250.

³⁷ Aquinas, Healy writes, "emphasises the reality of Jesus' humanity somewhat more than other theologians of his time. The Son assumes the real 'flesh', taking on the true human nature, with a body and a soul that could truly suffer and decay and die". Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 89. Cf. *ST* 3.5.2.

³⁸ In the words of Herbert McCabe: "Who he is, is the person Jesus Christ. What he is, is both human and divine". Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (Springfield: Templegate, 1987), 59. For the exact pronouncement of Chalcedon on the matter, see Norman P. Tanner, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 86. Aquinas was the very first scholastic thinker to quote directly from Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople II (553), and Constantinople III (680-681) – especially then with regards to Christology. See *ST* 3.2.1-12 ('On the mode of union of the word incarnate'); *ST* 3.3.1-8 ('Of the mode of union on the part of the person assuming'); 3.4.1-6 ('Of the more of union on the part of the human nature'), and 3.5.1-4 ('On the parts of human nature which were assumed). See also Thomas Joseph White, "'Through him all things were made' (John 1:3): The analogy of the Word Incarnate according to St. Thomas Aquinas and its Ontological Presumptions," in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or Wisdom of God*, ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 246-279, especially 252-4. See also Aaron Riches' article "Christology and the 'Scotist Rupture'," *Theological Research* 1 (2013): 41.

immaculate hypostatic union that is Jesus Christ of Nazareth.³⁹ For Aquinas, this coming together of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ is not a contradiction or an anomaly. It is, in fact, “precisely because our very being participates in [God’s Being] ... that God can exist as a human being without distortion or violating the existence and essential properties of the created human nature”.⁴⁰ In short, since the world was created by God, and is sustained by, analogically shares in, and expresses something of God’s infinite existence, God can become one with creation without ceasing to be God and without tarnishing the integrity of creation’s ontological otherness.

According to Aquinas, the purpose of Christ’s incarnation, the reason why the Word becomes flesh,⁴¹ is then to redeem humanity and the created order, marred by turpitude and sin, and to reconcile all finite reality to its divine source and end.⁴² Christ’s life, lived in perfect obedience to the Father,⁴³ and, especially, his vicarious death on the cross, bring atonement for the offences of humanity against God and one another, while reasserting the participatory relationship of creation and humanity to the divine.⁴⁴ Moreover, the incarnation and Christ’s salvific actions impart divine grace into the realm of creation, enabling a redeemed humanity to live their lives – through the power of the Spirit – in analogical conformity with the risen Christ, to the glory of God.⁴⁵ The reason for the incarnation, in Aquinas’ thought, is thus not to do away with, or save humanity from, corporeal reality, but to show God’s enduring love for the world that God brings forth from nothingness (a world that *is*, and always *remains*, pure gift), and to stir human hearts, through his Spirit, in what can be seen as a ‘divine pedagogy’,⁴⁶ to love God and others in return.⁴⁷

Given Aquinas’ understanding of the Christian doctrines of *creatio* and *incarnatio*, it is not surprising that he, too, in accordance with the thought of the patristic thinkers in the West and the East, and someone like his mentor, Albert the Great, came to see theology as a science that

³⁹ Aquinas writes: “... It remains then that the human nature be united to the Word, not accidentally or essentially, but substantially, that is to say, hypostatically and personally, insofar as the substance signifies the hypostasis”. *De Unione, a 1* trans. Thomas White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 82.

⁴⁰ White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 118; and Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 83. Cf. *ST* 3.17.2.

⁴¹ Thomas presents a collection of arguments for the “fittingness [*convenientia*] of the incarnation” in, *inter alia*, his *Summa contra Gentiles* 4.54.6 and *ST* 3.1.1-6 (which forms part of the third section of the *Summa*’s larger Christological reflection). Cf. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 88, and Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas, Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2003), 427ff.

⁴² See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 67.

⁴³ On the meaning and importance of Christ’s obedience to the Father in Aquinas’ thought, see White, *The Incarnate Lord*, 263-7, especially the section ‘The Obedience of the Son,’ 277-307.

⁴⁴ Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 88.

⁴⁵ See *ST* 1a.114.6, and also 3.8.5. Cf. also Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 111.

⁴⁶ This ‘divine pedagogy’ can be seen as a process of *deification*. Cf. Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 54-6.

⁴⁷ Healy, *Thomas Aquinas*, 89.

is not only interested in the transcendent God, who is above and beyond all things, but also in the created world and everything in it, in relation to the divine.⁴⁸ The fact that God brings forth the world *ex nihilo*, and, in doing so, establishes an analogical link between Godself and the realm of creation, and furthermore sends the Son to become flesh, so as to redeem and renew the world and reaffirm its intrinsic connection to the divine, prompts Aquinas to see theology, in the words of John Webster (who regularly referred to, quoted, paraphrased, and expanded on Aquinas' thought in this regard), as a "most compressive science", which studies "God and all things in God".⁴⁹ Or, as Brad S. Gregory would say, as a science that "encompass[es] literally everything", and cannot be divorced from the "inquiries pursued by masters in [other] faculties", as "nothing [is] outside of creation, [and therefore] outside of theology's compass and its inalienable concern for truth".⁵⁰

When working with this classical conception of theology, as espoused by Aquinas, which says that everything, all that exists, should be explored in the light of the mystery of the triune God with the help of, and in conversation with, other branches of knowledge, it seems that South African protest theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular, certainly fall within the bounds of what theology can study. It is, however, important to take note of the fact that this understanding of theology by Aquinas, which in many ways encapsulates the views of those who came before him, did not necessarily continue to be the dominant view in this regard, in the years following his life and death.⁵¹ At least from the late Middle Ages onwards, it, in fact, increasingly became common practice, specifically in the university setting, to draw a very clear distinction between the so-called 'natural world' and the 'supernatural' reality of God, without any form of *analogical* mediation.⁵² Whereas previously, theology sought to see and study 'all things', everything that exists, in relation to God, it gradually, *contra* Aquinas and the classical Christian theological tradition before him, came to be regarded as a science with a very narrow, specialised field of enquiry, namely, the God who is above and beyond, and who comes to be known "in isolation from", the "independent, quasi-autonomous order of

⁴⁸ See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 56-7.

⁴⁹ For John Webster's exploration of this aspect of Aquinas' thought, see *inter alia*: 'Omnia ... Pertractantur in Sacra Doctrina Sub Ratione Dei. On the Matter of Christian Theology,' in *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology, Volume I, God and the Works of God* (London: T&T Clarke, 2015), 12-56; 'Introduction: Systematic Theology,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-71 (especially 28); 'Principles of Systematic Theology,' in *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clarke, 2012), 133-149; as well as 'God, Theology, Universities,' 157-172 (especially page 159).

⁵⁰ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 315.

⁵¹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition* (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), 150.

⁵² Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 133.

nature”.⁵³ It is to this development that we now turn, before introducing Graham Ward’s notion of a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology, which attempts to move beyond the dualisms that came to define and dictate the *modus operandi* of many prominent strands of theology in the so-called ‘modern age’.

2.3. Unravelling the Tapestry of Heaven and Earth

To try and explain how and why the realm of creation and the realm of the divine were gradually ‘uncoupled’ from one another, and why theology came to be regarded by many, within and outside of academia, as a discipline that could and should only study an almost alien, Gnostic God,⁵⁴ who resides high above the ‘natural world’, is obviously not a straightforward undertaking. The past is complex and multi-layered and at any given moment in history, there are innumerable connected and unconnected forces at play, making it challenging, risky, and contentious to say, in hindsight, what the reasons behind certain historical ‘changes’ were.⁵⁵ Many scholars, working from various vantage points, have, however, attempted to address these questions. These have included, over the last few decades, a certain loose grouping of theological and philosophical voices out of the Anglophone world, who have been interested in the genesis of what could be called ‘modernity’, and who have continued the historical spade-work done by certain French thinkers from the mid-20th century, such as the medieval philosopher and Thomistic scholar, Étienne Gilson, and the Jesuit theologian and priest, who stood at the forefront of the *Nouvelle Théologie* movement, Henri de Lubac.⁵⁶ This diverse grouping of scholars is comprised, amongst others, of theologians

⁵³ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 178, 189; see also Louis Dupré, ‘The Glory of the Lord: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetic’ in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 188.

⁵⁴ See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 65, 318; and also, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), xxx.

⁵⁵ For more on the complexities and difficulties associated with historiography – the writing of (and interpretation) of the past – see Aviezer Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24ff. According to Rowan Williams, this does not mean that one cannot offer, and draw certain conclusions from, “reliable historical narratives”, and that we should stay away from all historiography and genealogical accounts. In many ways, we have a duty, especially in the field of theology, to reconstruct, study, and learn from the past, as our present reality is undoubtedly tied up with the realities of earlier times. What is, however, important, is that we should tread lightly when thinking and making certain pronouncement about history and, at all times, remain humbly aware of the difficulties, and continual provisionality, of this undertaking. See Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past: The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2005), 5ff. In this first chapter of his book Rowan Williams defends the study and interpretation of history, also in then in the field of theology, and speaks out against what he calls the “fashionable ... ultra-scepticism” about the historian’s bias “that makes it impossible to trust any narrative”.

⁵⁶ See Gilson’s *The Unity of Philosophical Experience: the Medieval Experiment, the Cartesian Experiment, the Modern Experiment* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937), especially the chapter ‘The Breakdown of Medieval Philosophy,’ (73-98); and De Lubac’s *Surnaturel: études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), as well as *Corpus Mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Église au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie La Procure, 1944).

such as the figureheads of so-called *Radical Orthodoxy*,⁵⁷ namely, John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock; philosophers such as Louis Dupré, Michael Gillespie, and Charles Taylor; and the historian Brad S. Gregory. All of them have argued that this undoing of the ‘synthesis’ of heaven and earth, and the accompanying narrowing of theology’s scope and focus, should be ascribed to certain changes that took place *within* the discipline of theology itself (as part of a somewhat noble, yet arguably misguided, attempt to safeguard the transcendence of God).⁵⁸ Instead of seeing theology thus as a mere victim of the developments mentioned above, these scholars have argued that theology has, in fact, been the initiator thereof; that these developments in the late Middle Ages, which arguably culminated in the views espoused in and after the *Aufklärung*, could be said to have had a deeply theological origin.⁵⁹

An important part of the argument that has generally been put by these thinkers, is that there are two major, interrelated theological ‘deviations’ that occurred in the late Medieval Period,⁶⁰ which contributed to this “fateful separation” of the creaturely realm and the divine, and the reduction of the scope and focus of theology.⁶¹ These two ‘deviations’ are the move from an analogical to a univocal understanding of ‘being’, something which is particularly emphasised by Milbank, Pickstock, and Gregory,⁶² and, also, the rejection of metaphysical realism and the

⁵⁷ *Radical Orthodoxy* has largely been associated with a group of Anglo-Catholic theologians who studied and worked at Cambridge University in the 1990’s. The name *Radical Orthodoxy* could be understood in the following way: “Orthodox in the straightforward sense of commitment to creedal Christianity and the exemplary of its patristic matrix... Radical, first of all, in the sense of a return to patristic and medieval roots, and especially to the Augustinian vision of all knowledge as divine illumination... Radical, second, in the sense of seeking to deploy this recovered vision systematically to criticise modern society, culture, politics, art, science, and philosophy with an unprecedented boldness... But also radical in a third sense of realising that via such engagements we do have to also rethink the tradition...”. See the introduction to the volume: *Radical Orthodoxy*, eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 1 – 20. For a somewhat critical (early) primer on Radical Orthodoxy, see the Reformed scholar James K. Smith’s *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), which include an introductory essay by John Milbank himself; as well as D. Stephen Long, ‘Radical Orthodoxy,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 126 – 148.

⁵⁸ Charles Taylor writes: [T]he irony is, that this clear distinction of natural from supernatural, which was an achievement of Latin Christendom in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, was originally made in order to mark clearly the autonomy of the supernatural”. See Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2007), 542, 773.

⁵⁹ See Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 68-83; Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 32ff; John Milbank, ‘The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of Sciences,’ in *The Future of Love* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascades Books, 2009), 46.

⁶⁰ In a chapter ‘Cutting the Tapestry,’ Hans Boersma describes these ‘deviations’ as “two blades of a pair of scissors that cut the ... participatory link between earthly ... and heavenly reality”. See Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 69.

⁶¹ See Dupré: *Passage to Modernity*, 167ff.

⁶² See, for example: John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*, especially xii, 305ff; *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 50ff; ‘Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,’ *New Blackfriars* 76 no. 895 (1995): 325-343; and ‘The Conflict of the Faculties,’ 301-315. See also Catherine Pickstock’s *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), especially 88ff and 121-134; ‘Modernity and Scholasticism: A critique of recent invocations of univocity,’ *Antonionum*, 78 no. 1 (2003): 3-46; and ‘Duns Scotus: His Historical and

espousal of nominalism, something which is highlighted in the works of Dupré, Gillespie, and Taylor, and which also features prominently in Gregory's thesis.⁶³

The first of these supposed theological 'deviations', namely, the move from an analogical to a univocal conception of 'being', is usually attributed to the Franciscan friar and theologian, John Duns Scotus, the so-called Subtle Doctor,⁶⁴ who studied and lectured theology at the universities of Paris and Oxford at the end of the 13th century.⁶⁵ Scotus, it is held, building on certain aspects of the thought of Ibn Sīnā (who is also called Avicenna),⁶⁶ as well as Henry of Ghent,⁶⁷ argued that in order for humanity to know of, and say anything with regards to, the divine, there had to be "at least *one* predicate that was shared *in the same sense* by God and his creatures".⁶⁸ This predicate, according to Scotus, was 'being' (*esse*) itself – something which, to his mind, preceded, and made possible, the existence of both creation and the divine.⁶⁹ Contrary to Aquinas and the theological tradition that came before him, Scotus therefore proposed that God 'existed' in the same manner as "everything else"; that both the creaturely and the divine were part of the same conceptual realm of 'being'.⁷⁰ This meant that God would

Contemporary Significance,' *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (October 2005): 543-574. And lastly, Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, especially 25ff and 298ff.

⁶³ See, for example: Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, especially 29-41 and 167-189; as well as *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 18ff; Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), especially 19-43 (the chapter 'The Nominalist Revolution and the Origins of Modernity,'); and Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 97, 295, 520, 539ff, and 773ff.

⁶⁴ In Latin, *doctor subtilis*. This name was supposedly given to Scotus due to the 'subtle' way in which he could put forward his arguments – both in writing *and* in oral debates within university and church settings. See Michael Sylwanowics, *Contingent Causality and the Foundations of Duns Scotus' Metaphysics* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 1-2.

⁶⁵ Gregory writes that the faculties of theology at these two universities "comprised the very centre of the Church's intellectual establishment in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries", and that, whatever theology was done here, indeed had an immense influence on the whole of Western Christianity. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 36.

⁶⁶ For more on the way in which Avicenna, the Persian Polymath, regarded as one of the most important philosophers and intellectuals of the Islamic Golden Age (which is traditionally dated from the 8th to the 14th century), influenced medieval Christian thought, in general, and the theology of someone such as Duns Scotus, in particular, see, *inter alia*: Étienne Gilson's essay 'Avicenna in the West during the Middle Ages,' in *Medieval Essays*, trans. James Colbert (Eugene, Or: Cascades Books), 179-214; and also Jules Janssens and Daniel De Smet, eds., *Avicenna and his Heritage* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), especially the essays by Dimitri Gutas (81-98), Jean-Michel Counet (225-252), Thérèse-Anne Druart (253-266).

⁶⁷ For more on Henry of Ghent's reception of Aquinas, and how he would influence a thinker such as Scotus, see the essays R. Wielockx, 'Henry of Ghent and the Events of 1277' (25-61), M. Pickavé, 'Henry of Ghent on Metaphysics' (151-179), and T. Hoffmann's 'Henry of Ghent's Influence on John Duns Scotus' Metaphysics,' in *A Companion to Henry of Ghent*, ed. Gordon Anthony Wilson (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2010).

⁶⁸ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 36.

⁶⁹ See Milbank, 'The Conflict of the Faculties,' 309. Milbank holds that in Scotus' theology, 'being' is indeed idolatrously regarded as something that is "more fundamental" than both creation and the divine. See also Milbank, 'Theology and Pluralism,' in *The Future of Love*, 327.

⁷⁰ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 37-8. For Scotus, Milbank writes, "'Exists', in the sentence God 'exists', has therefore the same fundamental meaning (at a logical and ultimately metaphysical level) as in the sentence, 'this woman exists'". He continues by saying that the "same thing applies to the usage of transcendental terms convertible with Being; for example, 'God is good' means that he is good in the same *sense* that we are said to be

no longer be seen as the fount of all creaturely existence, or as the “platitudinous origin that is both the source of all things and the genuine depth of all things”, but as a mere “being [ens] alongside other beings”.⁷¹ Instead of therefore ‘existing’ as the One *from whom* everything comes, *in whom* everything analogically participates, and *to whom* all creation is eschatologically ordered, God, in the thought of Scotus, is turned into the ‘highest’ or ‘greatest’ entity within the realm of ‘being’, who stands apart from, and even over against, the so-called ‘natural world’, which is a view that would also have severe implications for Christology going forward.⁷² As Milbank writes: In Scotus, “the figure of participation is substituted [with] the figure of *distance*: as if God was a very remote, infinitely large *object*”.⁷³ Scotist univocity, Pickstock concurs, “unmediably separates the creation from God ... as the distance between the infinite and the finite becomes an undifferentiated and quantified abyss ... paradoxically [producing] a kind of equivocity”.⁷⁴ According to these thinkers, the move from an analogical to a univocal conception of being, where “the ‘same’ becomes the radical desperate”, thus contributed to the “unhooking of creation from the Creator”, which, in turn, led to theology being regarded, already by Scotus himself, as a discipline that should only focus its attention on the reality and revelation of the all-powerful God, residing on the one end of the ontological

good...”. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 305. See also John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 50-1.

⁷¹ Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus,’ 553.

⁷² According to Milbank (and especially also then one of his recent doctoral students, Aaron Riches), Scotist univocity had definite implications for Christology. Whereas the focus had previously been on the fact that the incarnate Word was both fully God and fully human, two natures joint together in perfect hypostatic unity, “a formal or real division between human and divine being in Christ” was gradually introduced from Scotus onwards. This meant that, in the future, the temptation would constantly be to either focus on the divinity of Christ (where Christ’s Godly nature subsumes and negates Christ’s human nature); or, on the other side of the spectrum, on the humanity of Christ, where Christ is seen as nothing more than an admirable human being or ethical teacher (as would become common after the Enlightenment). See Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 79-80; *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 146-7; as well as, importantly, Aaron Riches’ article, “Christology and the ‘Scotist Rupture,’” and his monograph (which deals at length with these issues), *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), especially 210ff. See also Dupré’s discussion of Scotus and Ockham’s novel Christologies in *Passage to Modernity*, 175-6.

⁷³ Milbank, ‘The Conflict of the Faculties,’ 309.

⁷⁴ Pickstock, *After Writing*, 123. See also Milbank’s student, Phillip Blond’s essay, ‘Perception: From Modern Painting to the Vision of Christ,’ in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 220-242, wherein he writes: “The outcome of the univocal thesis of Scotus was a twofold abandonment and scission of the inter-relation of God and creation. The univocal thesis allowed the world to abandon God, as one could now wholly dispense with God by explaining the world in terms of this higher ground whatever it might be. This thesis also led to God abandoning the world, since the assumption that both God and his creatures share in some prior term meant that God could assert himself as God only by claiming to have a greater degree of this prior quality and hence, from the perspective of man, a greater power. This situation made God like man (even though God has an infinite share of this univocal being whereas man takes only a finite proportion), since both God and man were forced to share in the same immanent being in order to be at all. Consequently, this quantitative distinction between man and God, by reducing God to the level of an unequal participant in the being that man also shared in, meant that man could see God only as a greater and more powerful version of himself”.

spectrum, while the ‘natural world’, lying on the other side of the same spectrum, is left to the non-theological sciences.⁷⁵

It is, however, not only Scotus’ move from analogy to univocity that is blamed for the separation of the immanent order from transcendent reality, and the restriction of the scope and focus of theology, but also the subsequent espousal of what has been called metaphysical nominalism. This development is usually associated with another Franciscan thinker who was also based at Oxford shortly after Scotus, namely, William of Occam.⁷⁶ Aquinas, and the tradition before him, maintained that each created entity on earth belonged to, partook in, and could be seen as an analogical expression of, an ‘universal category’ that existed prior to the entity’s existence in the ‘mind of God’ (or as someone such as Maximus the Confessor would hold, in God’s eternal Logos, Jesus Christ, the One in and through whom creation came into being).⁷⁷ Working with a “heuristic principle of parsimony”,⁷⁸ Occam, however, rejected the existence of and need for ‘universals’, and argued that each created reality is “radically particular”, and ought to be studied without reference to anything else, including the divine.⁷⁹ Instead of thus upholding an intrinsic, participatory, and analogical connection between creation, in all its diversity, and the One God, as the *source* and *end* of all, where creation transpires “as the instantiation of the categories of divine reason”, Occam saw the world as an infinite array of singular, self-subsistent ‘things’, with empty, arbitrarily-assigned names, which came into being, and were bestowed with complete autonomy, as a result of the absolute, extrinsic, and capricious⁸⁰ ‘will’ of the highest entity within the common realm of existence,

⁷⁵ Pickstock, *After Writing*, 99; ‘The Conflict of the Faculties,’ 310; Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 318-9.

⁷⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 773; Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 6; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, xxvi, 15; and Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order*, 9.

⁷⁷ Cf. Torstein Tollefesen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially the first two chapters, ‘The Divine Ideas and the Creation of the Cosmos,’ 21-63; and ‘The Logos, the *logoi*, and Created Beings,’ 64-137.

⁷⁸ Ockham believed that one should make as few assumptions as possible when investigating things, focusing only on the most obvious givens, without introducing any excessive explanations or causes. According to him, every generalisation and redundant reason or justification “takes us one step away from the real”. Ockham gave a few versions of what would be called his ‘razor’ (as it ‘shaves off’ any redundancies in scientific investigation), including the following: “It is futile to do with more than we can do with fewer” (in his *Treatise on Quality*); and “When a proposition is made true for things, if two things suffice for its truth, it is superfluous to assume a third” (in his *Quodlibet*) – both quotations come from the section ‘What Ockham’s Razor Is?’ in Rondo Keele’s book, *Ockham Explained: From Razor to Rebellion* (Chicago: Open Courts, 2010), 95. See also Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 23.

⁷⁹ Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 14.

⁸⁰ In the voluntarism that became an essential part of Ockham’s nominalism, God’s ‘will’ does not correspond to his innermost being, and is completely inscrutable. It could thus be said that when he, for example, ‘wills’ goodness, it is not because he himself is necessarily good (as Aquinas and the tradition before him would hold), but because he – as supreme being – can ‘will’ whatever he wants. See Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 31.

namely God.⁸¹ Here also, a clear distinction between creaturely reality and the divine was thus drawn, and it therefore comes as no surprise that Ockham, too, propagated that theology could not study and make pronouncements about the natural world, but should only focus its attention on the supernatural revelation of God, who, as Gillespie suggest, increasingly came to be seen as an all-powerful despot, standing over against a radically autonomous creation.⁸²

For these thinkers, it could thus be said that Christian theology itself, in a somewhat ironic turn of events (given its early battles against Gnosticism), helped to re-introduce a dualist worldview into the “social imaginary” at a “critical moment in cultural history”, by embracing metaphysical univocity and nominalism, which “disembedded” God, as well as religious thought and language, from the reality of ‘nature’.⁸³ According to them, the theological innovations of Scotus and Occam, which came to be known as the *via moderna* (and which should undoubtedly be understood against the backdrop of many other historical occurrences that took place at the time),⁸⁴ indeed played a crucial role in severing, as David Bentley Hart writes, “the perceptible world from the analogical index of divine transcendence”, in shattering “the unity of faith and reason”, in turning God into the “world’s infinite contrary”, in leaving material reality “groundless in itself”, and in contributing “to a quite unbiblical dread of the goodness of creation”.⁸⁵ It also prompted “many Christian thinkers [to forget] that the incarnation of the Logos, the infinite *ratio* of all that is, reconciles us not only to God, but to the world, by giving us back a knowledge of creation’s goodness, allowing us to see again its essential transparency – even to the point, in Christ, of identity – before God”.⁸⁶ This led, in Dupré’s words, to a completely “new religious architecture”, where God and the world stood

⁸¹ Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 17, 19; Dupré: *Passage to Modernity*, 22; Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 24; Milbank, ‘Beauty and the Soul,’ in *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, John Milbank, Graham Ward and Edith Wyschogrod, (London: Trinity Press, 2003), 1-34 (especially 7).

⁸² See Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 14-18, 23.

⁸³ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 133; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1-24. Cf. also James K.A Smith, *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 9.

⁸⁴ Gillespie writes: “The Great Schism, the Hundred Year War, the Black Death, the development of gunpowder, the dire economic circumstances brought on throughout Europe by the advent of the Little Ice Age, and the dislocations wrought by urban development, social mobility, and the Crusades, were all of crucial importance to the formation of the anxiety and insecurity that made the [*via moderna*] believable”. See Gillespie’s *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 15.

⁸⁵ See Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 132-4. It is because of these developments, Hart argues, that someone such as Friedrich Nietzsche could launch his forceful attack on Christianity (in the 19th century). Nietzsche held that: “Christianity [is] essentially and fundamentally life’s nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in ‘another’ or ‘better’ life. Hatred of the world, condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented ... to slander this world ... [leading to an] impoverishment of life”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1967), 22-4. Hart extensive engagement with Nietzsche’s critique can be found in the section, ‘The Will to Power’ (as part of the chapter ‘Dionysus against the Crucified’), in *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 93-124.

⁸⁶ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 132-4.

apart from, and even against,⁸⁷ one another and, importantly, changed the “character” of theology.⁸⁸ Whereas theology previously was a holistic and comprehensive science that investigated God and all creaturely beings in relation to God, it now became a rather marginalised, if not completely abandoned, discipline within the university, which could either focus its attention on certain faith-propositions about the existence and decrees of an all-powerful and voluntarist God, who resided above and beyond the world, or, in an attempt to conform to the other sciences, study the realities of this world without any real reference to transcendence and revelation.⁸⁹ This understanding of theology, it is held, came to be the dominant view within most universities by the 15th century,⁹⁰ and was solidified even further with the advent of the Enlightenment, where the separation of the immanent realm and transcendent reality, which was initiated in the 13th century, would reach its apex. It also then came to define most theological thinking after the *Aufklärung*, in both Catholic and Protestant contexts, where univocity and nominalism, and the dualisms they brought forth, were supposedly espoused by thinkers such as Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, and Calvin, from the very beginning. For someone like Dupré, it could, in fact, be said that Nicholas of Cusa, the 15th century German philosopher and theologian, was the “last major alternative (before the 20th century) to the dualist ... theologies of the modern age”.⁹¹

The genealogical narratives presented by these thinkers, where the focus has generally been on certain changes or deviations that occurred within late Medieval theology (as a result of the thought of predominately Franciscan thinkers such as Duns Scotus and William of Occam), have provoked different responses over the last few decades. Many, both inside and outside of the world of academic theology, have been receptive to their views and have praised the way in which their writings have set out to give an alternative, theological account of the

⁸⁷ Dupré (a scholar who did a lot of work on the philosophical underpinnings of Marxism), describes this “new religious architecture” as follows: “[T]he upper structure – the so-called supernatural – was assumed to rest on a base of nature, but that base was conceived as detached from the superstructure. Nature had become independent in the sense in which Spinoza defined substance, namely, as ‘that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, independently of any other conception’ (*Ethics* I, Def. 3), while the supernatural order of grace, detached from its concrete base, was relegated to an airless sphere of abstraction”. See Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 181.

⁸⁸ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 181.

⁸⁹ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 189.

⁹⁰ See Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 38. Gregory writes: “[The] *via moderna* became and remained the principle intellectual framework for natural and moral philosophy as well as for theology in many universities after the mid-fourteenth centuries. The number of universities in Europe nearly doubled in the fifteenth century, while those with faculties of theologies proliferated at the hands of rival papal claimants after the schism of 1347 and increased almost tenfold [thereafter]. Metaphysical univocity and nominalism spread along with them. At the outset of the sixteenth century, the dominant ... view of God was not *esse* but an *ens* – not the incomprehensible act of to-be, but a highest being amongst other beings”. According to Gregory, this view of God (and the consequences it had for a discipline such as theology), would also come to underlie the thought of Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, and become part and parcel of the ‘new world’ that was emerging in and out of the 16th century Reformation.

⁹¹ Dupré: *Passage to Modernity*, 189.

emergence of modernity, which challenged the hackneyed and rather simplistic narratives that have often been propagated in the past (narratives which say, for example, that the secular world is simply the result of humanity ‘coming of age’ and outgrowing their ‘gods’).⁹² Appreciation has also been expressed for the way in which the works of these thinkers have rejuvenated an interest in patristic and medieval theology – especially in the English-speaking theological world.⁹³ There has, however, also been many scholars who have been quite critical of these thinkers’ engagement with the past, especially with regards to the thought of Scotus and Occam, and the question has repeatedly been asked if the whole enterprise is not contaminated by a certain nostalgia for a pre-modern world, wherein Christendom was still the dominant force in society, and theology was still seen as the ‘Queen of the Sciences’.⁹⁴

For me, one of the most interesting responses to these so-called ‘genealogies of decline’ has come from someone who has been closely associated with these thinkers, and can be regarded as somewhat of an insider within their ranks, namely, the Anglo-Catholic theologian Graham Ward, who helped organise the initial Radical Orthodoxy symposia with John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock in the 1990’s, co-edited the Radical Orthodoxy book series with them, and is therefore usually described as the third major representative of Radical Orthodoxy (even though Ward would likely resist this label).⁹⁵ On the one hand, Ward has often supported Milbank, Pickstock, and some of the other thinkers’ portrayals and interpretations of the past, and has, at times, explored, incorporated, and echoed some of their arguments in his own

⁹² See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 4, for a description of the ‘traditional’ account of the world’s secularisation, which, Taylor argues, is definitely not sufficient and rather naïve. For examples of scholars who are sympathetic to, and have been influenced by, these thinkers, see, *inter alia*, the ‘Radical Orthodoxy’ and ‘Illuminations: Theory and Religion’ book series (published by Routledge), as well as the monographs that form part of the ‘Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought’ series (published by Eerdmans). See also the essays published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics*. Many scholars who have published books in these series, or essays in this journal, have come to hold that, if religion and theology’s contested place in our contemporary society and the modern university is not the result of a “defeat at the hands of its adversaries”, but simply the consequence of a certain “forgetfulness, alienation or compromise’ on theology’s own side, the situation could surely be reversed, “by revisiting and rectifying certain ‘theological mistakes’ of the past”. See Webster, ‘Theologies of Retrieval,’ 586.

⁹³ See W. David Buschart and Kent D Eilers, *Theology as Retrieval: Receiving the Past, Renewing the Church* (London: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 221-256; Webster, ‘Theologies of Retrieval,’ 583-599.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Daniel P. Horan, *Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Account of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), especially 15-58 and 97-156; as well as the essays in the following two volumes: Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, eds., *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric, and Truth* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Lisa Isherwood and Marko Zlomislak, eds., *The Poverty of Radical Orthodoxy* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publishers, 2012).

⁹⁵ See Graham Ward, ‘In the Economy of the Divine: A Response to James K.A. Smith,’ *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 115-120, especially 117. See also Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 29, as well as the autobiographical essay: ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, ed. Darren C. Marks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), 177-186, especially 179.

work.⁹⁶ According to him, these genealogical accounts, focusing on the “internal corruption of the theological” in the late Middle Ages, are far more subtle than they are often given credit for, and offer a rather persuasive and historically-defendable ‘counter-narrative’ of how the modern world, with its binary distinctions between, for example, nature and the supernatural came about.⁹⁷ He furthermore agrees with the fact that, in many instances, ‘modern theology’ has continued to perpetuate, and function in accordance with, this dualist worldview, where God and the natural world are treated as separate entities that should be kept apart, especially in the university setting.⁹⁸ On the other hand, however, Ward has also warned against what could be regarded as a fixation on, and over-exaggeration of, the ‘lapsus’ brought about by the turn to univocity and nominalism, and the subsequent dismissal of the theologies and expressions of faith which followed. According to him, God’s providence and involvement in people’s lives and their theologies definitely did “not stop with Duns Scotus”, nor “cease[d] with William of Occam”, and one should thus be careful to disparage and do away with everything that was said and done *after* the 14th century.⁹⁹ Surely, he contends, God continued to work, and speak, and reveal Godself in and through the theologies of the ‘modern age’. To argue otherwise would, ironically, be a very “modern move”.¹⁰⁰

It is then interesting to note that, contrary to Milbank and Pickstock’s writings, Ward’s own theological project, while often affirming parts of the narrative presented above, has, for the most part, not really been interested in genealogical questions such as how the dualisms underlying modernity originally came about. Although he regards these questions as important and has remarked that even “deeper and more analytical histories and genealogies of cultural change, continuities, and transformations” are needed today,¹⁰¹ the emphasis in his theological writings has rather been on exploring how these dualisms could potentially be bridged, also through the rediscovery of certain theological resources in the classical theological tradition, such as analogy. For Ward, it is indeed not only important to ask why theology, to a large extent, became estranged from the creaturely realm and people’s everyday lives, but also to explore how it could learn anew to interact with, and faithfully respond to, the complexities of the world in which we live today, while still, in his words, taking its “revealed origins”

⁹⁶ See, for example, Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2001), ix, 7, 11, 130-7, 157-67, 160; *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 117ff; *Theology and Contemporary Critical Theory* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 5-7; and *How the Light Gets In*, 267-74.

⁹⁷ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 71, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 184.

⁹⁸ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 71.

⁹⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 72. See in this regard also Ward’s engagement with Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* in the essay: ‘History, Belief, and Imagination in Charles Taylor,’ *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (July 2010): 337-348.

¹⁰¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 73.

seriously.¹⁰² And this is precisely what he has set out to do throughout his theological career, by attempting to construct a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology, to which we will now turn, before introducing the life and work of Hans Urs von Balthasar (one of the important influences on Ward’s thought), who could arguably be seen and described as a ‘culturally engaged’ theologian himself.

2.4. Graham Ward’s ‘Culturally Engaged’ Systematic Theology

Graham Ward, in much the same manner as Hans Urs von Balthasar, “came to theology ... through literature”.¹⁰³ After discovering a passion for reading and writing one summer while still at school, he originally went to study English and French at Cambridge University in the hope of perhaps becoming a novelist or screenwriter, as he writes in an autobiographical essay.¹⁰⁴ It was here, while working on a third-year essay on the allegorical language employed by the 17th century Puritan writer and preacher, John Bunyan, that he first encountered the world of theology. This world captivated him to such an extent that he, with time, decided to change his field of study upon completing his initial undergraduate education. In time, he thus enrolled for his first degree in theology, which ultimately led to a doctorate at Cambridge’s Faculty of Divinity, under the tutelage of theologians such as Nicholas Lash, Janet Soskice, Rowan Williams, and Fergus Kerr. While completing his doctoral dissertation, which attempted to bring the ‘Word-theology’ of Karl Barth into conversation with the post-structuralist thought of Jacques Derrida (a project that was inspired by Lash’s annual eight-week course on analogy and religious language),¹⁰⁵ he was ordained in the Anglican Church.

It was during Ward’s initial theological studies and later doctoral work, which coincided with extensive involvement in parish ministry,¹⁰⁶ that he became aware, in his own words, of the

¹⁰² Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 184.

¹⁰³ Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 178.

¹⁰⁴ Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 178-9.

¹⁰⁵ Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 180. Ward’s doctoral dissertation would later be published as *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), with the main research question being: “How does Derrida’s understanding of logocentrism (and his critique of its pretensions) speak to Barth’s ruminations on the Word of God that is always mediated? And how does Barth’s understanding of Christ as the Word, speaks to Derrida’s investigations into *différance* and negative theology? How, with these two people, might we approach the perennial philosophy of religion question of the language of theology in a new way?” See the Introduction (1-10) for his description of how this project “took fire and spread from the flow of molten ideas that kept each student [in Nicholas Lash’s course] fanning the air for breath” (1).

¹⁰⁶ Ward describes his time in parish ministry, while also working on his project on Barth and Derrida, as follows: “In the meantime I had been ordained and was working as an Anglican curate in a large civic church in Bristol; by day I visited the bereaved and couples wanting their child baptised, and by night I was trying to clarify how Barth’s *Redevelopment* differed from that being advocated by the Patmos group (with which he had passing acquaintance). [This] double practice – of practicing theology and writing it – became very important... My time at Bristol as a curate ... raised for me an abiding question: what is the task of theology, for whom is it speaking and to whom?”. See Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 180-1.

“abstract, even idealist levels, towards which most systematic theologies were being pitched”.¹⁰⁷ Ward found that many systematic theologians of the last few centuries, including, at times, someone like Karl Barth, “seemed to be building ... great cathedral[s] that hovered above our heads”, without taking proper account of, or engaging with, the contexts *from which* and *to which* they spoke.¹⁰⁸ At the time, this realisation also came to be shared by a number of other up-and-coming British theologians, and together they began searching for alternative ways of thinking about and doing theology, under the guidance of mentors such as Nicholas Lash and Rowan Williams.¹⁰⁹ This search led to certain mid-20th century French and German *Nouvelle* theologians, such as De Lubac, Daniélou, De Certeau, and, our main interlocutor in this study, Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, a generation earlier, similarly recognised and spoke out against what Daniélou called the “rupture between theology and life”.¹¹⁰ It also prompted them to re-visit patristic and medieval voices, who had inspired and undergirded the *Nouvelle* theologians’ thought. These thinkers, they found, contrary to many representatives of ‘modern theology’, did not pit the creaturely against the divine, and did not see the natural world as being devoid of any transcendence (as several liberal theologians were doing at the time), but rather espoused a *sacramental* and *incarnational* worldview, where creation analogically participated in and expressed (definitely in the person of Christ) the reality of the divine. They realised that this opened up a myriad of new possibilities for the theologian to think about, explore, and engage with, the realm of creaturely existence.

This reaction against ‘modernity’ and its theologies, and the turn to *Nouvelle Théologie* and early patristic and medieval thinkers, would, in many ways, lay the foundation for the emergence of *Radical Orthodoxy*, in whichever way it is to be construed. However, from very early on it became clear that, while Ward and his contemporaries such as John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock shared certain theological sensibilities and looked to similar sources, they would not have the same emphases in their work. Milbank and Pickstock’s respective projects, as shown above, would have a strong genealogical focus and include abundant excavation work on the theologies of the late Middle Ages and thereafter. Ward’s writings, on the other hand,

¹⁰⁷ Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 184.

¹⁰⁸ Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 184.

¹⁰⁹ For some interesting insight into how British theology in the last quarter of the 20th century “started to rediscover its roots in the past and to build bridges between Western and Eastern tradition of Christian Orthodoxy” – a process in which Rowan Williams played an essential role – see the preface to Johannes Hoff’s book, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), xiv-xxvi. See also the interview Rupert Shortt conducted with Rowan Williams in the *London Times Literally Supplement*, which is part of the collection *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1-23. Cf. also Ward, ‘In the Economy of the Divine,’ 118-9.

¹¹⁰ Jean Daniélou, ‘Les Orientations présentes de la pensée religieuse,’ *Études* 79, no. 249 (1946): 5-21 (here 6), as quoted and translated in Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.

would be much more immersed in and engaged with the complexities of the contemporary world, and attempt to bring Christian Orthodoxy, in all its spiritual and intellectual richness and, importantly, diversity,¹¹¹ into critical conversation with the embodied and encultured realities of our everyday existence, while constantly interacting with other academic disciplines that are usually tasked with investigating these realities (whether it be evolutionary biology or the political sciences, immunology or film studies, neurology or art history). This would be done by actively embracing an *analogical* and *participatory* understanding of the relationship between creation and its Creator (in continuity with Patristic theology, Aquinas, and the Jesuit thinker, Erich Przywara, to whom we will shortly return); emphasising the radicality of the incarnation of Christ, an event which he describes as “the Godhead’s greatest and most gracious accommodation to our creatureliness”;¹¹² and, on account of the two previous points, recognising that all words *from* God, including the Word spoken in Christ, as well as all words *about* God, are mediated through creaturely reality and human language, and cannot therefore be divorced from the contexts in which they emerge. Ward would also continuously accentuate, in accordance with especially early patristic theology, that Christian doctrine is liturgical in nature, and should come to express itself through real, embodied practices in the world. The retrieval of certain aspects of the theological tradition that have often been neglected or discarded in the past, such as an ‘analogical worldview’, an emphasis on the ‘scandal of the incarnation’, and a rediscovery of the performative and liturgical nature of Christian doctrine, would thus enable Ward to move past the dualisms underlying a considerable amount of ‘modern’ theological thought, in order to engage anew with the realm of creation and everything that it contains, in relation to the transcendent God.

When one reads through Graham Ward’s oeuvre, it can immediately be seen that this last word, ‘engage’, features very prominently in his work. From the beginning of his theological career, he constantly uses it to describe what he is trying to do in and through his writings,¹¹³ and over the years, he increasingly comes to refer to his larger theological project as an attempt at a ‘culturally engaged’, or simply ‘engaged’ systematic theology¹¹⁴ – a description that is also

¹¹¹ For more on Ward’s understanding of ‘orthodoxy’ – as “an ongoing set of interrelated activities as Christian faith seeks understanding of the articles which compose that faith” – see his essay ‘Receiving the Gift,’ *Modern Theology* 30, no. 3 (July 2014).

¹¹² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, xii.

¹¹³ It is interesting to note that this word, ‘engage’, prominently features in the introductions or prefaces of almost all of Ward’s books. For only one example, see Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-11, where he speaks of the way in which should “engage” with the world and other academic subjects, such as “social, political and cultural theory, cultural anthropology, philosophy, hermeneutics [etc.]”, 2. He notes that the burden of this book will be to give a description “of that engagement”.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Ward, ‘On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,’ 185; *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 15; and ‘Affect: Towards a Theology

currently being used to frame the four-volume dogmatics that he is working on, of which the first volume titled *How the Light Gets In* has recently been published. Given the contested nature of theology as an academic discipline throughout history, as shown above, Ward has decided to devote a section of this first volume of his dogmatics to clarifying exactly what he means when he speaks of an ‘engaged’ systematic theology.¹¹⁵ It is to this section titled ‘So what is an Engaged Theology?’, that we will now turn very briefly, before introducing the life and work of Hans Urs von Balthasar as an example of a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theologian.

After giving a cursory overview of the ways in which systematic theology has evolved throughout the ages, from the times of the first ecumenical creeds to our present day, Ward commences this programmatic section, through which he hopes to give, in his own words, a “speed-camera shot” of his theological vision, by stating that, in short, a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology can be seen and described as a mode of theological enquiry that seeks to relate Christian doctrine to “cultural and social life”.¹¹⁶ This, he holds, is done by actively resisting, and moving beyond, “the set of binary distinctions bequeathed to, and dominating, ‘modern theology’”: distinctions between, for example, the supernatural and the natural, grace and nature, the transcendent and the immanent, and the sacred and the secular.¹¹⁷ For Ward, an ‘engaged’ systematic theology is therefore a “corrective to some of the less benign” changes that have occurred within the field of theology over the last few centuries, changes that have frequently resulted in the created realm being set against the reality of the divine, so that any theological endeavour would, in effect, have to choose between God and the world.¹¹⁸ Ward holds that an engaged systematics is not interested in merely upholding certain abstract, propositional truth-claims about the divine – propositions that are ‘disembedded’ from creation and the contexts from which, and to which, the theologian speaks – nor in “imitating the dominating secular modes of reasoning of the day”, without any concern for the *theos* in ‘theology’, as regularly happens, for example, in certain strands of modern biblical scholarship.¹¹⁹ Rather, it deliberately sets out to transcend these dualist paradigms, by focusing

of Experience,’ in *Radical Orthodoxy, Annual Review I*, ed. Neil Turnbull (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 51-74 (especially 51). See also the interview with Graham Ward, ‘The Academy, the Polis, and the Resurgence of Religion: An Interview with Graham Ward,’ by Brandy Daniels, *The Other Journal, An Intersection of Theology and Culture*. The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology, November 18, 2008. Accessed July 5, 2018. <https://theotherjournal.com/2008/11/18/the-academy-the-polis-and-the-resurgence-of-religion-an-interview-with-graham-ward>.

¹¹⁵ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 115-136.

¹¹⁶ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 115-6.

¹¹⁷ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 119.

¹¹⁸ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 116.

¹¹⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 116.

its attention on what it sees as God’s continual “operations of redemption in and through the materialities” of our embodied and encultured lives on earth.¹²⁰ In an engaged systematic theology, the whole created world is pervaded by, and constantly being transformed through, the transcendent God’s ever-persistent self-communication of love, which is definitively expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Creation therefore asks to be studied theologically, that is, with reference to its source and end, the triune God.

While working, in continuity with the writings mentioned above, with a deep *sacramentalism* and *incarnationalism*, and constantly recognising the mediatory nature of all God-talk,¹²¹ an engaged systematic theology is indeed interested in, and attempts to engage with, everything that ‘is’, much like the theologies discussed earlier in this chapter. From its own specific “locatedness”, it constantly sets out to investigate and make theological sense of all of the socially-, politically- and culturally-embedded realities around it in relation to God and God’s Word.¹²² Nothing can be excluded from, or be seen to stand outside of, its theological enquiry, as it is convinced that every inch of creation comes from, and analogically participates in, God,¹²³ and moreover is receptive to, and is being transformed by, God’s redemptive Word, who, in Jesus Christ, became flesh and, even today, is “continually given” to and for the world, through the working of the Spirit.¹²⁴ This also makes it a decidedly interdisciplinary enterprise. With explicit reference to the first *questio* of Aquinas’ Summa, as disused above,¹²⁵ Ward emphasises that an ‘engaged’ systematic theology constantly seeks to draw upon, learn from, and adopt the language and knowledge of, other academic disciplines, in its attempt to discern, grasp, and appreciate more deeply, the “good and graceful hand of God’s providence” in the world.¹²⁶ Quoting John Webster, Ward argues that by “entering the terrains of other disciplines”, and learning to use their language (always with great humility),¹²⁷ an ‘engaged’

¹²⁰ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, ix.

¹²¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 123, 127.

¹²² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, ix, 130.

¹²³ See Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 289-90.

¹²⁴ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 130.

¹²⁵ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 140. See also Ian Warlick’s interview with Ward, where he says the following with regards to the first *questio* of Aquinas’ Summa: “There is, for Aquinas, the sense that Theology, now he wouldn’t put it like this it’s not just the queen of the sciences, but it’s [also] the whore of the sciences. Queen of the sciences in so far as it caps them all but whore in so far as it has to trade on them all. Theology has no language of its own because we have no object that we can just simply claim. God isn’t an object in the world, so theology always has to borrow its language from other things”. Ian Warlick, ‘Post-secularity, Hegel and Friendship: An Interview with Graham Ward,’ *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1, no. 1 and 2 (August 2012): 333-48 (here 334).

¹²⁶ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 140, 142.

¹²⁷ See Ward’s essay, ‘Adam and Eve’s Shame’ (and Ours),’ *Literature and Theology* 26, no. 3 (September 2012): 305-322. In this article, Ward focus on the “fear [that] haunts all those involved in interdisciplinary research: the fear of being exposed as a dilettante”. This fear, or even shame, he holds, can, however, operate positively. According to him: “The lurking fear of a shameful exposure can ensure that as far as possible we approach the other discipline with what is, hopefully, an intellectual integrity formed in our own disciplinary training. It may

systematic theology does not “leave the domain of the Word behind, but continues to trace its full scope”.¹²⁸ This is also true for the world of the arts, Ward holds, where God’s Word often comes to expression in the most unexpected of ways, as seen, for example, in Serge Bramly’s photoshoot, *INRI*, or Bill Viola’s video installation, *Emergence*.¹²⁹

For Ward, an engaged systematic theology also then has an explicitly ethical emphasis. According to him, the central reason why it, in fact, attempts to engage theologically with the whole of creaturely existence and enters into conversation with other branches of knowledge and the world of the arts, as described above, is to try and discern how we ought to live and faithfully follow Christ in the world. It is therefore not only concerned with “intellection” and “ratiocination”, as this would lead, once more, to a form of “excarnation” (to use Charles Taylor’s notion), but also with embodied actions on the world stage.¹³⁰ Ward asserts that, in a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology, Christian ‘doctrine’ is treated as a “verbal noun”, as something that needs to be “made known”, as something that can and should be performed in real-life contexts.¹³¹ It encourages a way of acting in, amidst, and in response to, the realities of everyday life, as God’s Spirit gradually changes our ‘hearts of stone’ into ‘hearts of flesh’,¹³² and we come to learn, with others, what it means to live like Christ in the world today, while knowing that, even in our shortcomings and failings, our lives remain hidden with Christ in God, as Paul writes.¹³³ For Ward, an engaged systematics ultimately thus leads to an *imitatio Christi*, to a life of discipleship, where the truth of Christ is not only confessed, but also performed through certain embodied practices, so as to engender God’s *salus* in and for a world that is desperately in need of it.

Much more could be said about Graham Ward’s notion of a ‘culturally engaged systematic theology’, especially with regards to the importance it attaches to ecumenism, liturgy, and the practice of prayer, all of which are discussed at length in this initial section in his book, *How the Light Gets In*. At this point, however, it has hopefully already become clear that this approach to theology, in contrast to many examples of ‘modern theology’, not only allows for, but welcomes and encourages a thoroughly theological engagement with the many different realities of creaturely life on earth, including cultural realities, such as the arts. This is very

even produce something of an ethical community... The fragility, the openness to having one’s ‘script’ corrected, developed or modified deepens an ethics of responsibility. I own how I have responded but open myself to discussing that response in a way that fosters learning and exchange” (319-20).

¹²⁸ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 140. Cf. John Webster, *The Domain of the Word*, 20.

¹²⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 128, 131.

¹³⁰ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 112, 143; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 288.

¹³¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 110.

¹³² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 140.

¹³³ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 136.

encouraging for a study such as this one, given the concerns that were raised in the previous chapter. While Ward's project can certainly be regarded as a highly inventive endeavour and, in many ways, occupies a unique place in the Anglophone theological world at the present moment, it has hopefully also been seen that it did not simply appear out of thin air, but that it has always been embedded in a very rich theological tradition which stretches back to the earliest Church Fathers. To my mind, one of the strengths of Ward's theology, in fact, lies with the creative way it retrieves, works with, and further develops the thought of those who came before him, including, for example, patristic and medieval thinkers such as Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Aquinas, as well as German and French *Nouvelle* theologians such as Daniélou, De Lubac, De Certeau, and, as has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In the final part of this chapter, I would like to focus on this last-mentioned name, Hans Urs von Balthasar, someone who Ward himself has identified as one of the biggest influences on his theological thought.¹³⁴ What is interesting to note is that, a generation earlier, Balthasar had also set out to develop a theology that would: (i) challenge the dualisms of modernity, especially as it manifested in pre-Vatican II Neo-Scholasticism, and (ii) engage with the realities of the world around it, especially cultural realities, such as art, literature, and, importantly, the theatre. In many ways, Ward's notion of a 'culturally engaged' systematic theology could, therefore, serve as an apt description of, and lens through which to view, Balthasar's theological project, which came to have such a profound impact on Ward's own thought. In what follows, I would thus like to use Ward's notion of a 'culturally engaged' theology as a key to introduce both the life and theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, which are closely tied to one another,¹³⁵ before proceeding in the next two chapters to investigate how

¹³⁴ See Ward, 'On Being Radical and Hopefully Orthodox,' 186, where he remarks (in the very last sentence of this essay), that the "three most important theological influences" upon his work, have been Augustine, Karl Barth and, indeed, Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose "poetic" voice and inventive use of analogy, captured his imagination from the get-go (as he remarks earlier in the essay; see 182).

¹³⁵ In defiance of the notion of *la mort de l'auteur* – which rose to prominence in the latter part of the previous century – it has been reemphasised over the last few decades that it is not entirely possible to separate writings from the intentions and biographical context of their authors; that there will always be a necessary relationship between a text and the inner and outer life of those responsible for it. This connection between an author's biographical context and his or her work is particularly important to take note of when it comes to the writings of someone such as Hans Urs von Balthasar. For as will be seen in what follows, the particular *narrative* of his life, and especially the people and ideas he was exposed to along the way, had such a significant impact on the *content* and *contours* of his theological thinking, that it would be quite difficult to fully grasp, appreciate, and engage with his extensive *oeuvre*, without (at least some) knowledge thereof. Balthasar himself reluctantly realised this, and even though he disliked speaking about himself, he deliberately wrote an autobiographical essay at the end of each decade of his theological career, wherein he attempted to contextualise the work that he has done in terms of *that* which has happened in his life during this time. These autobiographical essays have been collected in the volume, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

Balthasar, as a ‘culturally engaged’ theologian, engaged with the world of theatre in and through his theodramatic theory.

2.5. Hans Urs von Balthasar as a ‘Culturally Engaged’ Theologian

Hans Urs von Balthasar, like Graham Ward, first studied literature, before becoming a student of theology. Despite having grown up in a very devout household and having actively embraced the Catholic faith at a very early age,¹³⁶ he certainly had no intention of formally studying theology, or of entering the priesthood, when he finished school. During his childhood and adolescent years, he devoted all of his time to the piano and to reading,¹³⁷ and when the time thus arrived to decide which field of study he would pursue at university level, the choice was between music or literature. In the end, he decided on literature, which he went on to study at the Universities of Zurich, Berlin, and Vienna.

When thinking back on his early student years, Balthasar would often single out the time he spent in Vienna, not only because of the “superabundance of concerts, operas, [and] orchestral masses” he was able to attend in this city of music,¹³⁸ but also because it was here that he first encountered theology – in the classes of the Plotinus-scholar, Hans Eibl, and by lodging with the medical doctor, Rudolf Allers, who was an amateur “philosopher, theologian, [and] translator of St. Anselm and St. Thomas”.¹³⁹ As would be the case with Ward later on, this initial encounter with theology made an immense impression on Balthasar, also then because of what he regarded as theology’s possible connections to, and significance for, his own field of study, namely, German literature. From the very beginning, Balthasar sensed that theology

¹³⁶ In an important biographical essay by Peter Henrici, it is remarked that Balthasar was known for his religious piety and commitment to the Church from a very early age – something which was certainly inspired by his parents, Oscar Ludwig Carl Balthasar (the city’s canton builder, who was responsible for the St. Karli-Kirche, one of Switzerland’s pioneering modern church buildings) and his mother, Gabrielle Piezcker (the co-founder of the Swiss League of Catholic Women and a direct relative of the Hungarian martyr-Bishop, Apur von Győr). Henrici writes that there was a “gift bestowed to him, so to speak, in the cradle: a simple and straightforward faith, a faith which, to the very end, remained childlike in the best sense. He owned this to his family”. See Peter Henrici, ‘A Sketch of Von Balthasar’s life,’ in *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Schindler, 10. Balthasar himself would later in his life speak of his “untroubled faith” as child, and fondly recall the “quiet, deeply moving” masses which he attended in the Franciscan Church of Lucerne (where he was baptised, received his first communion, and sang in the choir) and the city’s Jesuit church laying along the River Reus. With regards to his parents, he would write: “my parents were so instinctively Catholic, as if nothing more natural existed in the world ...”. See *Test Everything*, 10.

¹³⁷ He once reminded one of his school friends, Alois Schenker (who would become editor of the *Schweizer Kirchenzeitung*) about their time at together at school: “At that time you were frightfully industrious, while I was spending all my time on music and Dante”. Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 9.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Henrici, ‘A Sketch of Von Balthasar’s life,’ 9.

¹³⁹ Balthasar would later describe Allers as follows: “Opponent of Freud and free disciple of Alfred Adler, he possessed and imparted the feeling for interhuman love as the objective medium of human existence; in this turn from the ‘ego’ to the reality of the full ‘Thou’, lay for him philosophical truth and psychotherapeutic method”. See Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 88-9.

could potentially be used to ‘engage’ with, and make sense of, the works of poetry, prose, and drama that he was reading in his literary courses – a clear sign that he was a ‘culturally engaged’ theologian in the making. As Stephan van Erp writes: “Balthasar’s interest in theology was motivated by art ... and aesthetics from the start”.¹⁴⁰ Upon finishing his undergraduate degree, he thus decided to enrol for a doctorate at the University of Zurich, with the explicit intention of writing a dissertation that would bring the fields of theology and literature into direct contact with one another.¹⁴¹

Balthasar’s doctoral project, which he completed in *Germanistik* (and not in theology, as many would later assume),¹⁴² went on to look at modern German literature in terms of Eschatology, as a theological category. Balthasar wanted to see how the myth of the ‘end of the world’, as found in the work of writers such as Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, and Nietzsche could be ‘read’, understood, and also critiqued in light of the Christian understanding of the ‘Last Things’.¹⁴³ This was a highly ambitious project – firstly, because of its novelty, as interactions between the fields of theology and literature were practically unheard of at that time; and secondly, also because Balthasar had, up to that point, not received any formal theological training. When Balthasar submitted his final manuscript for examinations, he included the following *apology*:

The novelty, or perhaps one should say the rashness, of what I am attempting in this study perhaps explains the kind of trepidation I feel about submitting it... It may seem strange, in an historical investigation, to use philosophy and theology to explain art, and vice versa... the result of this method will be its justification.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 125.

¹⁴¹ See Balthasar, *Test Everything*, 11.

¹⁴² Germanistik mainly focuses on the relationship between German literature, philosophy, and culture. Later in life, Balthasar “liked to point out with some irony that he was really a professional scholar of German literature and not a theologian”. In one interview about his work, he would famously reply: “You address me as a theologian or a theological writer ... but I never got my doctorate in theology; by nature and upbringing I am a Germanist”. See Alois Mi. Haas, ‘Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Apocalypse of the German Soul: At the intersection of German Literature, Philosophy and Theology,’ in *Hans Urs von Balthasar* ed. Schindler, 45.

¹⁴³ This category of ‘myth’ would become all-important in and for Balthasar’s work, and he would even describe his own *method of interpretation* as ‘mythical’. In a summary of the revised edition of his dissertation (which will shortly be discussed below), Balthasar gives this definition of what he means by ‘myth’ / ‘the mythical’: “A ‘myth’ is the form of truth which gives expression to a world-interpreting or religious idea in equal distance from ‘pure’ concept and ‘pure’ percept (sensuous image). The ‘Christ myth’ is the eternal Truth become flesh, time, biological conception: it is not, therefore, in any sense unhistorical, but as a mythos can nevertheless enter into a conversation with the mystical image sense of ultimacy in German Idealism and the ‘philosophies of life’ (Bergson, Nietzsche etc.)”. Hans Urs von Balthasar, ‘Apokalypse der deutschen Seele’, *Schöner Zukunft* 14 (1938): 57-59, here 58, as quoted and translated in Aidan Nichols, *Scattering the Seed: A Guide through Balthasar’s Early Writings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 2006), 39.

¹⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Geschichte des Eschatologischen Problem* (Zurich: 1930, Dissertation), trans. Peter Henrici in his essay, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s life,’ 11.

Balthasar ultimately passed his doctorate *summa cum laude*, a mark that was more an acknowledgement of the originality of the project than a true reflection of its quality, as his arguments were rather convoluted and, in the words of Aidan Nichols, not “entirely digestible”.¹⁴⁵ Conscious of its shortcomings, Balthasar would go on to re-work and expand on the original manuscript until it was almost five times the original length, and publish it a few years later as a three-volume study titled *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*. However, this elongated version of his Zurich dissertation remained plagued by severe deficiencies, to such an extent that he would later place a halt on its distribution. Balthasar’s first major academic, and one could say theological, project was thus not the success he had hoped it would be. Yet, what did make it an important piece of scholarship, especially in Balthasar’s larger life-narrative and formation as theologian, was the ground-breaking way in which it attempted, in clear violation of the disciplinary boundaries described earlier in this chapter, to use theology “to explain art, and vice versa”. This placed Balthasar on a definite intellectual pathway and laid the foundation for much of the ‘culturally engaged’ theology that he would produce in the future. Soon, he would again set out to ‘engage’ theologically with the world of art, literature, and, indeed, drama; this time, however, with the definite theological resources to do so, which he would acquire through meeting, befriending, and learning from a number of influential thinkers on his way to becoming an ordained Jesuit priest.

While in the final stages of his dissertation, Balthasar attended a thirty-day Ignatian retreat in the Black Forest, and it was here that he, quite unexpectedly, felt called to enter the Society of Jesus.¹⁴⁶ After graduating with his doctorate, he accordingly embarked on the long road to ordination, which included two years of *novitiate* at the famous Jesuit stronghold, Feldkirch, in Austria, and a further six years of philosophical and theological studies, first at Pullach near Munich, and thereafter at Fourvière, near Lyon. While not too much is known about his time at Feldkirch,¹⁴⁷ Balthasar’s studies at Pullach and Fourvière turned out to be somewhat

¹⁴⁵ Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1998), x.

¹⁴⁶ Balthasar would later describe this moment of ‘calling’ as follows: “Even now, thirty years later, I could still go to that remote path in the Black Forest, not far Basel, and find again the tree beneath which I was struck 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 lose, 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 ‘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”. Quoted in Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s life,’ 11.

¹⁴⁷ It can be assumed that the first two years at Feldkirch would at least, to some extent, have been a fruitful experience for Balthasar, as it would have included extensive instructions in the teachings and ways of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. As is known from later writings, the thought of Ignatius, with its emphasis on the importance of hearing and heading God’s calling on one’s life, and vision of a dynamic Christian ‘Bildung’ – centred on the practice of mediating on, and becoming immersed in, the *mysteria vitae Christi* – resonated in a profound manner with Balthasar, and not only introduced him to the importance of contemplative

disastrous. For, whereas he had hoped that formal theological education would further enable him to engage with, for example, the world of literature (as he had attempted to in his doctorate), the theology that was being taught at Catholic seminaries and universities at the time had exactly the opposite objective, namely, to disentangle all God-talk from the created world and cultural realities such as art, literature, and the theatre.

The theology Balthasar encountered while he was studying for the priesthood, was indeed marked by the almost Gnostic dualisms identified and described earlier in this chapter, especially as it manifested itself in so-called Neo-Scholasticism. This specific school of thought came to dominate Catholic theology in the wake of Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, which gave papal approval to the 19th century revival of certain 17th century interpretations of Aquinas,¹⁴⁸ and was marked by the tendency to isolate faith-propositions from "the body, language, and history", and to treat "art ... with something close to disdain".¹⁴⁹ It called for a retreat from the world, *into* the mind, so that the 'intellect' of the believer could come to correspond to objective 'propositions of revelation' bearing the truth of God, a truth which stood apart from the realities of this world.¹⁵⁰ In his book, *How the Light Gets In*, Graham Ward describes Neo-Scholasticism, as follows:

[Neo-Scholasticism was a theological trend that] disembedded theological enquiry from history, context, and embodiment in pursuit of timeless perennial abstractions... Faith was a contractual matter of the will's intellectual consent to true propositions. These truths had no basis in human experience, but rather conformed to objective reality... [It thus] privatised spirituality, relegated the role of the Bible, and reduced dogma to clear statement.¹⁵¹

Balthasar did not only find this approach to theology, with its denunciation of the world and the body, and its attempts at finding mathematically-precise formulations regarding a God who was completely removed from our earthly realities, stultifying, but also in complete

prayer, but also awakened his fascination with (what could be seen as) God's 'dramatic' encounter with humanity – through Christ – in the time-and-space bound realities of this world (a theme that is central in Ignatius writings). See Werner Löser, 'The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar,' in *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Schindler, 103-120.

¹⁴⁸ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 5.

¹⁴⁹ Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clarke, 2009), 11.

¹⁵⁰ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 4, 40-1. The thinkers behind this Neo-Scholastic movement included people such as Luigi Taparelli (1793-1862) and Serafino Sordi (1793-1865), and it became influential, in part, due to the Jesuit journal, *Civiltà Cattolica*, founded in 1850 by the Jesuit theologian, Carlo Maria Curci (1810-91). The most famous of the Neo-Scholastic theologians were, however, Joseph Kleutgen (1810-83) and Matteo Liberatore (1810-92). See Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Nineteenth-century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 20ff.

¹⁵¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 68.

contradiction to his own understanding of the Christian faith and its relationship to creation. Even though he was determined to complete his studies, as it was a requirement for ordination (and he continued to have a strong sense of calling, also then due to his exposure to the thought of Ignatius of Loyola), he found it excruciating to sit through the different prescribed lectures, and he would often attempt to read other books in the classroom “with plugged ears”, instead of listening to the words of his teachers.¹⁵² He would later describe his time both at Pullach and at Fourvière as follows:

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 not endure this presentation of the Word of God. 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.... [I] was living in a state of unbounded indignation.¹⁵³

Fortunately, however, during this time of severe distress and disillusionment, when it constantly felt as if he was “languishing in the desert”, Balthasar came to meet a number of mentor-figures who shared his disdain for Neo-Scholasticism, and who gradually introduced him, outside of the classroom, to alternative ways of thinking about theology – ways that did not drive a wedge between the creaturely and the divine, but, in fact, actively looked to, engaged with, and attempted to discern God’s presence in and through, the realities of creation. The two most important names that can be mentioned in this regard are Erich Przywara, a Polish theologian and priest who was responsible for the Jesuit journal, *Stimmen der Zeit*; and Henri de Lubac, a young professor of Fundamental Theology at the Catholic Institute of Lyon, who was loosely tied to the community of Fourvière, and who would later, as Cardinal, play an all-important role in the Second Vatican Council.

Erich Przywara was a “brilliant and prolific” scholar, who, while serving as the editor of *Stimmen der Zeit*, produced numerous studies on a wide range of theological and philosophical thinkers and subjects at an almost “superhuman rate”, with the result that he was seen, by both his allies and adversaries, as somewhat of a *doctor universalis* in the Catholic Church.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s life,’ 14.

¹⁵³ As quoted in Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s life,’ 13.

¹⁵⁴ Karl Rahner, for example, spoke of Przywara’s “lifelong dialogue with the past and the present, with the entirety of Western intellectual history from Heraclitus to Nietzsche” and of his “openness to all in order to give to all”. See Karl Rahner, *Gnade als Freiheit. Kleine theologische Beiträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), translated by John Betz in the ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ in the book Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis, Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014 [1932]), 4-5. Also Karl Barth, Przywara’s main theological sparring partner, had the following to say about him: “You have to imagine a little man with a big head ... who somehow always knows how to give an intelligent and well-suited answer to everything, and I mean everything ... [he]

Contrary to most other eminent Catholic theologians at the time, Przywara showed an “unparalleled degree of theological openness to the world – to philosophy, literature, and culture”, and, already early in his life, became convinced that it was necessary to cast-off the chains of Neo-Scholasticism and to re-think God’s relationship to the realm of creation.¹⁵⁵ To do this, he returned, once more, to thinkers such as Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, and especially Thomas Aquinas (whose works have been replaced by late-Scholastic ‘manuals’, in theological education). Here, he discovered the principle of analogy, which, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, spoke of a similarity-amidst-dissimilarity between God and creation, which hinged on a real distinction between *esse* and *essentia* in creaturely being. For Przywara, this principle, which he, following Cajetan and Suarez, came to refer to as the *analogia entis*, was indeed what the Church and modern theology needed, to learn anew how to respond to, and engage with, the world around it.¹⁵⁶ For not only did it rightly affirm that the Creator God is “beyond” all things, but it also showed how, because this is the case, God is “ineffably interior to creation ... as the effective *ground* of [its] being”, and that creation, instead of being cut-off from God, is thus always “open upwards” to the reality of the divine.¹⁵⁷ For Przywara, the *analogia entis* was certainly not a way for creation to “claim God”, nor to partake in some or other naïve form of natural theology, but served as an acknowledgement, in faith, that “God can, and does, claim us”, that is, the world that God brought forth *ex nihilo*, sustains in love, and redeems and renews through the Son and the Spirit.¹⁵⁸ For him, the truth of the *analogia entis*, in fact, only really became known through “the illuminating sun of revelation”.¹⁵⁹

Przywara’s use of the *analogia entis* was not met with much optimism in the Catholic community at the time, mostly due to the fact that Neo-Scholasticism, with its dualist

knows Augustine inside and out, Thomas, Duns Scotus, Molina ... Moreover, he is thoroughly versed in history, philosophy, psychology, but also notoriously at home in the Bible, his favourite apostle being none other than Paul ...” See Karl Barth’s letter to his friend Eduard Thurneysen, in *Briefwechsel Barth – Thurneysen Band 2* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), 625-54, translated in Betz, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ 22.

¹⁵⁵ Betz, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ 7-8.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas F. O’Meara, *Erich Przywara: His Theology and his World* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 36-7.

¹⁵⁷ See Betz, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ 55, 92. Przywara writes: “The primordial metaphysical fact is the tension of the analogy of being, or expressed differently, the tension between ‘God in us’ and ‘God over us’, or once more, the tension between the self-reality and self-spontaneity of the creature and the universal and total reality and spontaneity of God; between the universe of creatures as the visibility of God and the invisibility of the self-same God over the whole universe of his creation”. Erich Przywara, *Religionsphilosophische Schriften, Schriften Band 2* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 403, translated in Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 33.

¹⁵⁸ See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 43.

¹⁵⁹ See Przywara, ‘Gottgeheimnis der Welt: Drei Vorträge über die Geistige Krisis der Gegenwart,’ in *Schriften Band 2*), 230, translated in Keith Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clarke, 2010), 41-2. For a reflection on the Christological dimensions of Przywara’s thought, see, for example, the essay: Kenneth Oakes, ‘The Cross and the *Analogia Entis* in Erich Przywara’, in White, *The Analogy of Being*, 147-71. In this essay, Oakes shows that for Przywara “the *analogia entis* ... ever and only reflects and radiates the glory of Jesus Christ, the incarnate God” (170).

understanding of the world, continued to hold sway up until Vatican II. It was also the focus of severe criticism by the eminent Protestant theologian, Karl Barth.¹⁶⁰ It did, however, have a profound impact on the young Balthasar, who Przywara mentored “at a distance”.¹⁶¹ It encouraged and enabled him to see and move beyond the Neo-Scholasticism of the day, and to engage, theologically, with the realities of the creaturely realm, including the world of art, literature, and, as will soon be seen, drama, in his own constructive work (as he had always hoped to do since commencing with his doctorate). Throughout his life, Balthasar would remain convinced, and continually declare, that the *analogia entis*, grounded in Aquinas’ ‘real distinction between *esse* and *essentia*’,¹⁶² is of “decisive significance for every right-thinking philosophy and theology”.¹⁶³ And when reading through his oeuvre, it can indeed be seen how it determined, “whether explicitly or implicitly, all the expression of his thought”.¹⁶⁴ Balthasar would later remark, while working on his own constructive theological project, that he can “barely live without” Przywara’s 1932 monograph, *Analogia Entis*, by his side, and he continued to sing the praises of his mentor at Pullach (who, in letters, he regularly addressed as ‘my master’ and ‘maestro’) until the very end.¹⁶⁵

It was, however, not only Erich Przywara, with his focus on the *analogia entis* (and its “amazing theological possibilities”),¹⁶⁶ who inspired and enabled Balthasar to counter, and move beyond, the theological hegemonies of the day, so as to ‘engage’, theologically, with the world around him. While at Fourvière, Balthasar also met and became the apprentice of another Jesuit theologian, who, like Przywara, defiantly rejected Neo-Scholasticism, and who argued for a “renewed integration of nature and the supernatural”, namely, Henri de Lubac.¹⁶⁷ De Lubac, as said above, held a professorship at the Catholic Institute of Lyon, where he taught

¹⁶⁰ Karl Barth – ever alert for the dangers of ‘natural theology’ – famously remarked that the *analogia entis* (as presented by Erich Przywara) should be seen as the “invention of the anti-Christ”. See Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis*, 150ff.

¹⁶¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 37, 103.

¹⁶² See the section ‘Aquinas and the Real Distinction,’ in Fergus Kerr’s essay ‘Balthasar and Metaphysics’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, eds. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 232-4.

¹⁶³ Werner Löser, ‘Weg und Werk Hans Urs von Balthasar’, *Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen. Frankfurt am Main-Virtueller Leseraum*, quoted in John Betz, ‘After Barth: A New Introduction to Erich Przywara’s *Analogia Entis*,’ in *The Analogy of Being*, ed. White, 41.

¹⁶⁴ Löser, ‘Weg und Werk Hans Urs von Balthasar’, quoted in John Betz, ‘After Barth,’ 41.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Betz, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ 2. Balthasar would write, for example: “The totality of Przywara’s work defies classification; it is not something that one can be finished with, and so most have chosen to ignore it. But whoever has gone through his school, wherever one later ends up, will carry the impression of this encounter in one’s thought and life; and every return to the old master will leave one oddly shaken, perhaps one comes to realise how much younger this old master has remained than all who have come after him ...”. See Erich Przywara, *Sein Schrifttum 1912-1962*, ed. Leo Zimmy, with an introduction by Hans Urs von Balthasar (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963), 18, quoted in Betz, ‘Translator’s Introduction,’ 1.

¹⁶⁶ Nichols, *The Word has been abroad*, xiii.

¹⁶⁷ Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 86.

classes on early patristic and medieval theology, amongst other things. As was the case with Przywara, this exposure to the early theological tradition, with its radically *sacramental* and *incarnational* worldview, where creation does not stand against God, but analogically participates in, and expresses, definitely in Christ, the reality of the divine, convinced De Lubac that the current ecclesial and theological *status quo* must be challenged, and that Christianity should, once again, learn to speak to, and engage with, the real world and people's everyday lives. He thus began, on the one hand, looking into how and why the supernatural realm was severed from the natural realm in the late Middle Ages (an investigation which, as said above, would have an immense influence on, and in many ways inspire, the work of the scholars mentioned earlier in this chapter), while he also retrieved, and drew on, the thought of theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas, in an attempt to respond, theologically, to the challenges and opportunities of the modern world.¹⁶⁸ This return to and retrieval of early 'sources' from the theological tradition, which was a very controversial move at the time and ultimately resulted in him being barred from teaching for many years, would come to be known and described by the French word, *ressourcement*.

Although De Lubac was not formally involved at Fourvière, he did lodge with the community, and mentored some of the students at the seminary, including Jean Daniélou, Henri Bouillard, as well as Hans Urs von Balthasar. For De Lubac, it was important that these priests-in-training were reading the Fathers and Aquinas, and he thus introduced them to their writings, also by "generously" making his own notes available to them.¹⁶⁹ Disillusioned by the theologies of the day, this encounter with "the founders of the tradition of Christianity"¹⁷⁰ also then came as an absolute revelation to the young seminarians who were looking, as Balthasar notes, for a catholicity "that excluded nothing".¹⁷¹ Soon they started spending every spare second outside of the classroom reading De Lubac's suggestions, instead of playing football, like many of their friends were doing. Interestingly, the early theologians who made the biggest impression on Balthasar at the time, included Greek Fathers such as Irenaeus, Origin, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor, and he would later publish monographs or collected anthologies on each one of them.¹⁷² What captivated Balthasar the most about these thinkers, was the way

¹⁶⁸ See David Grummet, *De Lubac: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1; Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 86; and Gabriel Flynn, 'Introduction: The Twentieth-Century Renaissance in Catholic Theology,' in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-22. See also Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 37 and *Test Everything*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Test Everything*, 11-2.

¹⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Test Everything*, 14; Charles Kannengiesser, 'Listening to the Fathers,' *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 59.

¹⁷¹ Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, 44.

¹⁷² Balthasar, *Test Everything*, 14.

in which they endeavoured, with “boldness, flexibility, certainty and a flaming love”,¹⁷³ to see every aspect of creaturely existence in the light of the divine, on account of their belief that the world comes from God, participates in God’s being, and was being redeemed and renewed through the Son and the Spirit. While they definitely did not offer “ready-made” solutions “to the difficulties of our contemporary situation”,¹⁷⁴ they presented Balthasar with a way of thinking about and doing theology that was fully immersed in, and engaged with, the world around it, spoke to the embodied lives of ordinary people, and saw God’s truth as something that could and should be lived out, or performed, in real-life contexts, which is exactly what he was looking for.¹⁷⁵ Through reading patristic, as well as scholastic voices, Balthasar increasingly became convinced of the absurdity of a Church “retreating within itself for fear of being besieged by a hostile world”,¹⁷⁶ and was also imbued with a particular “style of thought”, which would allow him, in the future, to develop his own ‘culturally engaged’ theology.¹⁷⁷ Unlike De Lubac, Balthasar would not get too absorbed in the genealogies of how the supernatural realm was supposedly severed from the natural world, even though he would, at least in his aesthetics, give some attention to this subject.¹⁷⁸ His focus would rather be on overcoming the dualisms “bequeathed to and dominating” ‘modern theology’, as Ward would say, with the very *resources* he attained not inside, but outside of, the classroom at Fourvière.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. ‘The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves.’ *Communio* 24 (Summer 1997): 371.

¹⁷⁴ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, trans. Marc Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 11. On this point Balthasar writes, for example: “If we study the past, it is not in the hope of drawing from its formulas doomed in advance to sterility or with the intention of readapting out-of-date solutions. We are asking history to teach us the acts and deeds of the Church... [T]he central point of view ... is [therefore not] any kind of material transposition. We would like rather to penetrate right to those vital wellsprings of Spirit, right to that fundamental and hidden intuition that directs every expressions of their thought and that reveals to us one of the great possibilities of attitude and approach to theology has adopted in a concrete and unique situation” (12).

¹⁷⁵ Balthasar writes: “[For the Fathers’] life and doctrine are immediately one ... Of them all is true what Kierkegaard said of Chrysostom: ‘He gesticulated with his whole existence’”. Balthasar, ‘The Fathers, the Scholastics, and Ourselves,’ 371. See also Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, 42-4, where he says the following about Maximus the Confessor (and his martyrdom): “The course of this saint’s life impressed me even more than his teaching ... [With him one finds the] summit of that unity of doctrine and life which marks the whole patristic age ...” Balthasar also writes in his article, ‘Theology and Sanctity’: “If we consider the history of theology up to the time of the great scholastics, we are struck by the fact that the great saints ... were mostly great theologians... They were pillars of the Church, by vocation channels of her life: their own lives reproduced the fullness of the Church’s teaching, and their teachings the fullness of the Church’s life... [T]hese pillars of the Church were complete personalities: what they taught they lived with such directness, so naïvely, we might say, that the subsequent separation of theology and spirituality was quite unknown to them”. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume I, The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 181.

¹⁷⁶ Kannengiesser, ‘Listening to the Fathers,’ 61.

¹⁷⁷ Kannengiesser, ‘Listening to the Fathers,’ 62.

¹⁷⁸ See the two volumes – Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume III, Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989); and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume IV, The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, CRV, John Saward, Rowan Williams, and Oliver Davies (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 119. As was the case with Przywara, Balthasar would remain thankful towards De Lubac throughout his life. He would also then translate many of De Lubac’s works into German and write his

Balthasar's years of theological studies at Pullach and Fourvière were thus marked by both bitterness and joy, by both disillusionment and hope.¹⁸⁰ On the one hand, it introduced him to the stale world of Neo-Scholasticism, which alienated God from creation, and prohibited all theological interaction with creaturely reality. On the other hand, however, it also gave him the opportunity, outside the classroom, to meet with, and learn from, voices such as Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac, who presented him with alternative approaches to doing theology, which emanated from the deep wells of the Christian theological tradition and emphasised, for example, the principle of the *analogia entis* and what Balthasar, like Ward, would refer to as the "scandal of the incarnation".¹⁸¹ These 'alternative' approaches to theology, came as a saving grace in Balthasar's life, and indeed inspired and enabled him to produce his own 'culturally engaged' theology – not as a professor or teacher at a seminary or a university, but as a student chaplain in the city of Basel.

After Balthasar finally finished his studies and was ordained to the priesthood,¹⁸² his superiors gave him the choice of either taking up a rather prestigious teaching position at the Gregorian

own monograph on what he called De Lubac's "Patristic-High Scholastic" theology, on the occasion of De Lubac's 80th birthday: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). In the opening few pages of this book, 23-5, Balthasar sings the praises of De Lubac as follows: "Whoever stands before the forty or so volumes of Henri de Lubac's writings, with their more than 10 000 pages and hundreds of thousands of quotations – even disregarding the numerous articles and other smaller works – feels as though he is at the entrance to a primeval forest. The themes could hardly be more diverse, and the gaze of the researcher glides seemingly without effort over the whole history of theology – and of thought itself. And yet in all this, not even the smallest details escape him – whether it be an obscure tractate of an early medieval author or a review in an equally obscure periodical. But to one to penetrate and become familiar with these major works, this seemingly jungle reveals an order of an organic whole ... that unfolds an eminently successful attempt to present the spirit of Catholic Christianity to contemporary man in such a way that he appears credible in himself and his historical development as well as in dialogue with the major forms of other interpretations of the world – and even feels confident in proposing the unique ... 'catholic' solution to the riddle of existence". De Lubac would also write an essay in honour of Balthasar (in which he speaks about Balthasar's work in much the same manner as Balthasar spoke about his), titled *A Witness to Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar*. He, for example, remarks: "His work, as we have said, is immense ... But strangely enough once you come got to grips to it, the unity stands out so forcefully that you despair of outlining it without betraying it ...". This essay also contains the famous quotation: "This man [Balthasar] is perhaps the most cultivated of his time. If there is a Christian culture, then here it is! Classical antiquity, the great European literatures, the metaphysical tradition, the history of religions, the diverse exploratory adventures of contemporary man and, above all, the sacred science, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, patrology (all of it) – not to speak of the Bible – none of them that is not welcomed and made vital by his great mind. Writers and poets, mystics and philosophers, old and new, Christians of all persuasions – all are called on to make their particular contributions. All these are necessary for his final accomplishment, to a greater glory of God, the Catholic symphony". This essay is found in Henri De Lubac, *The Church: Paradox and Mystery*, trans. James R. Dunne (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1969).

¹⁸⁰ Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 47.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Balthasar's anthology on Irenaeus' theology titled: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ed., *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against the Heresies*, trans. John Saward. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1990).

¹⁸² Balthasar was ordained to the priesthood, with twenty-one of his confrères, by Cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, the Archbishop of Munich. Shortly thereafter he celebrated his first mass to a group of friends and family members in a private chapel in his hometown Lucerne. The sermon that he preached at this gathering (which was sort of a homecoming for him, after more than a decade of studies away from the town he grew up in) was on the words of consecration – "*Benedixit, fregit, deditque*". Those who attended the service would later recall that he "emphasised the breaking [of the bread, and thus Christ's body] so forcefully that [it would remain] in one's memory for life". Henrici, 'A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life,' 14.

University in Rome, which would bolstered him into the world of academic theology and Church decision making, or, almost as an afterthought, of doing pastoral work with students in Basel in his native country, Switzerland, where the Society of Jesus was still not recognised (which meant that there were no Jesuit residences, and members of the order could not hold any official positions in “Church and School”).¹⁸³ Balthasar decided on the second option, a decision which arguably issued from his understanding of the nature of theology and the task of the theologian. Inspired by what he had learned from De Lubac and Przywara, Balthasar was not interested in engaging in theological reflection somewhere in an ivory tower. He rather wanted to bring Christian truth, in all its sacramental and incarnational radicality, into direct contact with people everyday lives. And what better way to do this, than by working as a student chaplain among young students and academic staff in Basel, especially in this time of uncertainty and anxiety that had been brought about by the Second World War.

The nature of this position of student chaplain meant that Balthasar could devote himself to many diverse tasks, which, to his mind, were all part of his larger calling as a Christian priest, theologian, and pastor. Apart from working vigorously on his own academic and non-academic books dealing with the Christian faith, of which more shall be said shortly, and also editing and translating the works of other theologian and Christian thinkers, Balthasar regularly preached at the Marienkirche, conducted daily pastoral conversations with students of all confessions, led Bible study groups, and held Ignatian retreats that were aimed at helping people make a “decision about the state of their lives”,¹⁸⁴ for both male and female students. This was an innovation on Balthasar’s side, as Jesuit retreats were regularly intended only for men. His time was, however, not only filled with what could be deemed as ‘religious’ activities. As he believed that Christian truth was relevant to all areas of life, and that Christian theologians should be immersed in, and constantly engage with, the world around them, he also gave “lecture after lecture” on topics, ranging from music, to literature, to philosophy, to drama;¹⁸⁵ spent numerous evenings debating in the various student societies, especially in the culturally-orientated *Akademische Gesellschaft Renaissance*, of which he was a senior member; and founded the *Studentische Schulungsgemeinschaft*, which was primarily aimed at training students in the ‘philosophy of life’. Balthasar also edited and translated works of literature and philosophy from every corner of the earth, and got involved in the world of Swiss theatre, which was important for his theological work going forward.

¹⁸³ Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 14.

¹⁸⁴ Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 16.

¹⁸⁵ Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 16.

Already in 1943, the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, which at the time hosted a number of famed directors, playwrights, and actors who were in exile,¹⁸⁶ staged Balthasar's translation of Claudel's *The Satin Slipper*.¹⁸⁷ Balthasar did not only provide the text for the performance, but was also involved in the development and eventual staging of the play. More plays by Claudel and other's followed, and as the years went by, Balthasar continually served in an advisory capacity to directors and actors throughout Switzerland and Germany, who were working on plays that he had translated.¹⁸⁸ It should be emphasised that Balthasar, as a 'culturally engaged' theologian, did not regard his involvement in the world of theatre as falling outside of, or standing apart from, his calling in the Church, but as a natural extension thereof. It was something that flowed forth from his theological, pastoral, and priestly work and his participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and, in turn, helped to inform his reflections on the mystery of the triune God, and God's workings in and through the material realities of the created world.

Much more that could be said about Balthasar's years in Basel, especially with regards to his friendship and theological engagement with Karl Barth (with whom he, amongst other things, shared a love for Mozart), and his fascinating association and collaborations with Adrienne von Speyer (with whom he established the *Johannesgemeinschaft*, a 'secular institute', which ultimately led to Balthasar leaving the Jesuit order). Before we move on to his theological dramatic theory in the next chapter, I would, however, briefly like to say something about the theological writings that Balthasar produced during these years. While Balthasar busied himself with the many activities mentioned above, he also produced a massive corpus of theological writings, which would, at the end of his life, amount to almost a hundred books and over five hundred journal articles and contributions to collected works. In most of these writings, Balthasar set out to give further expression to and develop the very theology that he was attempting to embody and enact in his daily life, namely, a lived theology that was thoroughly immersed in, and 'engaged' with, the world around him, especially with cultural realities such as art, literature, and drama.

Given Balthasar's love for, and involvement in, the world of theatre during this time, one of the first extensive writings projects that he hoped to complete in Basel was a "theology of the

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Marvin Carlson's *Theatre is More Beautiful than War: German Stage Directing in the Late Twentieth Century* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 125; and also, Tino Tiusanen, *Dürrenmatt: A Study in Plays, Prose, Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 46.

¹⁸⁷ This translation was first published as Paul Claudel, *Der seidene Schuh*, trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar (Salzburg: Müller, 1939).

¹⁸⁸ See Henrici, 'A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life,' 15. See also Manfred Lochbrunner, *Hans Urs von Balthasar und seine Literatenfreunde: Neun Korrespondenzen* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2007), 172ff.

dramatic”, or, as he called it elsewhere, a “*Theatrum Dei* – [a] theology of the theatre”.¹⁸⁹ While he did start working on such a project, and even presented his ideas in this regard to students in some of his early lecture-series as student chaplain,¹⁹⁰ he ultimately decided to temporarily devote his time and attention to other topics such as early patristic and scholastic theology, Karl Barth’s thought, the lives of certain saints (including Theresa von Lisieux and Elisabeth von Dijon), and the works of the writers Reinhold Schneider and Georges Bernanos (who, in his view, strikingly showed how the natural and the supernatural, nature and grace, are intrinsically tied to one another).¹⁹¹ The idea to engage with, and to develop a theology on account of, the reality of the ‘stage’, remained, however, very much part of Balthasar’s aspirations as a theologian, and in at least one of his relatively early works titled *Theology and History*, one can find a strong focus on the ‘dramatic’ dimension of earthly existence and salvation history. When Balthasar left the Jesuits, which resulted in him also having to leave Basel, his theological work almost came to a complete halt. Fortunately, however, it was not too long before he was re-allowed back into the city, and this return inaugurated what is often regarded as his second creative period, during which he would compose his mature, multi-volume work in dogmatics. Again, the idea was to start with a theology that would engage with the world of theatre, but after careful consideration, Balthasar decided to rather commence his dogmatic project with an extensive seven-volume work on what he regarded as the most neglected transcendental category of being, namely, beauty. This initial work in aesthetics, would then provide the foundation for, and open up towards, a reflection on another transcendental, namely, goodness. And it was here, before turning to the third transcendental in the last section of his trilogy, namely, truth, that the opportunity arose for him to compose his long envisioned theology of the dramatic – a work that would not only ‘engage’ with hundreds of plays, but also present Christ’s life, death, and resurrection as the ‘drama of all dramas’, which underlies all other dramatic activity on both the world stage and the theatre stage, and can be seen as the definitive expression of God’s goodness on earth. And it is then to this five-volume work, which can undoubtedly be seen and described as an example of a ‘culturally engaged’ theology, that we now turn in the next two chapters.

¹⁸⁹ Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 33.

¹⁹⁰ One example is the important lecture-series Balthasar presented in 1947/1948 in Basel, which had the title ‘The drama of the Christian (six lectures on plays about grace),’ and included theological engagements with: “Calderón’s *auto*, *El pintor de su deshonra*”, Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, Goethe’s *Faust*, Strindberg’s *Till Damaskus*; and Claudel’s *L’Annonce faite à Marie*. See Balthasar, *Our Task: A Report and a Plan*, 73 n.3.

¹⁹¹ See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Bernanos: An Ecclesial Existence*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996; and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Tragedy Under Grace: Reinhold Schneider on the Experience of the West*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997).

2.6. Conclusion – Towards Balthasar’s Theological Dramatic Theory

In this second chapter of the dissertation, I started out by asking what the focus and scope of theology should be, and if it was in any way possible and permissible for theology to engage with something like South Africa protest theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular. This was then followed by a reflection on a classical understanding of what theology entails, as found in the work of the 13th century theologian, Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, it was shown, in continuity with the patristic tradition before him, believed that theology ought to study all things, everything that ‘is’, in relation to God, and that it should also constantly be in conversation with, and learn from, the other sciences. The reason for this view was Aquinas’ conviction that the created world is intrinsically bound to God, on account of God’s acts of *creation* and *salvation*. After emphasising the fact that Aquinas’ view of theology did not remain the dominant view in this regard, we investigated the genealogical accounts of a number of recent Anglophone thinkers, in an attempt to understand how and why the ‘natural’ and the ‘supernatural’ were severed from one another in the late Middle Ages. Thereafter, we turned to the thought of Graham Ward and his notion of a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology, as a way beyond the dualisms underlying many modern theological expressions. Ward’s notion of a ‘culturally engaged’ theology was subsequently used to introduce the life and theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, after his encounter with thinkers such as Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac, deliberately set out to develop a theology that would engage with the realities of the world around him, including the theatre, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Theo-Drama I: The Theatre Stage and the World Stage

“For in the theatre man attempts a kind of transcendence, endeavouring both to observe and to judge his own truth, in virtue of that transformation – through the dialectic of the concealing-revealing mask – by which he tries to gain clarity about himself ... Man himself beckons, invites the approach of a revelation about himself. Thus parabolically, a door can open to the truth of the real revelation.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar¹

“[I]t can be said without exaggeration that none of this has had a fruitful influence on systematic theology. No theological textbook has found it worthwhile to refer to the names of Shakespeare or Calderón ... It is time, therefore, to attempt a synthesis: theology is pressing for it from within, and from the outside – from drama – we have so much material at our disposal.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar²

“While all the great dramatists of the Christian era were partly determined by the spirit of Christianity, we may say, perhaps, that the dramatic ... quality of Christian life and faith has not yet found an exhaustive expression... Our only hope is for an encounter between Church and drama in which they would come to see that they have certain aims in common.”

Reinhold Schneider³

3.1. Introduction

After the enquiry into the nature, task, and scope of systematic theology, and the introductory remarks about the life, work, and theological method of Hans Urs von Balthasar as a ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theologian, Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as found in his magisterial five-volume opus, *Theo-drama*, will now be investigated. Given the vastness and density of Balthasar’s theodramatic project, as well as the specific task at hand in this dissertation, the focus of the next two chapters will not primarily be on offering an exhaustive account of each and every aspect of this work (which stretches over two-and-a-half-thousand pages), but on highlighting and explicating certain key parts that could potentially play an important role in the reading of, and theological engagement with, South African anti-apartheid protest theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular.

This chapter will commence by looking at the way in which Balthasar’s theological dramatics, which centres on the transcendental category of the ‘good’, is related to, and builds upon, the

¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 12.

² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 125.

³ Reinhold Schneider, *Rechenschaft* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1951) 23-6, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 121.

first instalment of his dogmatic trilogy, namely, his seven-volume aesthetics (which centres on the transcendental category of the ‘beautiful’). Subsequently, attention will be given to the first two volumes of *Theo-drama*, wherein Balthasar, amongst other things, introduces and provides an *apologia* for his theodramatic project, reflects on the relationship between the drama of life and drama as performed in the theatre, and investigates the notion of ‘role’, both in terms of stage acting and in terms of the lives that we lead on a day-to-day basis. In this chapter, the emphasis will thus be on the instances of drama that we, as human beings, partake in, whether on the theatre stage or the world stage. This will then set the scene for the next chapter, which will specifically focus on Balthasar’s Christology, as developed in the third, fourth, and fifth volumes of his theodramatic project.

3.2. From Aesthetics to Dramatics

Even though Balthasar, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had hoped to compose a “theology of the dramatic” from the time he first arrived in Basel,⁴ he eventually decided that the ‘first word’ of his extended project in dogmatics would be on ‘beauty’ and that the theological dramatics he had envisioned, would be preceded by, and emanate from, a theological aesthetics. It is, therefore, important at the start of this section on Balthasar’s theodramatic theory to also make a few brief remarks regarding his aesthetics (published, in English, as *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*), and the significant ways in which this work lays the foundation for and leads into his dramatics.

Balthasar’s seven-volume work, *The Glory of the Lord*, which is regarded by someone like Donald MacKinnon as “potentially one of the greatest theological works of the twentieth century”,⁵ can be described as an ambitious and, in the context of modern theology, novel attempt to “recover for Christian theology a proper aesthetic”.⁶ According to Balthasar, beauty has not only become irrelevant in and for the secular world today, but it has also, disturbingly, been eschewed by the Christian faith and modern theology (importantly, in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions). “We no longer dare to believe in beauty”, he writes, “and make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it”.⁷ For Balthasar, this repudiation of beauty, especially in contemporary Christian thought, is a devastating development that

⁴ Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,’ 33.

⁵ David M. MacKinnon, ‘A Master in Israel, Hans Urs von Balthasar,’ in *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, by Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. R. John Halliburton, foreword by E. L. Mascall, and introductory essay by David. M. MacKinnon (London: S.P.C.K., 1975), 9.

⁶ Stephen Wigley, *Balthasar’s Trilogy, Reader’s Guides* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 25.

⁷ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume I, Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1982), 18.

urgently needs to be remedied. For, he holds, “in a world without beauty ... [a world] which can no longer see it or reckon with it ... the good also loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out ... and the proofs of the truth [lose] their cogency”.⁸ In accordance with the Platonic and later also Patristic and Scholastic tradition(s), Balthasar believes that the three transcendentals, namely, the good, the true and the beautiful,⁹ are intrinsically linked to one another, and that if beauty is done away with, truth and goodness will also soon disappear into thin air. Beauty, he holds, will “not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance”.¹⁰ This is then why Balthasar, before tending to goodness (in his dramatics) and truth (in his work, *Theo-logic*), first attempts to develop a Christian theology in the light of (what is often regarded as) the “third transcendental”.¹¹

Balthasar accordingly sets out to show that ‘beauty’ is not something that simply lies in ‘the eye of the beholder’, something that can be relativized and dismissed as a mere subjective sensibility (as has become commonplace in our modern day and age).¹² For him, it is rather an objective reality, something which, importantly, comes to the fore in, and enraptures the onlooker through, the forms of this world. This connection between beauty and form (in German, *Gestalt*) is of utmost importance to Balthasar and stands at the very heart of his aesthetics. According to him, one can only speak of beauty, if one also takes the mystery, revelatory potential, and “indissolubility” of form into account.¹³ For, in beholding the ‘beautiful’, he writes, one is simultaneously confronted “with both the figure [or, then, form] and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing”.¹⁴ With the beautiful, there is thus a unity between that which expresses beauty and the beauty being expressed, between the visible and the invisible that is revealed, between the surface of

⁸ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 19.

⁹ For an informative discussion on the history of these and other ‘transcendental categories of being’, and how they have been construed and used by Balthasar, see Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 98–107.

¹⁰ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 18. It is important to note that Balthasar also explicitly connects beauty (and its demise) to our ability (or then, inability) to pray and to love: “We can be sure that whoever sneers at [beauty’s] name as if she was an ornament of a bourgeois past – whoever he admits it or not – can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love”. Balthasar also explore this theme in his work *Theo-Logic*. See, for example, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, Volume I, Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 9. See also the essay by Francesca Murphy, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar: Beauty as the Gateway to Love,’ in *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, 5-18.

¹¹ The very first line of the foreword to Balthasar’s *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I* reads: “We here attempt to develop a Christian theology in light of the third transcendental, that is to say: to complement the vision of the true and the good with that of the beautiful (*pulchrum*). See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 9.

¹² This is mostly a result of the way in which someone like Immanuel Kant relegated beauty “to the realm of the non-real, the realm of subjectivity and taste”. See Stephen M. Garret, *God’s Beauty-in-Act, Participating in God’s Suffering Glory* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2013), 62.

¹³ See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 26.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 20.

the image and the splendour radiating forth from in and beneath this surface.¹⁵ It is form, in its visible materiality,¹⁶ that discloses beauty to us, and form which draws us into beauty's radiant depths (while, notably, also concealing it from us, so that "the invisible is not exhausted in the appearing").¹⁷ In this regard, Balthasar writes the following:

The beautiful is above all a form, and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form's interior. *Species* and *lumen* in beauty are one... Visible form not only 'points' to an invisible, unfathomable mystery; form is the apparition of this mystery, and reveals it while, naturally, at the same time protecting and veiling it. The content (*Gehalt*) does not lie behind the form (*Gestalt*), but within it... Whoever is not capable of seeing and 'reading' the form will ... fail to perceive its content. Whoever is not illuminated by the form will see no light in the content either.¹⁸

With his thought firmly grounded in the principle of the *analogia entis* (as discussed in the previous chapter), Balthasar goes on to argue that the forms of this world, and the beauty they reveal, are not closed off from the reality of the divine, but, in fact, have the inherent potential, in their time-and-space-bound state, to analogically disclose something of the beauty of the triune God in this world. According to Balthasar, it is indeed in and through the finite forms of this world, that the infinite beauty of God comes to expression and that the glory (*doxa*, as divine correlate of beauty) of God is made present on earth.¹⁹ Balthasar's theological aesthetics (and his understanding of the working of the analogy of being) is, however, not a naïve form of natural theology. For him, the only way in which God's beauty and glory can truly be perceived in this world, is in the light of God's self-disclosure in and through the unique form

¹⁵ In terms of this unity, Balthasar writes: "The appearance of the form [of the beautiful], as revelation of the depths, in an indissoluble union of two things... We 'behold' the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it ... We are 'enraptured' by our contemplation of these depths and are 'transported' to them. But, so long as we are dealing with the beautiful, this never happens in a way that we leave the (horizontal) form behind us in order to plunge (vertically) into the naked depths". See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 118-9. See also, Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Hans Urs Von Balthasar: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 12-48; Kevin Mongrain, 'Balthasar's Way from Doxology to Theology,' *Theology Today* 64, no. 1 (April 2007), 58-70; and Stephan van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 33-6.

¹⁶ Mark McInroy emphasises that, for Balthasar, "the materiality of the form does not in any way compromise or diminish the beauty that shines through it". Mark McInroy, *Balthasar and the Spiritual Senses: Perceiving Splendour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 149.

¹⁷ Garret, *God's Beauty-in-Act*, 40, 69.

¹⁸ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 151. Garret notes that Balthasar uses the Thomistic terms 'species' and 'lumen', interchangeably with 'forma' and 'splendour' (or form and beauty). See Garret, *God's Beauty-in-Act*, 68. For more on Aquinas own use of these terms see Umberto Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 20-48; 80-98.

¹⁹ See Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, 34.

of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, the ‘*analogia entis* in person’ (a notion we will return to in what follows), who comes to perfect “the whole ontology and aesthetics of created being”.²⁰

Balthasar’s theological aesthetics, like the rest of his theological project, can indeed be described as being explicitly Christocentric.²¹ According to him, Christ, the Word who became flesh, is the “super-form” (*Übergestalt*), in and through whom the triune God, in his infinite glory and beauty, is definitively revealed in the world, and in and through whom all other earthly forms (and therefore also all earthly instances of beauty), are redeemed and renewed.²² For Balthasar, the God-man, Jesus Christ, is thus not merely a sign pointing to the divine, but the ‘form of all forms’, and ‘image of all images’, who, in the here and now, expresses the invisible God in our midst, and who brings all other forms, and the beauty they disclose, to their God-intended end.²³ Aidan Nichols, one of the foremost interpreters of Balthasar’s thought, writes in this regard:

[For Balthasar], the incarnation is precisely the pouring out of God’s glory into the form of the world in one of its principle embodiments, human-kind. A form is thus taken up so that God may transfigure the whole of creation. This self-revelation of God in Christ is not a mere prolongation or intensification of the revelation given with the creation. The personal substance of the Father in his Word is now lavished on the world. And yet, because the creation was from the beginning orientated towards its own supernatural elevation, and because too the incarnation, taken in the fullness of its unfolding, from the annunciation, through the resurrection to the *parousia*, entails the bringing together of everything in heaven and *on earth* under one divine-human Head, it follows that the self-

²⁰ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 28.

²¹ See Wigley, *Balthasar’s Trilogy*, 32; and Mark McIntosh, ‘Christology,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar*, eds. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24-36. McIntosh writes: “Even if the statement holds true for enough Christian theologians as to be almost a truism, it none the less bears stating ... Jesus Christ stands at the centre of Hans Urs Balthasar’s theology. [F]or Balthasar, the incarnate Son illumines the work of theology itself in a way that is hard to describe – even by comparison to other modern theologians”, 24. Balthasar’s Christocentrism should, however, not be confused with Christomonism, as Graham Ward warns, as his Christology is deeply grounded in Trinitarian thinking, as will be seen in the next chapter. See Graham Ward, ‘Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection,’ in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, eds. Lucy Gardner, David Moss, Ben Quash and Graham Ward, (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 45.

²² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 432; McInroy, *Balthasar on the Spiritual Senses*, 152. Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 18-23; Dupré, ‘The Glory of the Lord,’ 184.

²³ In terms of Christ not being a mere sign pointing to God, but the form expressing Godself, Balthasar writes: “Christ can work and produce signs (*semeia*), and these signs will stand in a significant relationship to him. But he himself is more and other than merely a sign. It is not as if one can could, by means of rational enquiry and argument, recognise him to be a (perfect? religious? inspired?) man, and then, following the pointers provided by the rational knowledge, move to the conclusion that he is God’s Son and himself God. The witness of the Gospels, and John’s in particular, has it rather this way: Christ is recognised in his form only when his form has been seen and understood to be the form of the God-man...” Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 153. See also Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 437; and Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 129, 134.

manifestation of God in Jesus Christ brings the form of the world to its perfection, and in that way uncovers the fullness of its significance for the first time.²⁴

All seven volumes of Balthasar's theological aesthetics are then concerned with this seeing of the *Gestalt Christi*, as the definitive revelation of God and his glory and beauty in history, which in-forms and trans-forms all other earthly forms and our seeing and understanding of their beauty. After the important introductory volume titled *Seeing the Form*, in which Balthasar offers a first extended reflection on the beautiful form of Jesus Christ, the second and third volumes of the work deal with twelve Christian thinkers (from the Patristic period up until the 20th century) whose theologies, according to Balthasar, are marked by an attentiveness to the beauty of God's revelation in the form of Christ, as well as in the forms of creation.²⁵ The fourth and fifth volumes of the *Glory of the Lord* deal with how different metaphysical conceptions throughout the ages either stood in service of, or hampered, our perception and appreciation of divine and earthly beauty, while the last two volumes of the work focuses respectively on the beauty of the form of revelation in the Old Testament (which, for Balthasar, has a "proleptic character" and reveals an anticipated Christology),²⁶ and, finally, on the beautiful form of Christ in the light of the writings of the New Testament.²⁷

Following this last volume of the *Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar deliberately makes the transition from aesthetics to dramatics, which, as the etymology of the word 'drama' denotes, has to do with the 'performance' of certain actions in a specified time and place.²⁸ It is a transition he

²⁴ Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, 35.

²⁵ Balthasar writes that his aim is to present a "series of Christian theologies and world-pictures of the highest rank, each of which, having been marked at its centre by the glory of God's revelation, has sought to give the impact of this glory a central place in its vision". He states that this "is naturally, not to deny that, between these twelve figures picked out as typical, there is not a host of others who could have clarified the intellectual and historical relations and transitions between them and would in themselves also have been worthy of presentation". Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume II, Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1984), 13, 20. The twelve figures, who are divided into 'theologians' working from within formal church structures (which he calls *clerical styles*) and theologians working on the margins of (or even from outside) formal church structures (which he calls "lay styles"), are: Irenaeus, Augustine, Denys, Anselm, Bonaventure (as 'clerical styles'); and Dante, John of the Cross, Pascal, Jakob Hamann, Vladimir Solovyov, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and Charles Péguy (as "Lay Styles"). For an informative introduction to Balthasar's engagement with each of these figures see Nichols, *The Word has been Abroad*, 65-127.

²⁶ Wigley, *Balthasar's Trilogies*, 37; Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 336.

²⁷ For an overview of each of the seven volumes, see the section 'A Guide through Herrlichkeit' in Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 146-153.

²⁸ The word 'drama' comes from the Greek word 'dran' which means 'action' or 'deed'. See Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3-4; and David C. Schindler, *Hans Urs Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 17. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 413, where Balthasar writes: "drama is essentially human action"; and *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 451, where he affirms: drama "means action"; as well as Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory Volume II, The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 13, where he states: "A theodramatic theory is ... concerned with ... acting and the ability to act".

explains and expounds on in the opening pages of the first volume of *Theo-drama*, and which he often again addresses in the other volumes of the work. According to him, it is of the utmost importance to realise that this beautiful form of Christ, as examined in his aesthetics, is not, as has already started to become apparent (especially in his volume on the New Testament),²⁹ merely some static image, icon, or artwork (“crystallised in immobile perfection”),³⁰ but a dynamic event, a dramatic act, an embodied performance which reveals to us, along with God’s glory and beauty, God’s absolute and unbounded goodness.³¹ In perceiving the *Gestalt Christi*, it indeed becomes clear that who Christ is, cannot be separated from what Christ does;³² that God’s beauty and glory is tied up with, and comes to expression in and through Christ’s actions here on earth – actions that are aimed at bringing about the good “for us” and also “in us”.³³ Balthasar writes that there “is nothing ambiguous about what God does [in and through Christ] for man: it is simply good”.³⁴ According to him, we, as human beings, are also then called, in the moment of perception, when we are transported towards him whom we have perceived, to respond through action on our own part; to follow and imitate Christ in performing ‘the good’ in our own lives; to become part of, and play our part in, God’s redemptive activity in the world. This “good which God does to us”, he holds, can “only be experienced as the *truth* if we share in *performing* it”, if we also “embody it increasingly in the world”.³⁵ God’s “saving

²⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 16.

³⁰ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 49; Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, 146.

³¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 15. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 21. As Balthasar writes in one of his Christmas sermons (that we will return to in the end of the next chapter): Christ is the word “that has ‘happened’, the word that has taken place, the word that is not only something uttered, but something done, something that can not only be heard but also seen ... This is the Word in *action* ...”. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons through the Liturgical Year*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 276-7. Cf. Francesca Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T& T Clarke, 1995), 146, where Murphy speaks of Christ’s beauty, as the “beauty of an action”.

³² In the language of Walter Kasper – a thinker who has been influenced by Balthasar’s Christology: essential (or ontological) Christology cannot be set against or separated from functional Christology; what Christ is and does are intimately one; “his nature as the Son is inseparable from his mission and ministry”. Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London: T&T Clarke, 2011), 9, 12, 98. Cf. also David Bentley Hart who writes: “No division can finally be drawn between the style of God’s address in Christ and the content of what it reveals”. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 330. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 129 in this regard, as well as Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 11, where Balthasar states: Christianity is a stage play which “tells us who the Author is by telling us what he has done”.

³³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 19.

³⁴ He continues: “What God has done is to work salvation, to reconcile the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:19); he has taken this initiative out of love, which simply seeks to give itself. The good has its centre of gravity neither in the perceiving nor in the uttering: the perception may be beautiful, and the utterance true, but only the act can be good. Here, in the act, there is a real giving, originating in the personal freedom of the giver and designed for the personal benefit of the recipient”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 18. Balthasar also then writes: “[The] good is something done ... it takes place nowhere else but on the world stage ... and its destiny is seen in the drama of a world history that is continually unfolding”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 19.

³⁵ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 20.

drama”, he asserts, is not “a self-sufficient armchair drama”.³⁶ Neither “faith, contemplation nor kerygma can dispense us from *action*”.³⁷

By emphasising the fact that the form of Christ, as discussed throughout *The Glory of the Lord*, is not merely an “object to be looked at”, but an “action in and upon the world”,³⁸ which, as Aidan Nichols writes, “requires a self-involving response of engaged action from ourselves”,³⁹ Balthasar indeed then moves from the realm of “Theo-phany” to the realm of “Theo-praxy”, or, stated differently, from the realm of theological aesthetics to the realm of theological dramatics.⁴⁰ Whereas his focus, up until this point, has been on the transcendental category of ‘the beautiful’ (especially ‘the beauty or glory of Christ’), it will now explicitly be on divine and human action (and interaction with one another), and the performance or enactment of the ‘good’, both by God and by humanity.⁴¹ It is this focus on divine and human action which prompts Balthasar to embark on an extensive theological engagement with the one art form which, according to him, has the unique ability to convey and make visible the dramatic structure and performative nature of our lives here on earth, and to reveal, and provide resources and terminology to illuminate, something of God’s redemptive working in the world (which centres on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth). This art form is indeed then theatre, one of the great loves in Balthasar’s life, as was seen towards the end of the previous chapter. For Balthasar, as Karen Kilby writes, the stage play “offers a framework and a set of resources for thinking, not only of the whole of history, but of the whole of history in relation to God, and God in relation to history”.⁴²

³⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22.

³⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22. As will be seen in what follows, this ‘response’ from humanity’s side is, however, only made possible through the grace of God, and can, in fact, be seen to be part of *God’s* action. It is certainly not something that occurs through humanity’s own initiative. Balthasar writes: “It is God who acts, on man, for man, and then together with man; the involvement of man in the divine action is part of God’s action, not a precondition of it”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 19-20; and Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 30-1, in this regard.

³⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 15.

³⁹ Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth, A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 2000), 12.

⁴⁰ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 15-7, where he speaks of how “aesthetics must abandon itself and go in search of new (dramatic) categories”. This, obviously, does not mean that the realm of the aesthetic (or, then, the realm of theo-phany) is completely left behind. For Balthasar, his theological aesthetics and theological dramatics (as well as his theo-logic) are inseparable from one another. It is because we have ‘seen the glory’, that we recognise the dramatic nature of God’s act, and are also called to become part of the action. Aesthetics (with its focus on ‘beauty’) provides the foundation for dramatics (with its focus on the ‘good’). For more on the relationship between aesthetics and dramatics see Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 23-36.

⁴¹ According to Ben Quash, this move from ‘contemplation’ to ‘action’ is exactly what one would expect from a theologian trained as a Jesuit and steeped in the spirituality of Ignatius, for this is exactly the ‘movement’ which the *Spiritual Exercises* are structured around. See Ben Quash, ‘The Theo-Drama,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144.

⁴² Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction*, 58.

In the opening passages of the first volume of *Theo-drama*, Balthasar emphatically states that what “interests [him] here”, that is, in this second instalment of his dogmatic trilogy, “is the whole phenomenon of theatre: the sheer fact that there is such a thing as a structured performance and ultimately the actual substance of the play itself”.⁴³ Balthasar is fascinated by the “primitive human instinct” to mimetically act-out, before one another, the intricacies of our existence here on earth, and how these performances, in their “unreality”, shine “a ray of light into the confusion of reality” to help humanity better understand and re-think the ‘roles’ that they play on the world stage.⁴⁴ “Anyone who knows anything about the theatre”, he writes, “understands it as a projection of human existence onto a stage, interpreting to itself that existence which is beyond it”.⁴⁵ The way in which the stage makes “the drama of existence explicit so that we may view it”,⁴⁶ will indeed then stand central to the opening volume of Balthasar’s dramatics, as will be seen towards the end of this chapter.

When it comes to the question of what exactly constitutes ‘theatre’, Balthasar is quite open in his thinking, and even though he generally engages with plays belonging to the Western theatre tradition, which normally comprises of, *inter alia*, a script written by a playwright, which is performed by actors, who are led by a director, in front of an audience, he acknowledges that there are a myriad of different legitimate theatrical expressions all over the world. For him, the theatre is indeed a “fluid reality, patient of many forms”.⁴⁷ Certain plays, he writes, especially those who have their roots in classical Greek theatre, are, for example, strongly bound to a preconceived and finalised script, while others “are acted out purely from below, on the basis of the transforming skill of performance, as a spontaneous generation, a ‘happening’”.⁴⁸ The fact that Balthasar is open towards more improvised theatre in his thinking, is very promising, as many South African protest plays, including *Woza Albert!*, originated in this manner; and it often happened, even after scripts were formalised, that actors would change certain scenes on the spot, in the middle of the performance, or that audience members, as Balthasar mentions,

⁴³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 9.

⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 10, 17-18. Balthasar writes: “man is a spectator only as far as he is [also] a player: he does not merely see himself on stage, he really acts on it”. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 17.

⁴⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 20.

⁴⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 17.

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 262.

⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 262-3. Balthasar describes this kind of ‘improvised’ theatre as follows: “[This type of theatre] presupposes an instinctive mutual understanding among the actors, operating as a kind of collective and yet integrated and integrating author within the team. The aspect of direction also arises ‘of itself’ here; its presuppositions are, for instance, the costumes and the role types, they suggest. In turn, these roles interact as a result of the energising of the players’ *esprit de corps*. In a kind of ‘happening’ of this kind there is no reason why the boundary between auditorium and stage should not be obliterated, the spectator may join in the action throughout or for the part of the time, sharing in the authoring and introducing things he would like to see”.

would share in the “authoring” of the play, by introducing “things [they themselves] would like to see”.⁴⁹

3.3. A Theological Dramatic Theory

Balthasar’s aim in his five-volume work *Theo-drama* is indeed then to develop a theodramatic theory, which, through its continued theological engagement with the world of theatre, could help to shed light on, and provide language to describe something of, the ‘drama of redemption’, which has as its highpoint in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It will also look at the way in which this divine (or theo-) drama is analogically connected to,⁵⁰ and comes to frame, direct, and fulfil the drama of human existence that is playing out on the world stage, as well as, by derivation (as Ed Block Jr. notes),⁵¹ on theatre stages, which would naturally include a work such as *Woza Albert!* and other South African anti-apartheid protest plays, as will be discussed later in this dissertation.

While Balthasar acknowledges the novelty of this theory that he plans on developing (as the theatre has often been seen and treated as an anathema throughout Church history), he argues that his theological dramatic theory should not be seen as a dislodged and isolated theological endeavour that is aimed at “recasting theology into a completely new shape”.⁵² It is rather an attempt to expand on, complement, and unify a number of other theological trends, marked by certain trends in modern Christian theology.⁵³ He writes that all of these trends have grown out of the realisation that theology, as he himself experienced at Pullach and Fourvière, and also voiced in his work, *Razing the Bastions*, has become “stuck fast on the sandbank of rationalist abstraction” and needs “to get moving again”.⁵⁴ It is of crucial importance to note that a number of these theological trends that Balthasar identifies and describes as an introduction to, or foundational framework for, his theodramatic theory, have explicit social and political emphases, as someone like John de Gruchy has pointed out.⁵⁵ Given this study’s focus on, and theological engagement with, political theatre – theatre that was aimed at bringing about social and political transformation in the context of apartheid – and also then given the charge that is

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 263.

⁵⁰ This notion of analogy, as discussed in the previous chapter, is indeed essential for Balthasar understanding of, for example, the relationship between the divine and earthly dramas. He writes, for example: “[T]he analogy between God’s action and the world drama is no mere metaphor but has an ontological ground: the two dramas are not utterly unconnected; there is an inner link between them”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 19.

⁵¹ See Ed Block Jr., ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s Theodrama: A Contribution to Dramatic Criticism,’ *Renascence* 48, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 153.

⁵² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 125.

⁵³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 25.

⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 25.

⁵⁵ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 131.

often laid against Balthasar that his work is not political enough, Balthasar's references to these theological trends, which I will outline below, are rather significant.

The first of these theological trends that is of specific interest to our study here is that of 'Orthopraxy'. This trend, Balthasar holds, sees Christianity as a praxis, as an ethical way of living in the world, modelled on the teaching and life of Christ. He writes that in recent years, there has been growing discontent about the way Christianity has been presented, mostly from within its own ranks, as a purely intellectual and ahistorical "*theory ... doctrine [or] ... theologia*" that is far-removed from the specificities of history and people's everyday lives.⁵⁶ In response, the proponents of 'Orthopraxy' have argued that this view of Christianity not only betrays "the incarnate, crucified and risen Word of God", but has also led to unending conflicts about what these correct intellectual truths actually are.⁵⁷ "[D]ivisive differences of opinion acquire an importance that they would not have, given a different fundamental principle", ultimately making Christianity, in its splintered state, "unworthy of belief, both to itself and to the watching world".⁵⁸ The only way, then, to overcome this dire situation, and to take a "decisive step into the future", it is argued, is by the rediscovery of Christianity as a praxis; by returning to "Christianity's authentic and original meaning", namely, that "God shows his truth to us through *acting*, and the Christian (including the anonymous Christian, the Samaritan), likewise shows that he is following in Christ's footsteps by acting in love towards his fellow men".⁵⁹ According to the proponents of 'Orthopraxy', it is indeed necessary to realise, once more, that all "will be judged by the way they have treated 'the least of my brethren'", and that "the only way the Christian can commend himself to mankind today is through the right actions and by a determined commitment to the world in which he lives".⁶⁰

Balthasar notes that his theodramatic theory undoubtedly stands in strong continuity with this contemporary theological trend of 'Orthopraxy', which hopes to drag "Christianity out of the scholar's study and set it on the world stage, where it is to act and prove itself".⁶¹ As has already been emphasised above, Balthasar is also mainly interested in action, in the 'good' that God does in and through Christ, and the 'good' that Christians are called to do in the world, in response. According to Balthasar, a weakness of 'orthopraxy' that his theodramatic theory will aim to overcome, is, however, that it can easily abbreviate Christianity to mere ethics and turn

⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 31.

⁵⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 31.

⁵⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 32.

⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 32.

⁶⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 32.

⁶¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 33.

it into a somewhat formulaic “guide to human endeavour”, which is grounded in our own human initiative and eventually becomes indistinguishable from what could, for example, be termed “philanthropy”.⁶² For Balthasar, it is only because God became flesh and surrendered himself to the world and humanity, that we are empowered, through the working of the Spirit and God’s grace, to play our part in his redemptive activity in the world. Our enactment of the ‘good’ is rooted in, and flows forth from, Christ’s enactment of God’s infinite goodness on the world stage. While his theodramatic theory, building on the foundations of ‘orthopraxy’, is thus concerned with how we ought to act in the world, it should not be seen as merely another ethical model or framework, where Christ functions as a moral teacher, and the focus ultimately falls on what we could do through our own initiative, but as an attempt to ground our actions on the world stage, in what God did, and continues to do, in and through Christ.⁶³

The second trend that Balthasar refers to, which is relevant to our discussion here, is that of ‘dialogue’, which he immediately describes as one of the most “fruitful new approaches” to Christian “life and thought”.⁶⁴ ‘Dialogue’, Balthasar asserts, has always held a central place in the Judeo-Christian faith. Firstly, one can speak of the “primal dialogue” taking place within “God himself”, which, he notes, is the “necessary, albeit unfathomable, presupposition for the Christ-event”, where a genuine interchange takes place “between God in heaven and God as a human being on earth”.⁶⁵ Secondly, one can also speak of the dialogical character of the triune God’s engagement with humanity. Already in the Old Testament, it is seen how God creates humanity to “freely hear and answer and ultimately cooperate responsibly with” him, and how the words that God speaks, never take the form of an one-directional monologue, but always invites a response from the hearer.⁶⁶ There is clearly “not only the Word of the Almighty”, Balthasar writes, but “also the area of understanding, of taking up a position, of possible refusal”.⁶⁷ This is especially true when it comes to the definitive ‘Word’ that God utters in and through the incarnation, where the “Word-made-flesh enters into a dialogue with his kindred”.⁶⁸ The Word that is Christ, as seen throughout the Gospels, is not a ‘coercive word’,

⁶² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 33.

⁶³ Balthasar writes that following Christ indeed not only consists out of “doing *some right thing*, but in fundamentally surrendering everything, and surrendering it to the God who has totally emptied himself...” Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 33-4.

⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 34.

⁶⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 34.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 34.

⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 34. See also Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 394, where he writes: “When God speaks personally, he wants to be understood personally; when he utters his personal word into the world, he wants that word to be returned to him, not as a dead echo, but as a personal response from his creature in and exchange that is genuinely a dialogue”.

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 35.

but an open ‘invitation’ to dialogue and a renewed relationship with God; an invitation that respects the autonomy and integrity of the ‘other’, and beckons a free response. On account of this dialogical nature of God’s inter-trinitarian life and God’s dealings with humanity, specifically in and through Christ, the proponents of this trend, Balthasar writes, also then places a strong emphasis on the promise of dialogue between fellow human beings, especially to overcome the social and political divisions in the world. When the word ‘dialogue’ is mentioned “in theology and in the Church” today, he writes, it is frequently used to describe, within the context of all that has been said above, an “attitude that remains open to further listening, that allows the other his ‘otherness’ ... that refuses to give up”; an attitude that is thus “closely related to hope” – a hope that people can, in fact, be reconciled with one another; that the divisions of the world can be overcome; and that people can learn to speak ‘with’ and not only ‘to’ one another.⁶⁹

The insights from this contemporary theological trend of ‘dialogue’ is also of crucial importance for Balthasar’s theodramatic theory, as well as for his theological thinking, in general.⁷⁰ According to him, dialogue stands at the very heart of the ‘dramatic’. It is in the “construction and clarity of dialogues”, he writes, that the dramatist “shows his power most persuasively”, that the ‘play’ comes to life, and the nature of the relationships between the different characters are brought to light.⁷¹ Throughout his dramatics, whether he is engaging with drama as performed in the theatre (which involves the interaction between different actors on the theatre stage), the drama of everyday life (which involves the interaction between fellow human beings on the world stage), or the drama of divine redemption (which involves both God’s dramatic interaction with humanity and the dramatic interaction within the life of the triune God), the principle of ‘dialogue’ thus takes centre stage in the theodramatic theory that he is developing. Balthasar notes that it is, however, important to recognise that moments do arise in the different dramas mentioned above, when dialogue cannot seem to bring any resolution, when the plot cannot seem to be “unravelling in speech and counter-speech”.⁷² There are indeed moments in which “no word is of any avail”, where “no initiative succeeds”, where “the bridges to mutual understanding collapse”, where “hatred, fanaticism, jealousy and

⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 36.

⁷⁰ Balthasar’s commitment to dialogue is seen, for example, in his engagement with the thought of someone like Martin Buber (who, himself, was a strong proponent of ‘dialogical theology’). See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Martin Buber and Christianity: A Dialogue between Israel and the Church*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Harvill, 1961). This monograph came out before Vatican II when Catholic-Jewish dialogue was almost non-existent.

⁷¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 36.

⁷² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 36.

ultimate alienation erect impassable ramparts”.⁷³ Nowhere is this seen more clearly, he writes, that in the dramatic events surrounding Christ’s life and ministry. The Word-made-flesh enters into dialogue with humanity, but ‘his own’, as the fourth Evangelist writes, do not receive him. “The more the word of Jesus reveals its true nature – [which is] absolute divine love – the less people want to hear and understand it”.⁷⁴ Ultimately, Christ is sentenced to death, which is a deliberate attempt to silence the dialogue that has been initiated by God. This is, however, not the end of the ‘conversation’, Balthasar holds, for the “breaking-off of communication in the Passion of Jesus – both between him and men and him and God – signifies that the Word has penetrated the adversary’s deepest and most secret dungeon, so that a new wellspring of dialogue can burst forth out of the iron silence of death”.⁷⁵ While the principle of dialogue is thus indispensable for his theodramatic theory, Balthasar is acutely aware of the fact that dialogue sometimes fails, and that, when this happens, an unexpected, and often wordless, event or deed “can go beyond all that has been said and bring about the *dénouement*”.⁷⁶ There are indeed moments when something more than mere words and counter-words are required, moments when death, as a matter of fact, needs to be turned into life, so that dialogue between people can grow “up again elsewhere, at a new level”.⁷⁷

The third theological trend mentioned by Balthasar as a precursor to his dramatic theory, which is of specific importance to our project here, is that of ‘political theology’. This trend, he writes, promulgates the idea that “Christian involvement in the world and Christian theology” should have “a *political* side” and needs to be de-privatised; that Christianity, and especially also its theology, cannot only be concerned with the ‘inner life’ and personal salvation of human beings, but should also be involved in, and work towards transforming, people’s social and political realities.⁷⁸ According to Balthasar, ‘political theology’ points to the fact that, from the very start, Christ’s message was not only explicitly proclaimed in, but also openly concerned with, life in the public sphere, and, as such, had serious political implications.⁷⁹ Christ, who, in defiance of the reigning authorities of the day, was called ‘Lord’ by his followers, continually spoke of and embodied the coming kingdom of God in the “public arenas” of first century Palestine – a kingdom which clearly stood against the unjust and exploitative kingdoms of this world.⁸⁰ Part of the reason why Christ is then tried and sentenced to death, the proponents of

⁷³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 35.

⁷⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 35.

⁷⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 35-6.

⁷⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 36.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 36.

⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37.

⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37.

⁸⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37-8.

‘political theology’ argue, is because of the political threat that his message is seen to hold. However, as we read in the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament, his death does not bring an end to the promise of God’s coming kingdom. In dying and in being raised “as the ‘first fruit of the dead’”, the kingdom of God, “becomes, in him, a hidden, transcendent *present* tense”, a tangible reality that his followers are, henceforth, called to enact amidst, and as a response to, the social and political forces that “continue to dominate” world history, until the day of Christ’s second coming, when the kingdom of God will become the world’s sole reality and all political systems and rulers will be judged in the light of God’s truth.⁸¹

Once again, Balthasar states that his theodramatic theory stands in continuity with, and will attempt to build on, this contemporary trend of ‘political theology’. According to him, it is important to recognise that drama and politics have always been closely related to one another throughout history. Ancient Greek drama “was essentially concerned with the *polis*”, and it is no “different in most of the plays of Shakespeare or Schiller”.⁸² The “great characters” in the history of the theatre “are not simply individuals”, but often “carry the burden of the common good; kings, heroes, generals, statesman [and] rebels either represent a supra-personal order or else they question it”.⁸³ This is also true when it comes to what could be called the drama of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, as presented to us in the Gospels. “A king who is not of this world”, Balthasar writes, “but acts in utter seriousness on the public world stage is bound to be involved in the political drama”.⁸⁴ What Christ says and does on the world stage, and the way in which his death and resurrection inaugurate this coming kingdom of God, challenges and subverts the kingdoms of this world, and, importantly, also beckons his followers, united under the “Risen Christ as the Head of [the] Body”,⁸⁵ to engage with, and work towards transforming, the social and political realities of the day. And as the reality of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, can be ‘extrapolated’ “beyond its confined historical limits and into every period of history”, it also has “public and political relevance” today, Balthasar writes.⁸⁶

For Balthasar, in accordance with the proponents of political theology, there should be no doubt about whether Christianity ought to be involved in the public and political spheres. What exactly the nature of this involvement should be is, however, up for discussion. Balthasar notes that, in challenging the powers and principalities of this world, the temptation always exists to

⁸¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 38, 126.

⁸² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37.

⁸³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37.

⁸⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 37.

⁸⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 38.

⁸⁶ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 70, where he again discusses the trends mentioned in the first volume of his theodramatic project.

simply replicate their rule and reduce the kingdom of God to a this-worldly, ‘secular’ reality, which, in much the same manner as other earthly kingdoms, is realised through, and sustained by, political power, often in the ‘name of God’.⁸⁷ Yet, according to Balthasar, it “is revealing” to note that the life of Jesus, “contrary to Jewish hopes, contrary to messianic hopes of models of his time, and contrary to the accusations which led to his death”, was devoid of “any political claim to power”.⁸⁸ Christ, as he states later in the work, is “the fettered King before Pilate”, the “powerless divine power”, the “mighty impotence of God”.⁸⁹ God’s power is manifested “in Christ’s lowliness”, his “wealth in his poverty”.⁹⁰ The kingdom, which breaks through from outside this world and which, importantly, transcends all earthly political categories and cannot ever be understood in purely secular terms, does thus not come about by force. It is a kingdom that is brought about by the One who is crucified; a kingdom that transforms and renews our worldly realities – already in the ‘here and now’, but definitively at the movement of the eschaton – through God’s kenotic self-giving that occurs in absolute love. For Balthasar’s theodramatic theory, political action on the world stage, both by Christ and by his followers, is therefore of utmost importance as part of the larger drama of God’s redemption of this world.⁹¹ What is imperative, though, is that this action can never be grounded in and sustained by brute power, but should, in fact, flow forth from the ‘powerlessness’ of Christ and God’s coming kingdom. In a passage which speaks to the heart of his commitment to social and political issues, especially in his dramatics, Balthasar writes the following:

Politics concerns him [that is, the Christian acting on the world stage]: as a ‘member’ under Christ, the Head, he is in profound solidarity with each of the Lord’s least brothers and must realise that he has an inescapable responsibility for the conditions under which they live. In this more-than-human, specifically Christian responsibility, which is rooted in Christ’s solidarity with every last sinner and poor man, there can be no self-complacent community of Christians, no closed Church. The Church is essentially planted in the field of the world to bear her special fruit in it and from it; she is mixed in with the world’s dough to leaven all of it; but just as the Church can only be herself in going beyond herself to the world, so, on the other hand, the world is designed retrospectively, from the

⁸⁷ Balthasar notes that this is precisely what “Constantinian and medieval, imperial theology tried to do”, namely, “to “erect a static copy of the kingdom of God using the building materials of the old world”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 38.

⁸⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 39.

⁸⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 122.

⁹⁰ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 127.

⁹¹ Balthasar is, however, adamant about the fact that the redemptive work of God in the world cannot be reduced to the *political*. He writes: “[T]he Christian cannot be simply put into a ‘political’ pigeonhole ... If the ‘political’ is to claim relevance to the issue of ultimate meaning ... it must consent to being taken beyond itself and set in relation to this dramatic dimension of human existence, which attains its highest tension only in the Christian reality”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 39-40.

eschaton, to transcend itself in the direction of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:24ff). At this very point the Church becomes the world's substantial pledge of a hope that bursts all bounds, although her leaven, which continues to ferment in society and presses for worldly powers to be used in service of justice and peace, is powerless in itself. Or, in Paul's paradox, it is only strong when it is weak (2 Cor. 12:10). The importance of the Crucified in death, which remains the inner shape of even the most vigorous Christian life, can never be manipulated to 'amorize' mankind ...⁹²

Given Balthasar's assertion that these contemporary theological trends of 'orthopraxy', 'dialogue', and 'political theology' will play a foundational role in his theodramatic theory, it is clear, at least in the beginning of this work, that his intention is not to side-step or negate socio-political issues, but to confront them head-on. He explicitly mentions, in fact, that part of the aim of his theodramatic theory is to "do justice to concrete Christian existence in its personal, social, and political dimensions".⁹³ To what extent Balthasar succeeds in this aim, is a question that we will return to at the end of the next chapter. For now, however, it is important to recognise that Balthasar places a notably strong emphasis on socio-political issues at the very outset of his theodramatic theory, and explicitly points to the fact that this work should not be seen as an a-political endeavour.

Upon finishing his discussion of these, as well as a number of other,⁹⁴ theological trends that lead, according to him, "concentrically from the most diverse regions of contemporary thought towards a theodramatic theory",⁹⁵ Balthasar is nearly set to commence with the first major section of his dramatics (which will deal with the dynamic relationship between stage drama and the drama of life, and attempt to "establish a repertoire of theatrical concepts which would

⁹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 39-40.

⁹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 119.

⁹⁴ The other theological trends that Balthasar lists and discusses as a precursor to his theological theory are 'Event', which (*à la* Barth and Bultmann) sees God's revelation (and the Christ-event), as a reality "breaking vertically into the chain of events which make up the world as seen from the inside and as such reveals both the living God's mode of being and mode of acting"; 'History', where "the kairos, the situation (in time), is elevated to be the guide for Christian conduct, [and that] what is valid, what is true, is what is required at each 'now'"; 'Futurism', which "opens up a flight into the future ... and draws on the greatest strength of the following insight: [that] Jesus himself was not deflected from living and working for the coming of the kingdom ... and that the existence of the primitive church was radically future-orientated"; 'Function', which, in accordance with the philosophical movement of structuralism, lays "a grid ... over the contingencies of history to render them rationally accessible ... a grid [that] is based on *a priori* reciprocities of the existing subject"; 'Role', which has to do with the question of "of one's role and how to find it ... [a question hovering] forth between sociology and psychology"; and 'Freedom and Evil', which seeks to explore the relationship between "divine and human freedom", and account for the reality of evil (especially in the context of the horrors of the 20th century). See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 26-50. See also the section 'the Convergence towards Theo-Drama' in *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 62-77, where Balthasar again discusses these trends and explains how they move towards, and are incorporated in, his theodramatic theory. For a discussion of Balthasar's understanding of each of these contemporary trends, see Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 89-91.

⁹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 50.

play an analogous part” in his reflections on the Christ-event).⁹⁶ There is, however, one matter that Balthasar still needs to address before moving on, a matter that cannot be ignored in a study such as this one. This is the fact that, throughout history, many have argued, especially from inside the Church, that Christianity and the theatre are completely divergent realities that should be kept apart.

3.4. Responding to Objections

Before turning to the “problematical relations between the Christian Church and the stage” throughout the ages, Balthasar starts out by focusing on a number of philosophical voices from the modern era who have held that the “dimension[s] of the *theatre* and *Christianity* ... are totally opposed”.⁹⁷ Here, the interlocutor that he engages with most extensively is Hegel, a thinker whose ideas have intrigued, inspired, and haunted Balthasar throughout his life,⁹⁸ and who also developed his own dramatic theory, primarily in his famous lectures on aesthetics.⁹⁹

In short, Balthasar writes, Hegel promulgated the idea that drama, as the culmination and acme of all artistic endeavours, where the *lyrical* and the *epic* are brought to a “transcending synthesis” in the form of “living and present action, represented by man himself”,¹⁰⁰ should be seen as a “pre-Christian phenomenon” which was abolished and replaced by Christianity.¹⁰¹ According to Hegel, the aim of stage drama in antiquity was to depict something of the ‘Absolute’ in our midst. In a work such as Sophocles’ *Antigone* (which Hegel sees as the “ultimate expression” of Attic theatre),¹⁰² the intention was indeed to present onlookers with an ‘image’ of “the eternal powers, what is moral in itself, the gods of living reality, the divine and the true”.¹⁰³ This is why the theatre was closely related to “the oracle, the *nomos*, to cult and the mysteries”.¹⁰⁴ For Hegel, this self-portrayal or ‘imaging’ of the ‘Absolute’, as found on the ancient theatre stage, reaches a “revolutionary” climax in the dramatic story of the Christ-event, where God not only becomes human, but also dies and rises “phoenix-like”, so that the

⁹⁶ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 17.

⁹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 51, 55.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Cyril O’ Regan’s important study: *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Balthasar’s Response to Philosophical Modernity. Volume I: Hegel* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014).

⁹⁹ The edition of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* that Balthasar uses and refers to in this section is Hegel, *Ästhetik 2nd Edition*, ed. F. Bassenge (1965). See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 55 n. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 55-6. Balthasar quotes Hegel who writes: “Drama must be regarded as the highest stage of all poetry and art since, both in form and content, it fashions itself into the most complete totality”.

¹⁰¹ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 61.

¹⁰² Hegel writes: “Of all the glories of the ancient and modern world – and I know more or less all there is of it; it is something one *should* and *can* know – the *Antigone* seems to me the most consummate and satisfying work of art”. Hegel, *Ästhetik 2*, 530, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 55.

¹⁰³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 56.

divine is integrated into the reality of this world.¹⁰⁵ According to Hegel, this drama of Christ's incarnation, passion, and resurrection, as a definitive 'image' of the "history of Spirit", should be seen as "the absolute drama", which brings an end to all other dramatic activity on earth.¹⁰⁶ Post-Christian drama persists, but for Hegel no dramatic performance can ever again succeed "in attaining the proportions in the world of art to which the Christ-event lays claim..."¹⁰⁷ Henceforth, every drama, whether performed on the theatre stage or lived out on the 'stage of life', will, in the light of the Christ-event, only be a 'romantic' semblance of drama proper. It will be a form of drama that is stripped of potency to effect real change in the world, and is only focused on the individual's internal life, and the "devotions of mind and heart".¹⁰⁸ According to Hegel, the age of art, in general, and the age of the theatre, in particular, have "now come to an end".¹⁰⁹

In response to Hegel's ideas, Balthasar starts out by recognising and commending the way in which Hegel saw, understood, and presented the Christ-event in dramatic terms. "At the outset", he writes, "it must be said that no thinker before Hegel more profoundly experienced and pondered Christian revelation in dramatic categories".¹¹⁰ Balthasar clearly has a deep appreciation for, and has strongly been influenced by, Hegel's thought in this regard, especially when it comes to his conviction that the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ should be regarded as the 'drama of all dramas' standing at the centre of world history. He is, however, rather critical about some of the conclusions Hegel ultimately draws. And in showing where Hegel went wrong, Balthasar goes on, as Aidan Nichols writes, "to give us a tempting foretaste of the main dishes he will be serving" in his own dramatic theory.¹¹¹ Balthasar's response to Hegel can indeed be seen, in his own words, as "a résumé of the issues" that he will deal with "in detail" in what follows, especially when it comes to his Christology and the way it influences his understanding of the Christian life.¹¹²

Balthasar writes that the problem with Hegel's dramatic theory and the role that the Christ-event plays therein, is essentially that it lacks a proper understanding of analogy and, therefore, misconstrues the relation between the drama of Christ and the dramas that are performed both in the theatre and on the world stage. For Hegel, the Christ-event is something that subsumes

¹⁰⁵ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18; Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 60-1, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 63.

¹⁰⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 65.

¹⁰⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 67.

¹¹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 66.

¹¹¹ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18.

¹¹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 68.

and de-potentializes other dramatic expressions on earth.¹¹³ Any real differences between the drama of the Christ-event and other dramas are thus “absorbed into identity”,¹¹⁴ leaving only one, all-embracing, and therefore all-abolishing, drama behind, namely, the drama of Christ. According to Balthasar, all of this, however, changes if the classical Christian principle of analogy, as taught to him by Erich Przywara, is introduced into the equation, and the relationship between the drama of “worldly existence (which attains visible form in the theatre)” and “theo-drama” is understood not in univocal, but in analogical terms.¹¹⁵ In working within an analogical framework, which, according to Balthasar, is “essential to a theory of theodrama”, the Christ-event is not seen as the ‘highest’ instance of drama that competes with, and ultimately engulfs, any ‘lesser’ forms of drama in world history, but as an occurrence which, in its distinctiveness, stands in continuity with, and informs and enthuses, other instances of drama that we, as human beings, partake in, whether on the world stage or on the stage of the theatre.¹¹⁶

Balthasar notes that, according to the logic of analogy, one can, for example, speak of each Christian life as a ‘drama’ in its own right, which analogically shares in, and expresses something of, the unique drama of Christ, without the one collapsing in, and being subsumed by, the other. Here, the drama of the Christ-event does indeed not abolish or reduce the ‘dramatic nature’ of a person’s life, but imbues it with new significance and intensity, as the “mission of Christ” is re-performed in and through another unique ‘mission’ on earth.¹¹⁷ The drama of Christ does thus not bring an end to the drama of everyday life, but brings the drama of everyday life to its God-intended end. This is also true when it comes to the theatre, where the ‘drama of life’ is mimetically acted out in front of an audience. For Balthasar, the Christ-event does not bring about the theatre’s demise, but, in fact, has the potential to newly instigate, ground, frame, and inform what already happens, and could happen, on the theatre stage. He goes on to show, with reference to the dramas of the Spanish dramatist and priest, Calderón, how the Christ-event can be reflected analogically back “into the dramas and myths of antiquity (which prepare the way for it)”, and can also be rendered “credible as a here-and-now actuality in the most varied of situations”.¹¹⁸ Balthasar also refers to Shakespeare at this point. In some of his most important works, he writes, Shakespeare “conceived and fashioned

¹¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 66-7; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 67; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 67.

¹¹⁷ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18

¹¹⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 69.

the great destinies of the world as expressions and extensions of the Christ-event”.¹¹⁹ Shakespeare also continually created characters that could be seen as analogical “post-figurations” of Jesus (such as Hamlet, to name just one example).¹²⁰ For playwrights such as Calderón and Shakespeare, Balthasar argues, the Christ-event thus opened up new dramatic possibilities in and for the theatre, instead of imposing certain limitations and stifling dramatic activity.

In responding to Hegel’s view that the Christ-event brings an end to all other dramatic endeavours, Balthasar indeed then gives us a small, yet incisive, glimpse of the ideas that he will pursue and develop in the rest of his theodramatic project. This small introductory section, culminating in Balthasar’s comments about the works of Calderón and Shakespeare, already thus offers rich and promising viewpoints that can be used to engage theologically with a play such as *Woza Albert!*, where the drama of the Christ-event, as mentioned in the first chapter, is re-casted into a new and different context, namely, apartheid South Africa, which immediately brings the logic of analogy to the fore. It is, however, not only the critique of Hegel, and a number of other modern philosophers who he briefly mentions,¹²¹ that Balthasar has to face up to at the very start of his study. No, even though Hegel, himself, curiously did not mention anything in this regard,¹²² he was obviously not the first thinker who argued that Christianity and the theatre stage are incompatible realities that should be kept apart. In fact, Hegel only added his voice to a long line of thinkers from within Christianity, who have held similar views from the very inception of the Church.

Before Balthasar can thus continue, he also needs to confront the problematic fact that the Christian Church itself has often promoted a very negative view of the theatre and its practitioners, and that some of the harshest critiques that have been levelled against the theatre stage have, in fact, come from the very patristic thinkers whom he admires the most – an irony that is not lost on Balthasar (and many others). Fortunately, however, Balthasar is not a theologian who is easily startled or discouraged by a theological difficulty such as this one, and it almost seems as if he welcomes the opportunity, at this early stage of his theodramatic

¹¹⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 69, 112.

¹²⁰ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 67, 112.

¹²¹ Some of the other thinkers that Balthasar engages with here, alongside Hegel, include the Austrian writer, essayist, and cultural philosopher, Rudolph Kassner; the French positivist thinker, Auguste Comte; and playwrights such as Berthold Brecht and Samuel Beckett. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 51-4 and 70-87.

¹²² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 55.

project, to engage with the “burdensome legacy” of the Church’s hostile relationship to the theatre.¹²³

In a section titled ‘The Church and the Theatre’, Balthasar goes on to offer a thorough investigation into Christianity’s “stormy” relationship with the stage throughout history;¹²⁴ an investigation where his impressive knowledge of patristic and scholastic theology stands him in good stead. According to him, it can be argued that there are two major reasons behind the early Church’s negative response to the theatre.¹²⁵ The first of these reasons had to do with the novelty of the Christian message. Balthasar writes that in the early years of Christianity, the Christ-event needed to be seen and understood, especially by those who had converted from pagan religions, as something completely different to the myths that were being performed on the stage at that moment in time. The “biblical and Christian history of salvation”, he writes, “was such a totally new beginning over against the mythical theatre that it was simply impossible to effect a transposition and assimilation, at least in the early days”.¹²⁶ For the time being, Balthasar writes, the “mystery of God’s stepping into the world had to be clearly distinguished from everything mythological”.¹²⁷ Even though it would later be possible to recognise how even the plays of antiquity prefigure and point to the “one true drama”, namely, the drama of the Christ-event, the radical newness of the Gospel-message called, at this point in the history of the Church, for a temporary hiatus from all mythological subject matter.¹²⁸ This was especially important as many plays from antiquity, as Plato showed, presented the gods as beings beyond the realms of good and evil, whereas Christianity pointed to the God, whose innermost-being, and actions in the world, were solely marked by goodness.¹²⁹

The second reason that Balthasar gives as to why the early Church was opposed to stage acting, has to do with the calamitous state that the theatre was in at this specific moment in time. According to him, things might well have turned out differently if the patristic writers had lived, for example, in the age of the Attic tragedians, and not a few hundred years later, in the

¹²³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 93.

¹²⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 87.

¹²⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 93.

¹²⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 91-2.

¹²⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 91-2.

¹²⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 92.

¹²⁹ Balthasar writes: “Of course Plato’s criticism of the theatre had different presuppositions from that of the Christians. But we ought not to miss the analogies. What Plato criticised in Homer and his dramatic derivatives was above all the ambiguity of the gods, which did not correspond to the ‘basic norms of theology’ (*Politeia* 379c ff). The playwrights, with their ability to create illusions beyond the realm of good and evil, are led astray, along with the actors who perform their roles ... Here Plato gives a decided ‘No!’ to the dubious myths of the gods and their self-transformations ... His commitment is simply to the ‘good’ for which Socrates died and for which the just man should himself ‘be scourged, tortured, and after all this ill-treatment, crucified’”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 90-1.

Roman period, when theatre “had degenerated into ... circus”, and had become a hotbed of social and moral decay, as actors were stripped of their citizenship and were treated by the authorities like “dishonourable and infamous” degenerates.¹³⁰ Balthasar writes that, when Christianity came along in late-antiquity, theatre mostly took the form of “noisy, popular entertainment”, and was “principally coarse and lewd and often cruel, so that even the pagans themselves turned away from it”.¹³¹ Roman philosophers such as Cicero, Tacitus, Seneca, Juvenal, and Varro, for example, “complained about the disgusting aspects of the theatre”, and the poet Ovid explicitly asked the Emperor Augustus “to close these haunts of degeneracy”.¹³² In the first few centuries after Christ, the theatre was thus a place where humanity’s “lower nature” was unleashed; where the passions were stirred up by one crude and bloody spectacle after the other.¹³³

It is on account of this reason that the Church Father, Tertullian, would start a long line of anti-theatrical writings from within the Church itself, by composing a text titled *Concerning Plays* (c. 197). In this polemical work, Tertullian described the “mixture of ‘obscenity’ and cruelty” that was found on stages all over the Roman empire with “frightening realism”, and repeated the stoic objections to the “arousing of the passions”, which oftentimes “rose to the level of ‘ravings’ and ‘madness’”.¹³⁴ According to Tertullian, this reality confirmed that the theatres that were dedicated “to Venus and Bacchus”, must in some or other way, be “inspired and maintained by demonic power”.¹³⁵ Even older persons, Tertullian argued, who on the surface appeared to be unmoved by the wild, and often violent and blood-filled, action that filled theatre stages, were still affected by what was playing out in front of their eyes and fell victim to “hidden passions in the soul”.¹³⁶

This critique by Tertullian, which echoed what many pagan philosophers also said at the time, influenced and was repeated almost verbatim by most of his contemporaries in the Church and those who followed directly in their footsteps. It indeed became a common trait of early Christian theology to speak out in “Tertullian’s manner” against the dangers of the theatre, and

¹³⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 95, 151.

¹³¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 89.

¹³² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 90.

¹³³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 90.

¹³⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 94.

¹³⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 94, 155.

¹³⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 94. According to Tertullian (*De Spect.* 15) this reality of the theatre stands in opposition to the reality of God, “since he ordered”, he writes, “that our intercourse with the Holy Spirit should be in peace and gentleness ... [that] we should not discommode him through rage and fury, anger and vexation [emotions that are aroused through the stage]”.

to condemn, together with other Roman thinkers of the day, the profession of the actor.¹³⁷ Interestingly, this did not mean that early Christian theologians did not themselves use the language of drama and the theatre to describe and shed light on the truth of the Gospel, the Christ-event, and the Christian life. Tertullian, for example, urged his readers, when turning away from the spectacles of pagan theatre, to look to the “holy, constant, priceless drama of” the Christian martyrs,¹³⁸ and Novatian pointed his fellow Christians to the “magnificent world theatre of creation and salvation history”.¹³⁹ Clement of Alexandria spoke of the way in which Christ “adopted the human mask and clothed himself in flesh, in order to perform the drama of mankind’s redemption”,¹⁴⁰ and Methodius of Olympus remarked that the followers of Christ are called to “perform the drama of truth”.¹⁴¹ Also Cyprian, referred to the Christian life as a drama taking place before “Christ and the angels as spectators”.¹⁴² The use of the term ‘personae’ by the Early Church in the context of the Trinity, clearly also stemmed from the world of theatre.¹⁴³

The fact that these early patristic thinkers employed the language of drama and the theatre for theological ends did, however, not change their view of actual theatre in any way. “[P]assages such as these”, Balthasar writes, were only written in “a literary context” and served a purely rhetorical purpose.¹⁴⁴ Even while describing creation, the incarnation, the events of Easter, and the Christian life in dramatic terms, theologians such as Tertullian, Novatian, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, Cyprian, and those who followed after them (whether it be Augustine, the Cappadocians, or Chrysostom), still denounced the dramas that were performed on theatre stages. And with time, the official Christian councils and synods followed suit. The Synod of Elvira (305), for example, declared that “if actors want to become Christian, they must first give up acting”, and that if they attempt to return to it, “they must be cast out

¹³⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 95. In an interesting passage, Tertullian writes about the inconsistencies of Roman culture when it comes to the acting profession; about how actors are praised on stage, but (perhaps then rightly) condemned in real life: “The characters and actors of these spectacles, the charioteers, stage heroes, boxers, and gladiators of which people are so fond, to whom men submit their souls and women even submit their bodies ... are at the same time both despised and exalted; they are even condemned to infamy and denied the rights of citizens ... What perversity! People love them and do them harm, they dishonour them and applaud them, the artist is branded while his art is extolled!”

¹³⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 94; Tertullian, *De Spect*, 16.

¹³⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 95; Novatian, *De Spectaculis, CSEL (Cyprian) III*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptikos X*, 110.

¹⁴¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; Methodius of Olympus, *Gastmahl VIII*, 1-3.

¹⁴² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; Cyprian, *De gratia ad Donte*, 8, *PL 4*, 207ff.

¹⁴³ Balthasar writes in this regard: “The derivation of *persons* from the Etruscan *phersu* is almost universally recognised today. *Phersu* evidently denoted a mask, or the wearer of a mask, at festivals in honour of P[h]ersephone. On the stage, *persona* could denote both the actor (the one who puts the mask on), or his role (hence generally the assignment), as well as the character being represented (Oedipus, for example), or by extension that which is essential, the person character ...”. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ‘On the Concept of Person,’ *Communio* 13, no. 1 (1986): 20. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 209 on this point.

¹⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96.

from the Church”.¹⁴⁵ This verdict was repeated by the Synod of Arles in 314.¹⁴⁶ The Apostolic Constitutions, one of the first church orders in history compiled in the 4th century, similarly stated that actors and all “those who are addicted to the madness of the theatre” should be excommunicated.¹⁴⁷ Also the Fourth Council of Carthage urged the newly baptised to stay away from the stage.¹⁴⁸ With the dawn of the Christian imperial age, these pronouncements by Church synods and councils naturally influenced state legislature, and “in the laws of the Christian Emperors, the actor remained a ‘persona inhonesta’”.¹⁴⁹

According to Balthasar, these sentiments, which were later simply passed-on without any further critical reflection, also came to influence Medieval thought, and in the Scholastic era, actors continued to be “treated with utter contempt by theologians, preachers, and councils [who cited] the Church Fathers”.¹⁵⁰ Especially traveling actors were regularly “refused the sacraments and told that they could not hope for eternal salvation”.¹⁵¹ There were, however, a few theologians and church leaders at the time who held different views and attempted to make allowances for performing artists. The most prominent example in this regard is the Church’s Common Doctor, Thomas Aquinas, whose definition of theology was discussed in the previous chapter. In his *Summa*, for example, Aquinas argued that “amusement is indispensable in leading a human life”, and that if actors and jongleurs, who brought “cheerfulness to man”, were able to ply their trade with decency and “keep a due balance in their performances”, no sin was involved.¹⁵² For Aquinas, the Church’s denouncement of the theatre and the acting profession could only be seen to apply to performances that were marked by indecency. If no immoral behaviour was involved, there was no legitimate reason why theatre performances

¹⁴⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 97; *Synod of Elvira*, Can. 62.

¹⁴⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; *Synod of Elvira*, Can. 4.

¹⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; *Apostolic Constitutions VIII*, 32, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 96; *Fourth Council of Carthage*, Can 35.

¹⁴⁹ In surveying all of these negative pronouncements by early theologians and church councils, Balthasar notes that it is important to realise that the conflict between Christianity and the stage was not only stirred up by the Church. The theatre, also, in its own way, exacerbated the situation, by explicitly attacking, or at least lampooning, the Christian faith. “Insofar as he was recognised as such”, Balthasar writes, “the Christian was the butt of the jokes on theatre stages, and martyrdom was often parodied by actors, while the part of the pagan eager for salvation was played by the fool. In Tertullian’s day already, there would be calls from the stage for Christians ‘to be thrown to the lions’, and Gregory of Nazianzus would, for example, write (with reference to Paul): ‘We have become a new spectacle, not for angels and men like Paul, the noblest of athletes, but practically for the whole populous ... we have even arrived on the stage ... and are made a laughingstock by the most shameless people’”. “Nothing”, he continues, “is as amusing to hear and see as the part of a [Christian] priest in a comedy”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 97, 154-5. The quotation from Gregory Nazianzus comes from his *2nd Oration*, 84 [PG 35, 498B].

¹⁵⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 99.

¹⁵¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 99.

¹⁵² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 100. Jongleurs were medieval entertainers who were normally proficient in everything from juggling, acrobatics, music, and dramatic recitation. See Harold Gleason and Warren Becker, *Music in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Toronto: Frangipani Press, 1988), 32, and Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theatre and Public life in Medieval Arras* (London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 109.

needed to be condemned. He, accordingly, asked that actors be treated with dignity and respect, and that they be paid the wages that were due to them.¹⁵³

With the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, Balthasar continues, it momentarily seemed as if this new ‘movement’ within Christianity, would challenge and subvert the long, and by now deeply engrained, ‘tradition’ of the Church’s hostility towards the stage. Reformers such as Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin, with their humanist leanings, at first showed a surprising openness to theatre performances. They even expressed appreciation for some of the plays of antiquity, which, they believed, had important didactic value.¹⁵⁴ It was, however, not long before Protestantism, too, in line with the Church throughout the ages, began its very own “campaign of annihilation against the stage”.¹⁵⁵ This was true of the Lutherans in the German North,¹⁵⁶ the Calvinists in Switzerland and in the Low Countries, and especially also of the Puritans in England and other forms of Pietism throughout Europe. In his *Histriomastix*, for example, the influential Puritan lawyer, William Prynne, produced a thousand-page *summa* of passages that were written against the theatre by the Church Fathers, Christian writers, councils, preachers, poets, and so forth.¹⁵⁷ A similar publication was also produced by the likes of Gottfried Reiser, who was an important voice in German Pietism. Here again, the theatre was condemned mainly on account of the ‘antitheatrical prejudice’ that had taken hold of Christianity from the very start.

According to Balthasar, this hostility towards the theatre and the acting profession continued, on both Catholic and Protestant sides, up until the modern era, as can be seen from numerous decrees and pronouncements that were issued throughout the 17th, 18th, and even 19th and 20th centuries.¹⁵⁸ For the most part, the only justification that was even given for these words of

¹⁵³ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 100.

¹⁵⁴ One example of such a playwright from antiquity who was held in very high regard by the Reformers, is Publius Terentius Afer (better known just as Terence in English), from the 2nd century B.C. For Melanchthon, Balthasar writes, “Terence was orationis et vitae magister”, while Luther recommended his work as “a mirror to life, which was able to keep young people away from the ‘unmarried state, celibacy, and boredom’”. For these two Reformers, he (and his plays) indeed “embodied the practice of life as opposed to scholastic theory”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 110; Phillip Melanchthon, *Corp. Reform. 19:692*, Martin Luther, *Tischreden (Table Talk)* (Fordermann und Bindseil, 1848), 4:598.

¹⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 101.

¹⁵⁶ Here, Balthasar refers to the work of someone like Goethe, which gives insight into how the theatre and actors were seen by Lutheran clergy at the time. In his work, *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* we read, for example: “The hour of the performance was approaching when suddenly the disappointed news arrived that the new pastor ... had had the play forbidden” (book 3 chapter 1); “The clergy grew attentive when they heard that the part of Daniel, the fourth of the main character [in Wilhelm’s tragedy Belazar] was to be acted by a travelling player. They took the matter up with higher authority and in the absence of the chief magistrate an instruction was issued to Madame de Retti not to perform the play” (book 3, chapter 13); Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 102.

¹⁵⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 101.

¹⁵⁸ As late as 1917 the Code of Canon Law still read: “Under pain of suspension we forbid all priests and ordained ecclesiastical persons to attend performances in public theatre, operas, balls, cabarets, or at any other secular

condemnation were the views of theologians, church leaders, and church councils of previous ages. It was thus due to an “unbroken, but also unreflected and uncritically accepted tradition” that Christianity, on the whole, remained opposed to the theatre until very recently – which, to Balthasar’s mind, is highly problematic, to say the very least.¹⁵⁹ Yes, the Church Fathers did denounce the theatre, but these denouncements, he remarks, should surely be seen and understood for what they were, namely, a “timebound amalgam of early Christian awareness”, as shown above.¹⁶⁰ They were not infallible statements of timeless truths that asked to be followed blindly, for all eternity. To simply go on repeating what the Church Fathers and those who followed in their footsteps said about the theatre, as if these statements could be deemed relevant in every age and in every situation (as ultimately came to be the case), would be, as Balthasar puts it, “fundamentally illogical”.¹⁶¹ The “whole tragic story” of the Church’s relationship to the stage, therefore, seems to have been the result of a toxic form of ‘traditionalism’, where certain views and understandings were handed down in an unbroken chain, without ever being scrutinised anew.¹⁶² For Balthasar, there is, in fact, “nothing inevitable” about the Church’s clash with the theatre, especially after the patristic era, and the fact that history turned out the way it did, should, in his opinion, be seen as highly regrettable.¹⁶³

Balthasar then goes on to show that the fact that prominent theologians, church leaders, and church councils mercilessly attacked the phenomenon of the stage and the profession of the actor throughout the ages, did, however, not completely purge Christianity from the ‘dramatic’, and that, amidst, and in defiance of, the words of condemnation passed on from generation to generation, a profusion of dramatic expressions continued to spring forth from within the Church itself. It indeed seems, Balthasar holds, as if, despite their best attempts, different church leaders and theologians could not succeed in doing away with, or fully denying, the inherent dramatic nature of both Christian truth and human existence.

function where the presence of a cleric could give rise to scandal”. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 221. These condemnations, according to Balthasar, came to an end as “the Church lost her power in society”, and had to, “whether she wished to or not ... accept the existence of the theatre”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 102-5.

¹⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 104.

¹⁶⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 104.

¹⁶¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 104.

¹⁶² See ‘Traditionalism,’ in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1983), 576. One can also think here of the famous expression by the church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, that “tradition is the living faith of the dead, and traditionalism ... the dead faith of the living”, noting that it is “traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name”. See his *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65. See also the essay by Anna N. Williams on ‘tradition’ in this regard, which appears in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 362-377 (especially 372-376 where she speaks about ‘traditionalism’).

¹⁶³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 122.

From the earliest of liturgies, Balthasar writes, scripted words were being uttered, certain action were being performed, and passages from the Bible were being enacted in small dramatic scenes. Later on, the legends of the martyrs and the saints were also staged before and after services took place.¹⁶⁴ When these ‘performances’ became too big and elaborate for the church buildings, they were moved to the town square, where lay persons began to take part in the plays in the different vernacular languages (under the supervision of the church authorities).¹⁶⁵ While the Church, as a whole, thus remained hostile to the theatre, and most councils and theologians continued to speak out against the dangers of the stage, the Christian mystery play was born. Out of these mystery plays, other forms of religious and spiritual plays also came into existence. Examples include the morality plays in England and the *autos sacramentales* that were staged in Spain (“Europe’s classical country of the theatre”).¹⁶⁶ These plays did not only focus on biblical narratives or the life-stories of the saints and martyrs (as was the case with the mystery plays), but also attempted to make sense of the life of the ‘everyman’ in the light of the Christian worldview. This was done by employing the literary device of allegory, and by personifying Christian vices and virtues in many creative ways. Balthasar writes that, even though authors such as the “stupendous theatrical genius”, Lope de Vega, who “combined the life of the wildest adventurer with that of a priest and, at times, penitent”, and Calderón, who travelled the world as soldier before becoming a priest, often wrote about seemingly worldly themes, their works were still very much within the ambit of salvation history and the Church.¹⁶⁷ With time, some of these dramatic expressions gradually began to fade away, not least of all because of the Church’s enduring words of condemnation. But ever after this happened, Balthasar writes, many of the theatre pieces that were written and performed throughout Europe remained “under the cultic mystery play’s field of influence” and were informed by Christian sensibilities.¹⁶⁸ The work of someone like Shakespeare, of whom more will be said shortly, serves as a revealing example in this regard, Balthasar argues.

It thus seems as if the fervent opposition towards the stage, as described above, did not succeed in completely banishing the ‘dramatic’ from Christianity (as one would almost have expected to be the case), as different forms of drama still continued to appear within the Church itself, amidst the words of condemnation that were spewed against the stage. When reading Balthasar’s narration of these developments, it becomes apparent that what particularly

¹⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 105-6.

¹⁶⁵ Balthasar humorously states that in plays such as *The Prodigal Son*, *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife*, and *The Wise and the Foolish Virgins*, the ‘world’ claimed almost “half the scenes”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 106.

¹⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 108.

¹⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 108-9.

¹⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 69.

interests him in this regard, is how it was often the Christ-event, as conveyed to us in Scripture and through tradition, that gave rise to different dramatic activities within the Church. Balthasar, for example, points out that, from the beginning, the Church's dramatic liturgies centred on the performance of the Eucharist, where bread, as the Body of Christ, was dramatically broken, shared among, and consumed by, the faithful. This daily Eucharistic 'drama', Balthasar notes, anchored and directed the rest of the liturgical service, and moreover served "as the dramatic source of Christian life" outside of the ecclesial setting.¹⁶⁹ The whole liturgical year also culminated in, and emerged out of, the dramatic sequence of Holy Week, where, from early on, the passion of Christ was performed in church buildings. We have, for example, fragments of a liturgical 'passion play' that stems from the 4th century, and is attributed to the Cappadocian theologian, Gregory Nazianzus. This is rather remarkable, as Gregory himself had some harsh words to say about the stage, as shown above.¹⁷⁰ Later, with the religious or spiritual plays that developed out of the Church's liturgical life and Eucharistic celebrations, the Paschal events were also continually depicted on medieval stages that were erected in the market places of cities – especially during Passiontide and Easter. These depictions of Christ's life, death, and resurrection presented audiences, who could not necessarily read the Scriptures or fully understand the words of the medieval liturgies, with the opportunity to see and experience the Christ-event that took place in first century Palestine, as if it was happening for the first time in front of their very eyes, with the result that people travelled for hundreds of miles to attend these performances on a yearly basis.¹⁷¹

Balthasar also then emphasises the way in which the Christ-event, and the dramatic celebration of the Eucharist, informed and provided the impetus behind the Spanish *auto sacramentales*, which dominated theatre stages in Spain for five centuries, from the 13th century onwards. For Balthasar, what is quite astonishing about the writings of playwrights such as Lope De Vega and Calderón is the way they could "take almost any subject matter ... and show it to be permeated with the eucharistic mystery", as seen, for example, in "Lope's drama of passion, madness, and revenge, *La locura por la honra*".¹⁷² According to Balthasar, these authors' plays were indeed founded on, and flowed forth from, "an unshakeable faith in the Lord's eucharistic presence".¹⁷³ In many Spanish plays from this time, the myths of antiquity were also

¹⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 105.

¹⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 107 n. 56. Balthasar shows that much of this early passion play titled *Christos Paschon* was dependent on, and borrowed from, the tragedies of the ancient world: the "sorrowing Mary reflects Hecuba and Andromache; her lamentations are *a cento* from Euripides with borrowings from Aeschylus and Lycophron".

¹⁷¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 113-4.

¹⁷² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 115, 165.

¹⁷³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 116.

“effortlessly rendered transparent” to the mystery of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.¹⁷⁴ With Calderón, in particular, “Christ appears as the true Orpheus searching for Eurydice, the true Hercules, Jason, Perseus, the true Eros with his Psyche, the true god Pan, and so forth”.¹⁷⁵ For someone like Calderón, it was Christ who brought the myths and dramas of antiquity to fulfilment and provided them with their true meaning and significance. Also the characters of the Old Testament were presented “quite automatically” as prefigurations of Christ, in the works of Lope and Calderón, which meant that the narratives of, for example, Moses, Abraham, and David were oftentimes dramatically depicted in the light of the Christ-event.¹⁷⁶ In much the same manner as, for example, the *Corpus Christi* plays in England, it was thus the drama of Christ and his eucharistic presence in the world, which inspired and directed the plays that were created and staged during Spain’s golden age of theatre – which Balthasar finds fascinating.

Also in other parts of Europe, in the Medieval Ages and thereafter, many plays came into existence with characters who mirrored, and served as analogical expressions of, the drama of Christ. It is here, Balthasar notes, that it would be appropriate to talk about a “*postfiguration*” of Christ in the theatre; of a further *echoing* or *reverberation* of God’s Word, in different times and different places, on the theatre stage.¹⁷⁷ What is quite interesting for Balthasar is that, in these plays, the “connection with the primal image” of Christ was not always made explicit by the playwright, and it often happened that dramatists themselves did not plan, or recognise, the connection at first, but that it was “simply there, to the extent that the play [was] written from within a particular horizon of faith and consciousness”.¹⁷⁸ According to Balthasar, an important example that can be mentioned in this regard is Shakespeare’s Hamlet, where the play’s eponymous protagonist emerges as such a “postfiguration” of the Christ-character.¹⁷⁹ To attempt to “abstract from this theological horizon and reduce [Hamlet] to the ordinary psychological categories of a ‘great character’” (as both Hegel and Goethe did), Balthasar writes, “is necessarily to misinterpret the core of the action.”¹⁸⁰ The fact that it has been possible to mirror or post-figure Christ in certain dramatic performances on stage, proves once more to Balthasar that the drama of the Christ-event, in its particularity, does not negate or destroy

¹⁷⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 115.

¹⁷⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 115.

¹⁷⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 115.

¹⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 118.

¹⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 118.

¹⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 118.

¹⁸⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 118. See also Balthasar’s discussion in *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 384, where he again confirms that Shakespeare’s plays, in which he continually “performs a postfiguration” of Christ, is “inconceivable apart from the Christian background”.

other instance of drama. Instead, it instigates, and provides a surprising gravity to, new dramatic expressions. In the context of what has been said above, Balthasar writes:

Let no one say that after the Christ-drama everything has basically been said and shown, that drama is exhausted. No one knows all the implications of God's action which took place in Christ; the history of the Church and the world is there in order to bring them to light, not systematically, but dramatically.¹⁸¹

For Balthasar, it is thus evident that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ played an all-important role in instigating many of the dramatic expressions that have emerged from within Christianity and the Church throughout the ages. From early on, there developed a sense that the Christ-event is not, as was emphasised earlier in the chapter, merely a static image or icon, but an 'action' in and upon the world; and that there accordingly had to "be dramatic ways ... of presenting it, be they ever so indirect, risky, precarious, and ambiguous".¹⁸² Even though the Church and her theologians persisted with their condemnations of the stage, there continued to be a surprising appearance of dramas from within Christianity throughout the ages. And it is then because of this reality that Balthasar is eager to develop his own theological dramatic theory. Quoting the poet Reinhold Schneider, on whom he wrote a monograph as mentioned in the previous chapter, Balthasar states:

While all the great dramatists of the Christian era were partly determined by the spirit of Christianity, we may say, perhaps, that the dramatic ... quality of Christian life has not yet found an exhaustive expression. The fact that, at the time when the English, Spanish and French stages were at their most creative, drama ... was not recognised by the Church may have something to do with this... Our only hope is for an encounter between Church and drama in which they would come to see that they have certain aims in common.¹⁸³

After quoting and expanding on the above-mentioned words by Schneider, Balthasar then moves on to the next part of the study, where he will investigate certain 'dramatic resources', which, to his mind, could ultimately be used to understand and describe the drama of the Christ-event. Here, one of his main areas of focus is the way in which the theatre and human existence "ceaselessly and inseparably" mirror one another.¹⁸⁴ It is to this topic that we now turn, before

¹⁸¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 118.

¹⁸² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 112. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 22.

¹⁸³ Reinhold Schneider, *Rechenschaft*, 23-6, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 120-1.

¹⁸⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 130.

concluding this chapter with a short reflection on Balthasar's understanding of 'human freedom' and the "the role presented to us by existence".¹⁸⁵

3.5. Theatre as the 'Symbol' of the World

For Balthasar, one of the most significant features of drama and the theatre, also when it comes to the development of his theodramatic theory, is the fact that it gives us language to describe something of our individual and communal lives on earth. The image of the world stage on which the play of life is to be acted out has been an "abiding metaphor", he writes, "attracting to itself all the ultimate intimations concerning the meaning and structure of existence".¹⁸⁶ According to Balthasar, it has indeed been common practice throughout the ages and in different parts of the world to speak of life in dramatic terms, and to see humanity as 'actors' in their own right, attempting to perform the role allotted to them by God, or fate, or themselves, before the curtain falls and death dawns.

This tradition, Balthasar writes, began in the ancient world, where poets regularly portrayed life as a drama that played out under the gaze of "Zeus and the entire world of gods", who looked on primarily as spectators (while, at times, joining in on the action).¹⁸⁷ The idea would also be taken up by the philosophers of antiquity, despite many of them being wary of the theatre. Plato, for example, wrote in his late work, *The Laws*, that "life is a play in the presence of God", and that "man moves in the proper order when he allows himself to be moved as a 'divine marionette'".¹⁸⁸ The Cynic, Bion of Borysthenes, likewise employed the theatre metaphor, when he held that "the good man must play the role allotted to him by the Goddess of destiny", just as "the good actor must play the part assigned to him by the poet."¹⁸⁹ This sentiment was also echoed by the Stoic thinker, Epictetus, who argued that each person's life-task is to "play well the part they have been given", whether it is to be a "beggar" or a "cripple", "a ruler or a private person".¹⁹⁰ Also Marcus Aurelius, who, like many of his Roman contemporaries, despised the theatre and the "applause of the shouting multitudes",¹⁹¹ would in his rather morose philosophical musings describe life as "a stage play ... [with] puppets,

¹⁸⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 130.

¹⁸⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 135.

¹⁸⁷ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 135-7. Homer, Balthasar writes, speaks in the *Iliad*, for example, of how Zeus "never shifted his bright eyes from the scene" taking place on earth. Another example can be found in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, where the "suffering man is lifted up like a monstrosity and shown to the gods who, though invisible, are watching".

¹⁸⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 138.

¹⁸⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 140.

¹⁹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 140-1.

¹⁹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 144.

jerking on their strings”.¹⁹² Balthasar goes on to quote a number of similar passages from other early Greek and Roman philosophers, and points to the way in which these thinkers, in utilising this metaphor of the world stage, wrestled with questions concerning the meaning of the drama of life, and also the freedom of the human actor.

The image of the world stage, Balthasar continues, also came to permeate Judeo-Christian thought. Already in the texts of the Bible, there are clear traces of this metaphor: many of the narratives in the Old Testament, such as the story of Job, are presented as dramas taking place “under God’s impenetrable gaze”, and in the New Testament, Paul, for example, refers to his “fellow Apostles [as] ‘fellow players’”, and speaks of the way in which they have become a “spectacle [in Greek: *theatron*] to the world, to angels and to men”.¹⁹³ Despite their strong opposition to the theatre, the early patristic thinkers, as well as those who came after them, as mentioned in the section above, also followed Paul (and the philosophers of antiquity) in this regard, using the language of the stage in their theological reflections, with God being seen as the author of the play, and Christ as the drama’s main protagonist, whose role is to be imitated and re-performed by his followers. For Balthasar, the most prominent and influential church figure to employ the imagery of the theatre in describing life on earth would be the 12th century Christian humanist, John of Salisbury. In his *Policraticus*, a work in which he strongly draws on the writings of the Roman writer, Petronius, he famously speaks of the *Teatrum Mundi*, the world theatre, and states that “all the world acts a play” (*Totus mundus agit histrionem*).¹⁹⁴ These words would, of course, also be used as the motto of London’s Globe Theatre that was erected in 1599, and furthermore provide the inspiration for the famous line in William Shakespeare’s play, *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene VII), where the melancholic traveller, Jacques, exclaims to the fleeing cousins, Rosalind and Celia, that “all the world’s a stage”.¹⁹⁵ Also the Elizabethan poet, Thomas Heywood, in his work, *Apology for Actors* (in which he attempted to counter the Puritan attack on the theatre), would draw on this line, when he spoke of the world as “a theatre present”, where “Jehove doth as spectator sit”.¹⁹⁶

According to Balthasar, other noteworthy examples of how this image of the world stage came to be used within the Christian context, can be found in the work of some of the Spanish poets and playwrights, including Francesco de Quevedo, and, once more, Calderón. In one his most

¹⁹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 143-4.

¹⁹³ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 153-5.

¹⁹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 161-2.

¹⁹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 161-2.

¹⁹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 162; Muriel C. Bradbrook, *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare’s England* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 92.

famous poems, Quevedo writes that “Life’s a comedy, the world’s a stage, men are actors, and God is the author”.¹⁹⁷ This idea also features very prominently in plays by Calderón, such as *The World’s Great Fair*, *Life is a Dream*, and *The Great Theatre of the World*, where life on earth is continually portrayed as a drama taking place before God’s eyes. For Calderón, Balthasar writes, life itself is “real theatre”, and what counts is not “what role one plays, but how one plays it”.¹⁹⁸ What makes Calderón’s works so interesting and important for Balthasar, is the way the Spanish playwright makes a connection between the theatre’s understanding of ‘role’ and the Christian notion of ‘mission’. With Calderón, he writes, it is indeed “the individual’s mission that personalises him for his life in the world”.¹⁹⁹ This connection between ‘role’ and ‘mission’ in Calderón’s thought is something that would become very important in Balthasar’s own dramatic theory, as will be seen in what follows.

After his discussion of both Quevedo and Calderón, Balthasar goes on to show that, with time, the traditional metaphysical worldview of Christianity – where God was seen as the playwright – began to lose some of its prevalence in the world.²⁰⁰ But even after this happened, the metaphor of the ‘world stage’ continued to be a prevalent way of speaking of, and reflecting on, our existence here on earth – also within new worldviews that came to the fore. In the Enlightenment, for example, the ‘I’ of dramatic agency, became the “poet, actor, and spectator all at once”,²⁰¹ and with the dawn of Idealism, the unity of the ‘world play’ would be preserved by postulating “some pre-established harmony of ‘Absolute Spirit’”.²⁰² This can be seen in the writings of someone like Schiller, who held that if history was “a play in which each participant plays his part completely extempore and as seems best to him, we can only envision this confused performance proceeding meaningfully, if there is One Spirit, giving utterance in all its parts”.²⁰³ Many other view and interpretation of the play of life would follow; views and interpretations that would have different ideas about what this play actually means, and who should ultimately take responsibility for its outcome. What remained constant in all of this speculation, however, was the metaphor itself that was used; the way in which humanity repeatedly turned to the imagery and language of drama and theatre to try and describe something of our existence on earth. At different time and in different corners on earth

¹⁹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 163-4. The poem that Balthasar refers to is Quevedo’s *Epicteto y Fociledes en Español con consonantes*, written in Madrid in 1635.

¹⁹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 166, 168.

¹⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 167.

²⁰⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 177.

²⁰¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 184. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 26.

²⁰² Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 26.

²⁰³ Schelling, *Werke I, Band 3* (1858) 602 quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 182

(certainly not only in the West!),²⁰⁴ the theatre remained the supreme “symbol of the world”, Balthasar asserts – a symbol, he believes, that “contains concentratedly and most abundantly, both widely scattered and in precise detail the elements which ... can help facilitate a religious and ultimately theological interpretation of existence”.²⁰⁵

3.6. Theatre and the Illumination of Existence

According to Balthasar, the theatre does, however, not only provide us with language to describe our personal and communal lives with, but also serves as a lens through which existence on earth can be viewed and examined. For him, one of the most effective ways to study, and attempt to make sense of, this drama playing out on the world stage, is, in fact, through the action which transpires on the theatre stage. In the theatre, he writes, a mirror is held up to the world, enabling the audience to see and gain insight into the play of life. The theatre, he writes, illuminates our existence; it casts a “spotlight” on the intricacies of everyday life on earth.²⁰⁶ It provides a ‘image’ of reality, and beckons the onlooker to probe the way things currently are, while also imagining how things could possibly be. Starting with a section titled “Drama and the Illumination of Existence”, one of the central topics that Balthasar explores towards the end of the opening volume of his theodramatics, is indeed the way in which the theatre provides audience members with ‘a revelation’ about existence and everyday life, as it recasts the action that takes place on the world stage onto a physical stage, where it can be viewed against a certain interpretive horizon.²⁰⁷

In this regard, it is for Balthasar firstly important to recognise and affirm that the subject matter of most plays usually is, or, to his mind, should be, the ‘drama of everyday life’ that is taking place on the world stage. The theatre, he writes, “springs from existence”,²⁰⁸ and the “aesthetic illusion” of the stage refers back “to concrete reality”.²⁰⁹ Balthasar is not interested in the idea of art which merely exists ‘for art’s sake’. For him, all worthwhile and significant stage dramas, in one way or another, have their roots in, and point back towards, the ‘drama of existence’ and the role that are played and acted out by the ‘everyman’.²¹⁰ What happens in the theatre ‘is’ not real life, he argues, but nonetheless reflects, as in a mirror, the drama of real life, thereby

²⁰⁴ Balthasar explicitly mentions Egypt, Babylon, Indonesia, and Japan as place/cultures in which this image of the world stage has also played a prominent role in people’s descriptions and understandings of life on earth. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 135. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 23 in this regard.

²⁰⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 249.

²⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 259.

²⁰⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 265.

²⁰⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 259.

²⁰⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 267.

²¹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 266.

offering audience members an ‘image’ of the world around them. For Balthasar, this intrinsic connection between the action taking place on the world stage and the drama of everyday existence could best be described and explained by making use of the notion of analogy, which is all-important in and for his theological thought, as has been emphasised throughout this dissertation. Just as one can speak of a similarity-amidst-dissimilarity, or continuity-amidst-discontinuity, between the reality of this world and the reality of the divine, Balthasar believes that one can also refer to a similarity-amidst-dissimilarity, or continuity-amidst-discontinuity, between the world stage and the theatre stage, with the latter being grounded in, mirroring, pointing towards, and even participating in, the former, without being identical to it.²¹¹

According to Balthasar, this is also then precisely why people go to the theatre, namely, to be confronted with the ‘dramatic dimensions’ of the world, and to gain a better understanding of the drama of existence of which they themselves are part. Balthasar calls this one of the main allures or “pleasures” of the theatre: “to be able, as a spectator, to explore oneself within its context at one remove”, and to be granted, “insight, however limited, into the world’s embracing horizon of meaning, within which a complex action unfolds”.²¹² He agrees that there are “areas of the stage business where the only concern is the demand for and the supply of diversion, where the audience remains enclosed in its own amusement”.²¹³ Yet, for “as long as theatre has existed”, he writes, people have also “asked something more of drama than this”.²¹⁴ They have come to the theatre to seek insight into “the nature and meaning of existence”, which cannot always readily be “read off the immanent course” of things, but radiates forth from “the play on the stage”.²¹⁵ According to Balthasar, the theatre indeed offers the promise of a revelation about human existence, and audience members take their seats in front of an empty stage, because they are eager to know what this revelation will be. He goes on to quote Paul Claudel, one of the most important voices in his life, who said the following about why people choose to spend their time and money on going to the theatre:

Do you know what the theatre is? There is the stage and the auditorium. In the evening, when all the shops are closed, people come here, sit together in rows and watch. And then the curtain goes up and something takes place on stage, as if it was true. I look at them, and the auditorium is full of living, clothed flesh, and they stick to the walls like flies, right up to the roof. And I see these hundreds of white faces. The human being gets bored, and

²¹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 259, 267.

²¹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 264-5.

²¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 314.

²¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 314.

²¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 314.

ignorance clings to him from his birth. He has no idea how things begin and how they cease, and that is why he comes to the theatre. Sitting there, with his hands on his knees, he looks at himself. And he cries, and he laughs and is reluctant to get up and go.²¹⁶

For Balthasar, it is then particularly important to emphasise the actor's function in this 'process of illumination' that occurs in the theatre. While both the playwright, who "selects what to bring forth from his arsenal, in order to create a valid likeness of the world",²¹⁷ as well as the director, who "is a servant of the production" and "takes responsibility of the play's performance",²¹⁸ are indispensable for the creation and staging of any theatre productions, it is the actor who ultimately establishes the link between the real world and the world of the stage. The playwright's work, Balthasar contends, is "*potentially* drama" and only "becomes *actual* through the actor".²¹⁹ It is the actor, who "causes" the ideas of the author and the director "to be embodied", and who, through his or her performance, "makes things present".²²⁰ The "performance is the work of art", he writes, "the text is only the foundation".²²¹ It is thus solely when the actor takes to the stage, for the benefit of the audience,²²² that the analogical mediation between the written play and the play of life begins to occur. As a human being, belonging to 'everyday life', the actor is not really Hamlet, but momentarily 'becomes' Hamlet on stage, so as to reveal certain truths about this world and human existence to audience members, who start to see themselves *in* the characters and situations that are portrayed on stage (as if they were looking into a mirror).²²³ It is indeed through the physical, embodied performance of the actor that an analogical bond between the theatre and the real world transpires. According to Balthasar, the actor 'is' the relationship that is "established between the 'reality of life' and the 'aesthetic reality' of the stage; his 'disguise' [*Ver-stellung* in German] brings forth the 'presentation' [*Vor-stellung* in German] of reality".²²⁴

Building on these ideas, Balthasar sets out to explore what he regards as two of the most prominent themes in the drama of human existence that are illuminated by theatre productions, through the embodied performance of actors on the stage. The first of these themes is that of human finitude and death; a theme, he writes, that has stood "unuttered, behind every play"

²¹⁶ Quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 308.

²¹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 270.

²¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 298-9.

²¹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 281

²²⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 281

²²¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 282.

²²² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 268.

²²³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 281-2.

²²⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 261.

since the time of Attic theatre.²²⁵ Through an extensive investigation of a myriad of dramatic works, Balthasar goes on to reflect on the ways in which death has been portrayed on the theatre stage throughout the ages, and emphasises how, in and through all of these dramatic explorations, it has remained one of the biggest predicaments and mysteries of the drama of existence.²²⁶ Alongside human finitude and the suffering that goes along with it, a second prominent theme that Balthasar also explores in this regard, is that of the “struggle for the good in the world”.²²⁷ In this investigation, Balthasar once again makes use of his encyclopaedic knowledge of world theatre, and refers to a whole array of plays.²²⁸ This second theme could then be seen to be particularly important in and for his theodramatic theory, as it points towards, and in many ways encapsulates, what Balthasar regards as another unique and significant feature of the theatre, namely, its ability to bring to the surface, and elucidate, the ethical dimensions of the play of life.

According to Balthasar, it is indeed fascinating to see how the theatre, in and through its depiction of what ‘is’ and, at time, what ‘could be’ (as a solution to the present reality), beckons audience members to reflect on, and make judgments concerning, the ethical state of the ‘drama of human existence’. By presenting a ‘mirror-image’ of the world, the theatre enables and encourages audience members to think through the moral complexities of the situations that are playing out in front of their eyes, so as to decide “whether, in this particular course of events, the right thing has been done or not.”²²⁹ In “its profound essence”, Balthasar notes, the stage is “a tribunal” and drama “essentially judgment”.²³⁰ This confrontation with, and

²²⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 369.

²²⁶ The vast array of “themes in ‘thanatology’,” as Aidan Nichols (*No Bloodless Myth*, 36) writes, that Balthasar explores with reference to the “the plays of world literature”, include: “death as destiny” (with reference to plays such as Sophocles’ *Ajax* and Peter Weiss’ *Auschwitz Oratorio, Die Ermittlung*); ‘death as the interpreter of life’ (with reference to plays such as George Bernard Shaw’s *Saint Joan* and Pär Lagerkvist’s *Den svara stunden*); ‘the immanence (and pervasiveness) of death’ (with reference to plays such as Maurice Maeterlinck’s *L’Intruse, Les aveugles* and Gabriel Marcel’s *L’Iconoclaste*); ‘the borderline between death and life’ (with reference to plays such as Sophocles’ *Women of Trachnis*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and J.B. Priestley’s *Johnson over Jordan*); ‘death as atonement’ (with reference to plays such as Hölderlin’s *Tod des Empedokles*, Brendan Behan’s *The Quare Fellow*, Arthur Miller’s *the Death of a Salesman*); ‘death and (it’s relation to) love’ (with reference to plays such as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Paul Claudel’s *Le soulier de Satin*, and the many works of Hugo von Hofmannsthal); ‘death on behalf of someone else’ (with reference to works such as Euripides’s *Alcestis, Heracles*, and the *Phoenician Women*, Schiller’s *Die Bürgerschaft*, and Georg Kaiser’s *Die Bürger von Calais*; and lastly ‘the unmasking of kings’ (with reference to Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, Frank Wedekind’s *König Nicolo oder so ist das Leben*, and Christopher Fry’s *Curtmantle*). See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 20-1; and the section ‘Time and Death’ in Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume IV, The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994) 95-135, in which he again engages with what he calls the “riddle of death” (with reference to this discussion in the first volume).

²²⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 413ff.

²²⁸ As is the case with the theme of ‘death’, Balthasar also here refers to many dramatic works in his discussion. Some of the prominent works that are mentioned include: Schiller’s *Fiesco*; Corneille’s *Nicomede, Sertorius*, and *Sûrena*; Camus’ *L’État de Siège*; Sartre’s *Les mouches*; and various plays by Shakespeare.

²²⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 452.

²³⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 452, 461.

assessment of, “the right or perverse action of free human beings”,²³¹ also then reminds audience members that they themselves are actors on the world stage, who can either enact, or turn their back on, that which is good, right, and just on earth. As the theatre stage mirrors, and constantly points back towards, the world stage – to the drama that is taking place outside of the walls of the theatre complex – it often happens, Balthasar notes, that the audience’s “personal sense of ought” is challenged.²³² According to Balthasar, the intention of many plays, is, in fact, to call audience members’ attention to their own ethical duties and responsibilities in the world; to point out that they, too, can and should make decisions on a day-to-day basis, either in service of, or to the detriment of, the common good. In the abovementioned context, Balthasar quotes Schiller, who writes:

True art is not concerned merely with some momentary illusion. Its concern is a serious one: it does not merely wish to transport man to a momentary dream of freedom, it wants to make him really and truly free, by awaking a power, and by exercising and shaping it, so that he may transform the world ... In its unfettered self-presentation, art, which ‘changes nothing’ in the real world, reminds us of man’s true freedom and utters a challenge to it.²³³

According to Balthasar, the theatre is thus ultimately concerned with “change, whether it is the change of man himself or of his environment”.²³⁴ One of the reasons why it presents “us with themes and counterthemes, forces and counterforces”, is indeed so that we can rethink the drama of our own lives, come to new ethical insights, and learn to seek, perform, and help bring about the ‘good’ on the world stage.²³⁵ Through the “paradigm of life presented on the stage”, Balthasar remarks, the spectator is invited to “fashion” his or her life along the lines of the insights that the play has brought forth, while obviously, at the same time, being free “to distance” him- or herself “from it critically”.²³⁶ This can be seen as a ‘call’ to take up a given ‘role’ in the play of life; as an appeal to accept and undertake a certain ‘mission’ (to move to more theological language) in the drama of existence. What could, however, be asked at this point, is whether human beings, in fact, have any say in the role that they play on earth?; whether it is possible to exercise any choice when it comes to the mission one enacts on the world stage? These questions are especially relevant when it comes to the Christian worldview, where it is confessed that the triune God is the author of all that exists; that he, in the words of

²³¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 266.

²³² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 266.

²³³ Quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 267.

²³⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 413.

²³⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 413-14.

²³⁶ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 264.

Julien Green, is the “divine playwright of the drama of existence”.²³⁷ As Thomas Dalzell asks: if “the author of the play is divine, does it [not] necessarily result in the actors, particularly the created actors, being reduced to mere puppets?”²³⁸ It is then to this question of the freedom of humanity, which has been one of the most controversial subjects throughout the ages, that we now very briefly turn at the end of this chapter, with Balthasar’s help.

3.7. The Actor’s Role/Mission on the World Stage

For Balthasar, a helpful way of addressing, at least in a provisional manner, this question of the freedom of the actor on the world stage (from within the Christian worldview), is by looking at the relationship between the playwright and the actor in the actual theatre. When examining the theatre-making process, he writes, it is interesting to see that, although the playwright is the one who creates the play, as well as the characters in it, and can therefore be seen to have a certain “ontological primacy” with regard to everyone else involved,²³⁹ his or her relationship with the actor “cannot be expressed in terms of master and servant”.²⁴⁰ The actor is not simply a slave to the playwright’s text, he emphasises, and there is “nothing mechanical” about how he or she makes the ideas and intentions of the author present.²⁴¹ It is, in fact, far more interesting than that. Quoting Gabriel Marcel, Balthasar writes that dramatic creation usually involves a “self-alienation on the part of the author, for the benefit of the beings to whom he gives life”.²⁴² While the author may have certain ideas and intentions for the characters he invents, and offers these intentions and ideas to the actor by means of the script that has been written, he or she nonetheless grants cast-members a certain amount of autonomy, so as to creatively contribute to the ‘making present’ of the play’s truth, through their own performance. Any skilled playwright, Balthasar argues, chooses to leave room in his or her work, “both in terms of the depth of inspiration (the ‘higher task’), and of the details of gesture, intonation, and so forth”, for a “creative act” on the part of the actor.²⁴³ The author is not interested in merely projecting him- or herself onto the stage and only hearing his or her own voice from the actor’s lips, but longs to see and experience how his or her characters come to life, and fulfil their intended purposes, through the free and inventive contribution of someone

²³⁷ Thomas Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 118. See also Julien Green, *Journal I* (Paris: Plon, 1938), quoted in *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 268.

²³⁸ Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter*, 118-9.

²³⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 270.

²⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 283.

²⁴¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 284; Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter*, 121.

²⁴² Balthasar *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 271. This quotation is from Gabriel Marcel, ‘L’Influence du théâtre,’ *Revue des Jeunes* (Mar. 5, 1935).

²⁴³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 284; Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter*, 121.

else, even if there is a chance that this will not be the case. For Balthasar, part of the “mystery of inspiration” lies precisely in allowing “the characters to develop in their own way”, while guiding their actions and interactions ‘from above’.²⁴⁴ This is the risk of being a playwright – of writing plays and creating characters that will be performed by others.

According to Balthasar, this obviously does not mean that all is permissible on the stage, and that the actor could or should merely do as he or she likes. For this would be a regrettable misuse of the freedom granted to the actor by the author, and most certainly lead to a failed performance. What is rather asked of the actor is to enter – through a “creative effort” on his or her own part – into the “author’s vision”.²⁴⁵ As a free and creative agent, the actors should indeed come to cooperate with the author, by putting “all the power of his or her physical, emotional, and spiritual self, at the service of” the role that he or she has been given.²⁴⁶ It can be seen as an act of consent to the author’s intentions; as a deliberate ‘Yes’ that is uttered in response to, and in continuity with, the playwright’s original thoughts. Quoting George Simmel, Balthasar writes that the actor’s “freedom is of the kind customarily described as ethical”.²⁴⁷ He or she must “give the impression of *wanting* to do what, on the basis of his role, he *ought* to do”.²⁴⁸ For Balthasar, this is exactly what the great Russian theatre theorist, Konstantin Stanislavski, who is often described as the father of modern acting, was referring to when he developed his acting ‘system’ and spoke of the “actor’s *disponibilité* for his role”.²⁴⁹ With this notion of ‘*disponibilité*’, which can be translated into English as ‘well-disposedness’, Stanislavski pointed to the way in which the actor should open him- or herself up to the ‘role’ that has been imparted to him or her by the author, through a process of “character formation”.²⁵⁰ It thus has to do with the actor’s “dedication, encompassing body, mind, and soul” to the given role; a “mobilisation” of the self that is “initiated by the actor’s belief in the truth of the role” – something that can only but occur in absolute freedom, if the role is to be performed authentically.²⁵¹

In the theatre, one can thus speak of both the playwright’s primal freedom to create, and of the actor’s derived freedom to creatively take up, and give life to, his or her assigned role, either

²⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 276-7.

²⁴⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 284.

²⁴⁶ Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom*, 121.

²⁴⁷ George Simmel, *Logos IX* (1920/21): 360, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 284.

²⁴⁸ George Simmel, *Logos IX* (1920/21): 360, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 284.

²⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 288-9.

²⁵⁰ See Vander Lugt, Wesley. *Living Theodrama, Reimagining Theological Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2014) 33.

²⁵¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 288-9. Balthasar quotes Stanislavski saying: “My method consists in allowing the interior and exterior processes to deepen each other and in summoning a feeling for the role through the physical experience of the human body”.

in continuity with, or in defiance of, the author's original intentions. The hope is normally that these two freedoms (which, it should be said, are not equal, as the one stems from, and is contingent on, the other), will coincide; that the author's intentions for the character whom he or she has fashioned in freedom and love, and the actor's portrayal of this character in response to the author's original creative act, will somehow intersect with one another. It is here, Balthasar believes, that the director or producer of the production – as “mediator” between author and actor – has an important role to play.²⁵² For Balthasar, this relationship between the author and the actor in the actual theatre, indeed then provides a helpful ‘model’ – within the Christian worldview – for understanding and describing something of the relationship between humanity (as actors on the world stage) and God (as the playwright of the drama of existence).

Balthasar argues that, in much the same manner as the playwright in the theatre, God, as the author of the play of life, does not forcefully subdue the ‘characters’ whom he brings forth in love, but allows them to come into being, and play their part on the world stage, in and with freedom.²⁵³ God's decision to create the world and humanity, Balthasar believes, includes his decision to create finite freedom, so that he might have covenant partners for his love. God's act of creation, he writes, can thus be seen as a “letting be”, as a “making space for otherness”.²⁵⁴ While God, as playwright, undoubtedly has a definitive and good plan for creation, and has endowed each actor on the world stage with a specific role or mission, human beings “are not slave to” a “Most High Master of the play”, but are invited, in freedom, to enter into God's ‘vision’ for their individual lives and the greater world which he creates, and devotes himself to, in infinite love.²⁵⁵

Once again, as in the theatre, this derived freedom that is graciously granted by God to humanity does not mean that everything is permissible, and that human beings can simply do as they like, as if God was completely indifferent to the drama of human existence. For, as

²⁵² The director, Balthasar writes, should help in bringing forth “a unified vision embracing both the drama [with the author's entire creative contribution] and the art of the actors [with their very different creative abilities]” ... he or she is “most profoundly dependent on the two extreme elements [that needs to be integrated]; [the director's] whole *raison d'être* consists in the way he [or she] mediates between them”. The director is thus responsible to (and can be seen as an extension of) the author (and his or text); while, on the other hand, also being in service of the actor, who he or she is tasked with inspiring and guiding – without ever impeding on his or her freedom – so that he or she can perform the given role as faithfully as possible. See Balthasar's description of the role of the director in *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 298-305.

²⁵³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 277.

²⁵⁴ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 55.

²⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 252. Balthasar argues that in creating the world, God has devoted himself fully to this play. Quoting Kierkegaard, he writes that God does not pursue his poetical activity as a pastime: “It is a serious matter for him: to love and to be loved is God's passion ... as if he himself were subject to the power of his passion, almost as if it were a weakness on his part, whereas in fact it is his strength, his almighty love”. See Kierkegaard, *Diaries*, 630-31, quoted in *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 277.

mentioned above, God's whole intention with granting freedom to human beings – a freedom which analogically shares in, and expresses something of, his own infinite freedom – is so that they would become his covenant partners in the world, and go on to perform the roles that they have been called and predestined to play; not because they have to, but as an act of loving devotion and obedience to the One who has created them, loves them, and, from the very start, only wills their 'good'. Only in being directed towards God and his goodness, can finite freedom come to fulfilment, and can human beings become who they have been created to be. God, Balthasar affirms, "is the space within which finite freedom finds liberation", the space within which "it can attain completion".²⁵⁶ What is thus asked of humanity, as actors on the world stage, is a disponibilité to God's will, a "readiness to step", in freedom, into "whatever role in the play God has in mind".²⁵⁷

The freedom of humanity, and the way it is related to, and intersects with, the infinite freedom of God, can then be seen to form the subject matter of much of the second volume of Balthasar's theodramatic project. By engaging with philosophers and theologians throughout the ages, while continuously making use of the language and categories of drama and theatre, Balthasar sets out to defend his conviction that human beings really are free,²⁵⁸ and that this finite freedom analogically shares in,²⁵⁹ and finds fulfilment in, God's freedom.²⁶⁰ For Balthasar, freedom is the condition that renders action possible, and allows human beings to take up and perform a certain role or mission on the world stage.²⁶¹ When a person is "struck by something truly

²⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 19.

²⁵⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 59; David L. Schindler, *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 247.

²⁵⁸ Balthasar argues: "Christian theology will have to confront [contrary views] with an unalterable, twofold postulate of its own, arising from its fundamental nature: first, that the 'Absolute' is free (which the philosopher can concede, in a limited sense); and second, that the 'Absolute' has a sovereign ability, out of its own freedom, to create and send forth finite but genuinely free beings (which is bound to cause the philosopher the greatest embarrassment), in such a way that, without vitiating the infinite nature of God's freedom, a genuine oppositions of freedom can come about ... It is one of the fundamental assertions of the Bible and of theology that such opposition exist and that it works itself out dramatically in a variety of forms". See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 190.

²⁵⁹ Balthasar writes: "The basic presupposition for all understanding of existing things and of Being is the relationship between uncreated and created freedom; it is the creature's freedom that causes him to be termed the 'image and likeness of God' – and this likewise is the thrust of the '*analogia entis*'". See *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 123. See also, in this regard, Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 60, as well as Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter*, 59-100 (a section titled 'Freedom in the Context of the Analogia Entis').

²⁶⁰ Balthasar writes: "Thus, finally, it becomes clear why finite freedom can really fulfil itself in infinite freedom and in no other way. If *letting-be* belongs to the nature of infinite freedom – the Father *lets* the Son be consubstantial God, and so forth – there is no danger of finite freedom, which cannot fulfil itself on its own account (because it can neither go back to take possession of its origins nor can it attain its absolute goal by its own power), becoming alienated from itself in the realm of the Infinite. It can only be what it is, that is, an image of infinite freedom, imbued with a freedom of its own, by getting in tune with the (Trinitarian) 'law' of absolute freedom (of self-surrender); and this law is not foreign to it – for after all it is the 'law' of absolute being – but most authentically its own". *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 259.

²⁶¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 30-1.

significant”, he or she can either “live in response to” the “revelation” that has been received, or choose not to do so.²⁶² He or she can either let his or her life be “marked by the unique encounter offered”, or resist and rebel against what has been seen, heard, and experienced.²⁶³ This can be true of the ‘revelation’ received in the theatre, as described above, and also, ultimately, of the ‘revelation’ received from God – with the former, in Balthasar’s thought, often serving as a doorway to, and even expression of, the latter.

For Balthasar, it can accordingly be said that a central part of being human is to continually go “through the point of decision”, either for or against “God’s absolute freedom”.²⁶⁴ The problem, however, with this reality, is that humanity, draped in sinfulness and selfish desires, mostly decides against God’s will; mostly refrain from doing what they are called to do; mostly ignore the mission that has been bestowed on their lives; mostly disregard ‘the good’, and oftentimes even actively seek what is unjust and evil – which explains why the world is in such disarray.²⁶⁵ The lives of humanity, Edward Oakes writes, are marked by a constant “misfiring of intent”, by an “inevitable going astray”.²⁶⁶ We initially see this in the Genesis narrative, where Adam and Even choose to disobey God and, in doing so, reject the role they have been assigned to play, an event that sets the whole history of sinful disobedience into motion. It is also evident in the drama of Israel, who, as God’s chosen people, are called to perform God’s goodness and love to all the nations, but continually fails to do so.²⁶⁷ Even Paul, while recognising the folly of rebellion against God, would come to write: “What I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate doing, that is what I end up doing” (Rm 7:15). This statement shows how human freedom that

²⁶² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 30-31.

²⁶³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 31.

²⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 190; and *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 36, where he writes: “Man can freely choose which freedom he prefers. He can choose the freedom of being his own origin, in which case he must pay the price of never being able to find any sufficient reason or satisfying goal for this self-manufactured freedom but must content himself with the exercise of his autonomy; or he can choose the freedom of continually acknowledging his indebtedness, in ever new ways, to absolute freedom”.

²⁶⁵ Balthasar quotes Chesterton, for whom, he writes, the insight that “God freely created the world and endowed it with freedom”, formed the turning point in his conversion to Christianity – saying: “God has written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he has planned as perfect, but which necessarily had been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it”. *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 190; Gilbert, K. Chesterton, ‘Orthodoxy,’ in *Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton, Volume I* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 281-2. See also McIntosh, ‘Christology,’ 35, where he describes Balthasar’s understanding of human sin (and its consequences) as follows: “Sin had deafened humanity to the calling of God”; humankind “no longer hears its true calling, no longer offers itself and the world into the loving hands of the Creator ... the space, the ‘room’, which God has made for the creature to respond to divine life was either collapsed into idolatrous creaturely self-assertion or else distorted into an angry distance of fearful and bitter alienation”.

²⁶⁶ See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 251. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 11 where he speaks of sin as “a titanic rejection on man’s part” of God’s will; and his comprehensive discussion of ‘evil’ and ‘sin’ in *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 160-201.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 177; and especially then *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 183-191, where he quotes a passage from Clive S. Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain* (London: Collins, 1990), dealing with how sin enters the world drama.

“does not attain the goal God has set out for it”, ironically becomes an enslavement, a ‘prison of unwillingness’.²⁶⁸

When looking at the drama of the history of the world, and the drama of each of our own lives, it is indeed clear that there is a disparity between what we, as human beings, are called to do, and what we end up doing; between the roles that we are given to play, and the lives we ultimately lead.²⁶⁹ This disparity, Balthasar writes, is also often found in the actual theatre, where it is seen how the actor ignores, or even refuses to give him- or herself over to, his or her assigned role, thereby defying the intentions of the author. It is then amidst, and because of, this reality, Balthasar asserts, that God, as the author of the ‘drama of existence’, decided to send an actor onto the world stage whose innermost being is identical to his God-given ‘role’ or ‘mission’ on earth; whose entire performance stands in continuity with, and is marked by perfect obedience to, God’s will; whose words and actions, while being free, are inseparable from God’s own. And this ‘actor’ whose performance affects a “great reversal on earth” and ultimately determines the outcome of “all secondary dramas”,²⁷⁰ is none other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Quoting Theodor Haeker, Balthasar writes:

By and large the actor’s nature and person do not coincide with the role he has to play, and this is true not only of the stage play that, on the basis of an inborn instinct, human beings creatively set forth in image and speech, but also of the *theatrum mundi* itself. In the play that takes place on the world stage, the author, director, and producer is – in an absolute sense – God himself. True, he allows freedom to act its own part according to its nature – and this is the greatest mystery of creation and of God’s direct creative power – yet ultimately the play he plays is his own. In this play there can be a tragic or comic dichotomy between the actor and the role; and this produces the comedies and tragedies of world history – and its farces too, of which we today are both spectators and actors, as we have always been. Only in the drama of the God-Man do we find identity between the sublime actor and the role he has to play...²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 251; Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 135.

²⁶⁹ Balthasar describes this ‘refusal’ as follows: “I don’t want to. I know I should, but I don’t want to. I’ll pretend I’m deaf; I’ll curl up and show my bristles. Let him who touch me dares! The arrow of the Call, sharply aimed, ricochets off. My skin is thick and weather-proofed. The Demand slides from it like water from a duck’s feathers. I stand on my rights, bestowed on me from the highest source in virtue of the instincts and habits which are implanted in me and which strives for life and development. Let no one contest these my rights, not even the highest authority! And even if someone would dare, let him know that I don’t want to it...” See Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 91.

²⁷⁰ Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 220, 230.

²⁷¹ Theodor Haeker, *Was ist der Mensch?* (Leipzig: Hegner, 1934), 128ff, quoted in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 646.

For Balthasar (following Haeker), there is indeed only one case in the history of the drama of existence, where role and person, mission and inner-most being, coincide completely, namely, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Who Christ is, as said in the beginning of this chapter, is indistinguishable from what he says and does on the world stage; his true identity, as Son of God, is identical to, and becomes known through, the role he performs on earth, in perfect obedience to his Father.²⁷² It is then on this note, that we will bring this third chapter to an end, and proceed to Chapter Four, which will focus on Jesus Christ of Nazareth's performance on the world stage, and the way he perfectly enacts – and 'is' – the mission given to him by his Father – a mission that will, ultimately, lead to the realm of the dead and back, and come to "impact" all other dramas in history, like a "meteor" hitting the earth's surface, to use Balthasar's metaphor.²⁷³

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, which drew on the first two volumes of the work *Theo-drama*, we started out by looking at how Balthasar's dramatics flows forth from, and builds on, his aesthetics, and how it will aim to compliment and bring to fullness a number of contemporary trends in systematic theology (including trends with overt social and political accents). This was followed by a discussion of Balthasar's engagement with and response to certain historical critiques against Christianity's involvement with the theatre, which set the scene for the subsequent section, which focused on his understanding of the relationship between the theatre stage and the world stage, and the ethical dimensions of drama performances. Next, we looked at Balthasar's conception of human freedom, and how humanity, as actors on the world stage, mostly fail to perform the role they have been given by God. At the end of this chapter, it was mentioned that, for Balthasar, the only actor in history whose performance on the world stage can be regarded as being identical to his innermost 'self', is Jesus Christ. And it is indeed then to Balthasar's Christology, as developed in the last three volumes of his theodramatic project, that we now turn.

²⁷² See McIntosh, 'Christology,' 33. Troy Stefano also states in a section on Balthasar's Christology: "In a way that is true of no other human being [Christ] *is* his mission ... He has identified himself in complete inner freedom with the task that has been given to him". See Stefano's essay, 'Christology after Schleiermacher: Three Twentieth-Century Christologists,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Christology*, 373.

²⁷³ See 'The Impact of the Meteor' in *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 25-32.

– 4 –

Theo-Drama II: The Drama of Redemption

“Yet, not only has the play been begun and performed for his sake: the entire drama needs him if it is to get under way. His being born, his living and dying are a finite and temporal process; but within this process, God actually comes forth out of himself in order to be part of an interplay involving worldly beings...”

Hans Urs von Balthasar¹

“(H)ere for once a divinity has taken the side of the suffering, the lowly and the wronged... Who will deprive me of such a God who – as an obscure poet in the Gulag Archipelago dares to say – had to die not only in order to blot out the sins of humanity but in order to experience their suffering? This is God who not only – at best – from his heaven has compassion on poor creatures but in his Son shares their pain and helplessness, and even goes further, endowing that pain and helplessness, as dreadful as they may be, with a meaning of love and transformation ...”

Hans Urs von Balthasar²

“The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man – the dogma is the drama”

Dorothy Sayers³

4.1. Introduction

Following the previous chapter’s introduction of Balthasar’s theodramatic theory, and the subsequent investigation into his understanding of the relationship between the dramas being performed on the world stage and the theatre stage, this chapter will primarily focus on the drama of the Christ-event, a drama which Balthasar sees as the “defining fulcrum” of every drama performed on earth.⁴ According to Balthasar, the performance of Christ, “as chief actor in the theodrama, as Christianity understands it”, is indeed nothing other than the “summit of both the *questions posed by* and the *response to* all human dramatic explorations”.⁵ It is the ‘drama of all dramas’ which speaks into and grounds all further dramatic activity in the world. In this drama, it becomes clear that “God has not remained silent in the face of the longings and struggles of the world”, but enters the play of finite existence *as* a human being.⁶ Absolute

¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 53.

² Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, trans. Mary Theresilde Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 15-6.

³ Dorothy Sayers, ‘The Greatest Drama Ever Staged,’ in *The Whimsical Christian* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 11.

⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 17; Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s “Theatre of the World”: The Aesthetics of Dramatics,’ in *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, 28.

⁵ Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s “Theatre of the World”, 28.

⁶ Todd Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor, Theodramatics in the Light of Liberation Theology* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 102.

freedom indeed “enters into created freedom, interacts with created freedom, and acts as created freedom”, so as to bring about salvation and liberation for the world.⁷

In order to give an exposition of Balthasar’s understanding of this all-defining drama of Christ, this chapter will primarily draw on the last three volumes of Balthasar’s theodramatics, written in the autumn of his life, in which he develops his mature Christology in explicitly dramatic terms. For Edward Oakes these last three volumes of Balthasar’s theodramatic project should be seen as “the apex of [his] theological achievement”, as the “culmination and capstone of his work, where all the themes of his theology converge, and are fused into, a synthesis of remarkable creativity and originality”.⁸ In addition to these last three volumes of his theodramatics, frequent reference will also be made to a number of other writings, which expand on, and give further clarity regarding, his dramatic Christology and the way in which it affects all ‘earthly’ dramas. Examples of such writings include his important work on the Triduum, *Mysterium Paschale* (a work which, according to Oakes, ought to be seen as “an integral part of the Theodramatics”),⁹ his essay ‘Beatitudes and Human Dignity’, as well as monographs such as *The Christian State of Life, Theology and History*, and *Engagement with God*, to name but a few. Towards the end of the chapter, where the political dimensions of Balthasar’s dramatics will be considered, a number of Balthasar’s sermons (which open up interesting political possibilities for his theodramatic theory), will also be examined.

This chapter will commence by looking at the way in which Balthasar attempts to develop a Christology by making use of the “poetic category of mission”,¹⁰ in continuity with, especially Ignatius of Loyola’s thought.¹¹ Next, the focus will be on the ‘content’ of Christ’s mission, namely, on the three distinct-yet-united ‘syllables’ out of which the Word-made-flesh’s performance on earth consists: “His public life” which “heralds the kingdom of God”; his “Cross”, as God’s “triumph over death”; and his “Resurrection”, which “makes personal

⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 318.

⁸ Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 230-1; and also, Aidan Nichols, ‘Introduction, Balthasar, his Christology, and the Mystery of Easter,’ in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale, The Mystery of Easter* (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 2000 [1970]), 7.

⁹ Oakes notes that the work *Mysterium Paschale* (with the original German title *Theologie der Drei Tage*), started out as an encyclopaedic article for a reference work in Dogmatics: “The editors”, he writes, “had at first commissioned the article from someone else who had to drop out of the project, and so Balthasar was asked to fill in at the last minutes”. See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 237 n.15.

¹⁰ See John Riches, ‘Afterword,’ in *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs Balthasar*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1986), 192.

¹¹ It is important to emphasise the fact that Balthasar’s departure with the Society of Jesus in 1950 did not diminish his admiration for, and reliance on, Ignatius’ thought in any way. As said in the second chapter, Ignatius’ theology (with its strong focus on ‘calling’, ‘obedience’ and, indeed, ‘mission’) remained, up until the very end, the impetus behind much of Balthasar’s work – including his writings on Christology, as will be seen in what follows.

discipleship and mission possible”.¹² After the discussion of these three “fundamental articulations of [Christ’s] existence”,¹³ the focus will shift to the implications of the drama of the Christ-event for humanity and the world, to what Balthasar calls the “irreversible ‘history of liberation’” that is initiated by Christ’s incarnation.¹⁴ Lastly, we will look at the political dimensions, shortcomings, and possibilities of his dramatics – also then, as said, by examining a number of Balthasar’s sermons (with surprisingly strong socio-political accents). This will allow us to make the transition from Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory to South African anti-apartheid protest theatre, and the dramatic re-imagining of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the play, *Woza Albert!*.

4.2. A Christology of Mission

One of the most interesting aspects of the last three volumes of Balthasar’s theodramatic theory is the fact that he initially sets out to develop an “ascending Christology” which moves from “Christ’s overt function to his covert being”.¹⁵ Balthasar does not want to say too much about the divine nature of Christ and the mystery of the intra-Trinitarian life, before first looking at what has been revealed in and through the action-filled existence of the person named Jesus, living in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine. Balthasar remarks that in his theodramatic theory there “can be no question of retailing the usual textbook approach, which starts with an essentialist Christology that claims prior knowledge of Jesus’ essential nature as the Incarnate Word, even before the action begins”.¹⁶ He is indeed not interested, at first, in what he calls a “purely extra-historical, static, ‘essence’ Christology”.¹⁷ He rather wants to place his focus on the “form that Jesus’ humanity took in and of itself”; on the way in which Christ “meets us on our own terms – with the ‘manifest’ quality of a lived history: uttered words, a cry, a death, and a commission”.¹⁸ Jesus did not “start by declaring who he is”, Balthasar writes, but “by

¹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 43; and Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 106-7. See also the transcript of four talks Balthasar gave for the Vatican Radio Station on Christology titled *Basic Questions of Christology* – a text I will refer to quite often in this chapter – where he speaks of Christ as “the word in three parts: ‘life-death-resurrection’”. The text is found in Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 307-323, here 310.

¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 43.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 28.

¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 149, 221.

¹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 13.

¹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 149. See also Nichols, ‘Introduction,’ 6, where it is likewise asserted that Balthasar “is not especially concerned with the ontological make-up of Christ, with the hypostatic union and its implications”. It is interesting to note that Graham Ward’s multi-volume dogmatics also does not start with the doctrine of God, but with a Christology that is developed ‘from below’. Ward argues – in a similar fashion to Balthasar – that this is the case, since we can “only seek a creaturely understanding of God’s eternal triune nature ... on the basis of salvation history ... (on account of what is revealed about God) in Jesus Christ”. See Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, x.

¹⁸ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 95; Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s “Theatre of the World”,’ 27, and also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘At Play in the Theodrama of the Lord: The Triune God of the Gospel,’ in *Theatrical Theology*:

doing things”, and it is the things that Jesus ‘did’, which Balthasar is interested in.¹⁹ This obviously does not mean that he wants to isolate Jesus of Nazareth’s earthly life, death, and resurrection from his everlasting existence as the ‘second person’ of the immanent Trinity.²⁰ For him, who Christ is ‘from below’ and who he is ‘from above’ form an “elliptical unity” and cannot be separated from one another. It is exactly by looking at the form (and performance) of Jesus’ life ‘from below’, he believes, that we start to perceive, through the ‘eyes of faith’, who Christ (and the triune God) is ‘from above’. In “perusing a ‘Christology from below’”, he writes, “we keep an eye open for the possibility that an answer may eventually come from a ‘Christology from above’; that is, something that goes beyond all the anthropological facts and all the events of salvation history of date”.²¹

Balthasar begins his Christological reflections, which centres on what could be described as “the concrete play of Christ”,²² by turning to the initial ‘script-outline’ of Jesus’ dramatic performance on the world stage, to what he sees as the “libretto of God’s saving drama”, namely, the biblical witness, as an expression of God’s “revelation in history”.²³ As someone trained in the reading and analysis of literature (who, as said in the second chapter, often, in jest, remarked that he is not firstly a theologian but a literary scholar), Balthasar’s reflection on Jesus’ earthly existence is primarily grounded in scriptural exegesis.²⁴ For him, the “utterly astounding and unforeseeable answer to the question who Christ is”, should firstly be sought “in the New Testament”.²⁵ By turning to the biblical witness, and looking at Jesus’ words and deed as recorded in the Gospels (in conversation with critical biblical scholarship and the whole

Explorations in Performing the Faith, eds. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 12.

¹⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 99.

²⁰ See Stefano, ‘Christology after Schleiermacher: Three Twentieth Century Christologists,’ 362-377 (here 373).

²¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 150. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 15, where he writes: “After all, Christ ... is the single capstone of the entire vault of creation built up ‘from below’... Christ is determined from below by the whole world drama, and, on the other hand, he is *not* [only] determined by it since he alone is ‘from above’ (Jn 8:23). The second aspect embraces the first: everything he synthesises in himself was created in the first place with a view to this synthesis. See also, Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 106; and Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 95. Nichols warns that although we should take Balthasar’s claim that he wants to develop his Christology ‘from below’ seriously, we should also notice that he does not place this notion ‘from below’ over against the notion of ‘from above’ (as we often encounter in other theologies).

²² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 53.

²³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22. See also the important section titled ‘The Place of Scripture in Theodrama,’ in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 102-115; Van Erp, *The Art of Theology*, 94.

²⁴ McIntosh, ‘Christology,’ 29. Graham Ward also emphasises that Balthasar’s theology in general, and Christology, in particular, continuously “arises from and return to the Scriptures”. See Ward, ‘Kenosis,’ 42. See also the important essay by William T. Dickens titled ‘Balthasar’s Biblical Hermeneutics,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar*, 175-186.

²⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 149-50. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 55, where Balthasar asserts: “The first task will be to gain access to the figure of Christ, which is only possible through pondering the specific character and structure of the New Testament sources, the Gospels in particular”.

Leben Jesu Forschung-enterprise),²⁶ Balthasar argues that one of the central motifs that come to the fore, is that of Jesus' sense of mission; his awareness of having been sent to perform a unique God-given role on the world stage.²⁷ In his important study of Balthasar's Christology, Mark McIntosh writes that Balthasar's reading of the biblical account of the Christ-event "focuses intensely on the overwhelming role of divine mission in Jesus' life: his total and complete election of his mission, his perfect availability for it, his loving obedience to it".²⁸ For Balthasar, the mission of Christ is indeed "the truth of his identity".²⁹

In a rather extensive section titled 'Christ's Mission and Person',³⁰ which builds directly on the preceding segment where the focus was on exegetical method and the role of critical biblical scholarship, Balthasar goes on to reflect on a range of passages out of the Gospels which shows to what extent Jesus' whole life spoke of this idea of mission. Again and again, Balthasar maintains, in "most places and layers of the text", it is seen how Christ, in the performance that is his earthly life, reveals to his followers and everyone with whom he comes into contact, that he has been sent *to* and *for* the world by his Father, whom he serves "in the most profound human obedience".³¹ For Balthasar, it is evident from Christ's words and deeds, that he "knows and understands that he is utterly and completely the 'One sent'", and that his mission thus

²⁶ It is interesting to note that Balthasar does not dismiss the historical-critical method out of hand, but goes on – in the opening sections of Volume III of *Theo-drama* – to discuss, at length, its history and notable ideas and findings, showing that he, as literally scholar, takes the field seriously and is well-informed about the studies that have been done by a variety of scholars (from David Friedrich Strauss in the 1830's up until some of his contemporaries such as Martin Hengel). He also then agrees, at least at a (very) provisional level, that one can speak of the historical man "Jesus of Nazareth" (who Jesus 'actually' was; Jesus behind the text) and Jesus as the "universalised Object of faith" (the way he is presented by the first Christians communities). Having said this, Balthasar goes on to argue, however, that the so-called 'Jesus of history' and the 'Jesus of faith' are not opposing realities but stand in perfect continuity with one another. Balthasar is, in fact, convinced that what Jesus Christ said and did on earth (and, importantly, who he understood himself to be), as uncovered in and through critical exegeses, and what the first Christians (and, subsequently, the Church throughout the ages) came to proclaim about him as a "testimony of faith", form an 'elliptical unity', where there is complete reciprocity between the "testifying form" and the "content attested" (something, he argues, "classical theology, and the theology of the Fathers and of the Middle-ages [has always proclaimed and been] at home with"). The "disciples' faith" he writes, "would not be faith if it did not have the awareness of being entirely formed by its content". According to him, no "schizophrenic dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith" is thus necessary. See the section 'The Problem of Method,' in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 59-122; as well as Stefano, 'Christology after Schleiermacher: Three Twentieth-Century Christologists,' 373; and Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 101ff.

²⁷ Balthasar writes: "We cannot overestimate the universal and radical nature of Jesus' claim. The words of the Gospel point concentrically to his peerless sense of mission". The early Pauline writings (and the Christology its presents) also confirms this focus, Balthasar holds, countering any suggestion that the words of the Gospels were "amplified and inflated in the course of decades until they came to be written down by the faith of the primitive Church". "Pauline Christology", he writes, "with the regards to the person of Jesus, affirms no less than the strongest words of Jesus himself". See *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 26; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 106.

²⁸ Mark McIntosh, *Christology from Within* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1996), 42.

²⁹ McIntosh, *Christology from Within*, 42.

³⁰ This section is found in Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 149-259.

³¹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 21, 150.

calls for total obedience.³² Balthasar writes that Christ continuously “defines his ‘having come’ in terms of doing the will of him who sent him, performing his works, and speaking his words”.³³ It is thus not a case of him merely doing the Father’s will incidentally, but of him living in and from it, to such an extent that his whole existence is marked by his continued openness and readiness to do what the Father calls him to do, namely, “to serve”, “to give his life as a ransom for many”, to “identify himself with every ‘least’ and ‘lowliest’ human being”, etc.).³⁴ In short, as the one who comes, and receives everything he is, from the Father, Christ renders his whole self available (or to use Stanislavski’s term, *disponible*) to the Father’s will, through the working of the Spirit.³⁵ “Everything in him”, Balthasar writes, “mind, intelligence and free will, is orientated to” his mission.³⁶

For Balthasar, in accordance with Theodor Haecker who was quoted at the end of the previous chapter, this complete and utter obedience and readiness to do the Father’s will, is then what differentiates Jesus from all other human beings throughout history, including, for example, the prophets of whom we read in the Old Testament.³⁷ One of the defining aspects of sinful humanity, according to Balthasar, is the disparity between the roles we are called to perform by God, and by what we, as free individuals, end up doing; between the selfless missions we are given, and our self-serving actions on the world stage. Christ’s perfect obedience and the way he ‘abandons’ his life to the will of the Father (by entering ever deeper into this sinful and unjust world, as the suffering servant), means, however, that with him, ‘mission’ and ‘person’ are inseparably connected. According to Balthasar, we are indeed only acquainted with a single case in history where ‘mission’ and ‘person’ coincide completely, namely, “that of the God-man”.³⁸ Christ does not merely possess a certain mission, but, as the One sent by the Father, “is the task” of bringing about liberation from the forces of death and destruction in this world.³⁹ As his whole life is defined by obedience, his role on earth is not something that is exterior to him, something that he aspires to, or that “is imposed on him from outside, like a law” that he

³² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 168-9, 183. Some of the verses from Scripture which Balthasar refers to at this point includes: Matthew 9:37, 10:40, 15:24; Mark 12:6; Luke 9:48, 10:11, 19:10; and John 1:9, 3:17, 3:19, 6:29-57, 7:29; 8:42, 10:10-36, 11:42, 17:21-5, 16:28.

³³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 152.

³⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 152-3, 516.

³⁵ Balthasar makes a direct link between Stanislavski’s concept of *Disponibilité* (as discussed in the previous chapter) and Jesus’ ‘obedience’ to the role he has been given by the Father. See in this regard, Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 532.

³⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 168, 182-3.

³⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 150. See also the section ‘The Obedience of Jesus,’ in Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, 230-36.

³⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 533.

³⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 168, 170.

has to try to uphold.⁴⁰ It is rather something that, in freedom,⁴¹ is completely identical to the ‘I’ of his existence; something that is inherent to, and that radiates forth from, the very form, or performance, of his dramatic life. Therefore, if we want to know who Christ is, we simply have to look at the role or mission he enacts in obedience to the Father, through the inspiration of the Spirit, out of love for the created world and humanity. Balthasar writes the following in this regard:

[I]n the identity of Jesus’ person and mission, we have the realisation par excellence of what is meant by a dramatic ‘character’, namely, a figure who, by carrying out his role, either attains his true face, or (in analytic drama) unveils his hidden face. In the case of Jesus Christ, we have, in terms of real life, the truth of what is found on the stage, that is, the utter and total identification of the character as a result of the utter and total performance of his mission. Thus, in theo-drama, he is not only the main character but the model for all other actors and the one who gives them their identity as characters ... In his person and mission, Christ is the ‘last Adam’, the one who gives meaning to the entire play [and] embodies mankind’s whole dramatic situation in its relationship to itself and to God.⁴²

For Balthasar, it is then on account of this basic concept of ‘mission’, which comes to the fore, from below, in the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ life on the world stage, that the early Christian communities, and the Church throughout the ages, came to apply “certain ideas, concepts, titles, in varying degrees, to the phenomenon of Jesus”.⁴³ It is also on account of this concept of ‘mission’, that we, today, are invited to ponder the deeper mysteries of, for example, the hypostatic unity of Christ, as well as the dramatic, and, as Balthasar would emphasise, kenotic life of the economic and immanent Trinity. In Balthasar’s thinking, it is indeed “the scope of Jesus’ mission that provides the point of continuity between the man of Nazareth and the universalised object of faith”.⁴⁴ He acknowledges, however, that any theological thinking in this regard is necessary speculative and reliant on further illumination offered by revelation

⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 167.

⁴¹ In Christ, Balthasar holds, we thus find the definitive junction of *finite* and *infinite* freedom (as discussed in the previous chapter). He writes: “All of this confirms at the level of concrete mission what we set forth in principle ... as the abstract relationship between finite and infinite freedom. Above all, it confirms that finite freedom, which possesses itself by acknowledging that it owes its being to Another, must simultaneously transcend itself by rising to its fulfilment in the infinite ambience of freedom that characterises its origin and goal. If this is true in the case of every free, created being, it is superabundantly true of the God-man; his finite freedom is so deeply rooted in his infinite freedom that it continuously transcends itself towards infinity – not in order to rest there, however, but to receive his mission. In turn, the implementation of this mission guarantees the final fulfilment, in God, of created freedom, thus demonstrating the latter’s sovereign and glorious quality”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 199. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 225-6, and 532.

⁴² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 201.

⁴³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 64.

⁴⁴ Stefano, ‘Christology after Schleiermacher: Three Twentieth-Century Christologists,’ 373.

that is received in and through faith, with faith being seen as a “mode of perception” (that is given as gift from God), which does not stand over against reason, but brings it to its fulfilment.⁴⁵

In what could then be considered some of his most intriguing and daring theological writing, which is both deeply grounded in the tradition and highly original, Balthasar goes on, in different parts of the last three volumes of his dramatics, to use this concept of ‘mission’ (and the identity of ‘role’ and ‘personhood’ in the lived life of Jesus of Nazareth), as foundation for his own rather technical reflections on, and affirmation of, the Chalcedonian claim that Christ is not only fully human, but also fully divine; one person with two separate, yet equal, natures (which makes Christ, Balthasar claims, the “concrete *analogia entis*”).⁴⁶ The movement of Balthasar’s thought is thus, in his own words, “from the mission of Jesus to the Son”.⁴⁷ In addition, Balthasar also develops his doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of this proposed ‘Christology of mission’.⁴⁸ Following Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar sees Jesus’ *missio* in the

⁴⁵ Balthasar writes that the truth of Christ and the triune God, never ceases “to be a mystery”, and that we therefore “always need consecration, the gift of the Spirit, the ‘eyes of faith’”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 507. See also Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 131-218, 219-428; as well as Ward, ‘Kenosis,’ 46.

⁴⁶ As emphasised in the second chapter of this dissertation, the principle of the *analogia entis* lies at the very heart of Balthasar’s thought. For Balthasar, the relationship between God and God’s creation is indeed marked by a similarity which is grounded in, and exists on account of, an ever-greater dissimilarity, as God exists necessarily, while creation receives its ‘being’ as gift from God, and is thus contingent on, and participates in, his infinite being. The reason why Christ, while being God, can thus become human, without his human nature being subsumed or annulled by his divine nature, is due to this fact that the creaturely and the divine are not competitive realities, but stand in an analogical relationship to one another. This is one of the central points Balthasar makes in his book on the theology of Karl Barth (who, as mentioned, dismissed the *analogia entis* by saying that it is the invention of the antichrist): that creation contains “images (*Bilder*), analogies as it were, dispositions, which in a true sense are the presupposition for the incarnation”. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 177. Balthasar, however, also then goes further by arguing that the incarnation is not only *possible* because of the continuity-amidst-discontinuity between God and creation, but *is* its fulfilment. As Christ enters the created world, the *dissimilitudo* between creation and God (which frames, and enables, the *similitudo* between the two), is definitively overcome. Creation as “image of God”, he writes, has “always been created for the sake of the ‘similitudo’ ... to serve as a place where the divine Archetype can be implanted” – which is what happens in Christ; *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 177, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 525. And it is then on account of this reality, that Balthasar describes Christ as being the “*analogia entis* in person”, the “concrete *analogia entis*”, who is the “ultimate union of divine and created being ... the final proportion between the two”, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 221-2. As he phrases it in his book *Theology of History*: “In this sense Christ can be called the ‘concrete analogy of being’, *analogia entis*, since he constitutes in himself, in the union of his divine and human natures, the proposition of every distance between God and man. And this union is his person in both natures ... The philosophical formulation of the analogy of being is related to the measure of Christ precisely as is world history to his history – as promise to fulfilment, the preliminary to the definite”, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 74. For two insightful engagements with this aspect of Balthasar’s thought, see Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs Balthasar*, 19-90, as well as the monograph by Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs Balthasar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 515.

⁴⁸ Balthasar writes: It is “only on the basis of Jesus Christ’s own behaviour and attitude that we can distinguish such a plurality in God. Only in him is the Trinity opened up and made accessible ... We know about the Father, Son, and Spirit as divine ‘Persons’ only through the figure and disposition of Jesus Christ. Thus we can agree with the principle, often enunciated today, that it is only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we can have knowledge of the immanent Trinity and dare to make statements about it”. This, however, does not mean that the immanent Trinity can be reduced to the economic Trinity. He continues: While, “according to Christian faith, the

world, as the “economic form of his eternal *processio* from the Father”.⁴⁹ The fact that Christ is sent to the world by the Father, and, in response (through the working of the Spirit), gives everything he ‘is’ back, by pouring himself “forth in any way that the Father may determine”, provides Balthasar with a ‘model’, however insufficient, to understand something of the mystery of the ‘primal divine drama’, which consists out of a “primal kenosis” – an eternal ‘reckless’ giving of the ‘self’ and receiving of the ‘other’ within the Godhead.⁵⁰ Ben Quash explains this idea of the kenotic nature of the immanent Trinity, which, for Balthasar, ultimately serves as the foundation for both God’s act of creation and Christ’s kenosis into the world,⁵¹ as follows:

In Jesus Christ’s attitude of total, free availability, [Balthasar] glimpse[s] the utter perichoretic self-donation (and mutual constitution) of the trinitarian Persons in the perfection of their love... The total ‘kenosis’ of each and the thankful (‘eucharistic’) return to each of himself by the other becomes the ground of trinitarian unity, being, and love ... [According to Balthasar], God’s nature is [thus] something like (that is, analogous to) thanksgiving, something like generosity, something like obedience, something like sacrifice, something like a never-ending surprised receipt of self from others, but only as exceeding all that we know as creaturely thanksgiving, generosity, obedience, sacrifice, and surprise.⁵²

economic Trinity assuredly appears as the interpretation of the immanent Trinity, it may not be identified with it, for the latter grounds and supports the former. Otherwise the immanent, eternal Trinity would threaten to dissolve into the economic; in other words, God would be swallowed up in the world process”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 505, 508, and also 512.

⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 201; See also *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 356, where he writes: “[T]he Son’s *missio* is his *processio* extended in ‘economic’ mode; but whereas in his *processio* he moves towards the Father in receptivity and gratitude, in his *missio* ... he moves away from him and towards the world, into the latter’s ultimate darkness”. Cf. Ward, ‘Kenosis,’ 46, and *How the Light Gets In*, 216.

⁵⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 330-2. Balthasar writes: “Father’s self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial ‘kenosis’ within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son. He lets go of his divinity and, in this sense, manifests a divine God-lessness of love ... The Son’s answer to the gift of Godhead (of equal substance to the Father) can only be eternal thanksgiving (*eucharista*) – a thanksgiving as selfless and unreserved as the Father’s original self-surrender (*Hingabe*). Proceeding from both, as their subsistent ‘We’, there breathes the Spirit ... the essence of love”; *Volume IV*, 323-4. God’s imminent life, according to Balthasar, is thus marked by ‘powerlessness’ – by absolute surrender. Balthasar describes something of this *kenosis* within the Trinity, in one of the prayers he composed, which reads: “You, Father, give your entire being as God to the Son; you are the Father only inasmuch as you give yourself; you, Son, receive everything from the Father and before Him you want nothing other than one receiving and giving back, the one representing glorifying the Father in loving obedience; you, Spirit, are the unity of these two mutually meeting, self-giving, their We as a new I that royally, divinely rules them both”. This prayer can be found on the last page of *The Balthasar Reader*, eds. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985), 428-9.

⁵¹ Balthasar writes: The “primal *kenosis* makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into the world; they are simply its consequences”. See *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 331.

⁵² Quash, ‘The Theo-Drama,’ 151. See also: Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 301ff, 505-535 (the section ‘Deus Trinitas’); Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Volume V, The Final Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 82; ‘Basic Questions of Christology,’ 319, etc. For one of the seminal treatments of this topic in Balthasar’s thought, see Ward’s essay ‘Kenosis’. Ward writes:

For the purposes of this chapter and of the dissertation as a whole, it is not necessary to delve any further into the finer intricacies and technicalities of Balthasar's use of this concept of 'mission' to affirm Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and to develop his views on the kenotic drama within the immanent Trinity. There are, in fact, many dissertations and monographs that are solely focused on addressing this topic.⁵³ What is important at this point, is simply to take note of the great emphasis Balthasar's places on Christ's dramatic role or mission on earth, as a key to understanding who he is. According to Balthasar, Christ's mission indeed stands at the very heart of his existence; everything that he says and does, in the words of Mark McIntosh, can be seen "as a reflection of" his identity and calling as Son of God.⁵⁴ With this in mind, it is also important to note that when Balthasar speaks about Christ's mission and makes certain claims about Christ's divine nature and the intra-Trinitarian life on account of it, he does not, in the first place, do so in an abstract manner. He rather places at the centre of his reflections what could be deemed as the action-filled 'content' of Jesus' mission; the 'acts' on the world stage out of which Jesus' mission consists. For Balthasar, Christ's mission is, after all, pure "action"; a chain of dramatic events playing out in a specific time and space.⁵⁵ And it is to this dramatic 'content' of the Word of God, which, as said above, take the form of three 'syllables' (namely, 'life', 'death', and 'resurrection'), that we now turn.

4.3. The Witness of Jesus' Public Life

In what follows, we will begin by looking at what Balthasar sees as the first 'syllable' of the Word of God's mission on earth, namely, his public life and ministry (which, as said above, "heralds the kingdom of God").⁵⁶ Before doing so, it is, however, important to briefly mention how Balthasar understands the unity and particularity of each part of Christ's mission.

In this regard, it should be noted that, for Balthasar, the climactic word that is spoken in Jesus of Nazareth, should ultimately be seen as single word expressing one mission, which is aimed, in its entirety, at bringing about salvation in and for the world. According to Balthasar, the

"Kenosis is not simply at the centre of Balthasar's theology. Its economy is both the condition for the possibility of theo-logic itself and its very form (*Gestalt*) ..." (40).

⁵³ For a comprehensive list of secondary literature and dissertations that have been written on Balthasar's thought, see the document: 'Hans Urs Balthasar – Sekundärliteratur: Monographien, Dissertation, Habilitationsschriften,' Johannes Verlag, last accessed August 10, 2018, http://www.johannesverlag.de/jh_huvb_sekund_monographien.pdf. This list is published by Balthasar's Publishing House, Johannes Verlag, and is updated every year.

⁵⁴ McIntosh, 'Christology,' 28.

⁵⁵ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 532.

⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 43.

pattern of Christ's life should, "like all historical patterns", be perceived "as a whole to be perceived rightly".⁵⁷ This means that the full significance and implications of Christ's mission only become apparent after, and in the light of, the reality of the empty grave, when all the dramatic action that occurred on the world stage can be considered together.⁵⁸ "Just as a melody can only be 'understood' when its final note has died away and our memory recollects all the notes into their pre-existing unity", Balthasar writes, "so the Christ-event can only be grasped in its totality from the resurrection".⁵⁹ This does not mean, however, that one should not also accentuate and hone in on the specific 'parts' out of which this larger, unified 'melody' of Christ's mission consists. Balthasar is, in fact, very adamant about the fact that, in order to understand something of the single 'word' spoken in Christ, it is of the utmost importance to take the particularity of each of its different 'syllables' seriously. Christ's mission, he argues, while being one, clearly contains distinct 'moments', and to ignore this reality, or to collapse these 'moments' into one another, as often happen with Christologies that are solely focused on, for example, the cross or the resurrection, can only but distort our understanding of the larger, unified whole. When thinking about the dramatic performance of Christ on the world stage, it is therefore necessary, according to Balthasar, to "maintain both the interconnectedness and the distinctness" of his life, death, and resurrection.⁶⁰ And this is then exactly what he attempts to do in his own account of Christ's dramatic existence on earth.

According to Balthasar, the first 'syllable' that forms part of the larger 'word' spoken in Christ is indeed, as said above, Jesus' public life and ministry. This syllable, he writes, is by "no means a mere ante-room to the real action", but is in itself of crucial importance for the larger mission of Christ.⁶¹ As mentioned above, Balthasar is wary of any Christology that conveniently prances forward to Christ's passion without worrying too much about what happens before this moment. Therefore, in two brief, yet incisive, sections in the third and fourth volumes of his dramatics, as well as in many other works,⁶² he makes sure to focus his attention on aspects of Christ's life leading up to his incarceration, trial, and violent death on the cross.

For Balthasar, one of the central features of Jesus' public ministry, as seen in the different accounts offered by the Gospels, is the way in which it heralds the coming kingdom of God (or

⁵⁷ Oakes, *The Pattern of Redemption*, 231.

⁵⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 310.

⁵⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us? Do We Know Him?*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 89; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 107.

⁶⁰ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 106.

⁶¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 233.

⁶² See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 43-53 and *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 231-40.

the kingdom of the heavens, as Matthew prefers to speak of it), through the words Jesus utters, yes, but also, simultaneously, through his embodied actions on the world stage. According to Balthasar, Christ does not only preach about the coming kingdom of God, but, as a true actor in the world drama, enacts this coming kingdom in a tangible manner for all to see. The coming kingdom proclaimed by Christ, Balthasar writes, is thus “no unintelligible abstraction but something colourful and concrete”.⁶³ In the “historical Jesus”, he contends, “this kingdom is actually in the process of coming-to-be”.⁶⁴ Although the kingdom is, and in many ways remains, something that lies on the horizon and will only become the world’s sole reality at the *parousia*, it is already starting to become an actuality through the dramatic performance of Christ’s bodily existence – to such an extent that it can, at least in a provisional manner, be re-performed by those imitating his life.⁶⁵ In one of the radio talks he gave on his dramatic Christology, Balthasar notes the following:

Jesus’ words and deeds, his whole being, is utterly inseparable from his message. It is not merely that he is entrusted with the task of heralding the immanent kingdom; rather, it is only in him that the kingdom’s nearness is recognised; it is only in him that we *have* the Kingdom ... [This is why people were] amazed and asked: “What is this? A new teaching! With authority!” (Mk 1:27). What is new, what amazes them, is precisely this authority that is visible and tangible in the words and actions of Jesus. The indissoluble connection between the proclamation of the kingdom and the Person of Jesus is affirmed by every pericope of the Gospels ... [T]his Word that proclaims the Father’s kingdom is inseparable from its content ... It *would* be separable from its content if it were nothing more than God’s ‘advocate’ in the world (as Hans Küng says). No, in the Gospels – in all four Gospels! – the content, that is, the Father and the kingdom, has no other vessel than the Word, the Son.⁶⁶

When it thus comes to the question of what exactly the coming kingdom of God will entail, which is a question that has often led to disastrous happenings in history when ‘God’s coming reign’ was conflated with, or construed in terms of, certain earthly reigns,⁶⁷ Balthasar believes

⁶³ *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 312.

⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 43.

⁶⁵ Balthasar *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 45 and also *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 234. For Balthasar, we can thus speak of the “dual reality of the kingdom as coming-to-be within Jesus’ ministry and yet ever on the horizon”. See Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 107.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 309-10. From quotations such as this one, it is clear that Balthasar, to an extent, holds a version of a realised eschatology. He writes, for example, in the last volume of his theodramatic project: The Christ-event “is the vertical irruption of the fulfilment into horizontal time; such irruption does not leave this time – with its present, past and future – unchanged, but it draws it into itself and thereby gives it a new character”. See *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 25.

⁶⁷ See for example Arthur Clutton-Brock’s classic study (written at the end of the First World War): *What is the Kingdom of Heaven* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014 [1919]).

that we should primarily look at the performance of Jesus' own life (which includes both his words and his deeds). For Balthasar, the kingdom of God, while a mystery which transcends all earthly conceptions, is indeed not an immaterial 'utopia', but something "utterly concrete", as it is "bound to the person of Christ".⁶⁸

When one then looks at the drama of Christ's existence – at the words he preaches and the actions he performs – it becomes clear that this coming kingdom of God, which is inaugurated with Christ's incarnation and ultimately brought to fulfilment through his cross and resurrection (to which we will turn shortly), is decidedly dissimilar to any earthly kingdom in history. God's coming kingdom (which breaks in from above, through the embodied performance of Jesus, from below), is indeed not a kingdom of power, but of powerlessness; not a kingdom of pride, but of humility; not a kingdom of self-glorification, but of self-surrender and kenosis; not a kingdom of violence, coercion, and oppression, but of peace, justice, and love. It is a kingdom, where those who are first, are last, and those who are last, first; where the mighty are "put down", and the "humble and meek are exalted", as Mary sings in her Magnificat – which inevitably means that it has serious socio-political implications, both for first century Palestine and also for today. Balthasar does not want to define the coming kingdom, and Jesus' mission as a whole, solely in socio-political terms, but nonetheless recognises, as has already been seen in his section on political theology in the first volume of his theodramatics, that God's coming kingdom exposes, challenges, and starts to undo, the logic that underlies and upholds "the totalitarian claims of the Roman empire", and of all other 'powers and principalities' in this world, throughout history.⁶⁹ One of the places where Balthasar states his views in this regard most clearly, is in his important essay titled 'The Beatitudes and Human Rights', which stands in continuity with, and further develops, many of the ideas expressed in his theodramatic theory (in explicitly socio-political terms). Given the significance of this essay for a project such as this one, and, it could be argued, for any other comprehensive engagement with Balthasar theodramatic theory, as a whole,⁷⁰ we will briefly look at its content.

Balthasar's main focus in this essay, which has long been ignored by the Anglophone theological community as it was not available in translation until recently, is indeed the drama of Jesus' public life and ministry, which he attempts to investigate with reference to both the

⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 44.

⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 210. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 157.

⁷⁰ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 114-7.

Beatitudes, which he regards as the “mighty overture to the whole of Jesus’ preaching”,⁷¹ as well as, to a lesser degree, Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. Balthasar is particularly interested in the version of the Beatitudes recorded in Luke’s gospel, where the “Lord’s inaugural ‘sermon’”, in his words, is casted in “an analogous form that borrows heavily from Isaiah”, and shows Jesus to be the one bringing “glad tidings to the poor” and proclaiming “liberty to the captives”, as well as “freedom to the oppressed”.⁷² The question Balthasar seeks to answer is what it could possibly mean when Jesus says that “the poor”, “the hungry”, “those who currently weep” and “those who are hated and excluded and reviled” are – or will be – blessed? Should these pronouncements solely be understood in an eschatological sense, as promises that will be realised at the end of time,⁷³ or do these words, in fact, hold any truth for the present moment?

Balthasar subsequently goes on to offer a fervent defence of the latter position and claims that any “facile antinomy” between justice in this life, and justice in the life to come, should be rejected.⁷⁴ The reason for this, he argues, is the fact that the coming kingdom of God, as emphasised in his theodramatics, should not be seen as a reality merely belonging to a distant future, but as something which already, in the present moment, breaks into this world through Christ’s embodied existence.⁷⁵ Jesus himself, he writes, rejects any form of “apocalypticism”, which simply awaits “a temporal event that would supposedly replace the present evil aeon with a new and totally different age”.⁷⁶ The coming of Christ into the world, Balthasar contends, “has already brought the definite newness”; Christ himself is “heaven come to earth”.⁷⁷ According to Balthasar, Jesus does thus not “merely promise that those who now mourn on earth will laugh in a distant future after their death, or that those who hunger now will have their fill only in a new aeon”, but that they can “expect a share in the abundance of divine goods here and now”, even, then, amidst ongoing persecution.⁷⁸ Indeed, because the kingdom is already taking hold of this world through the coming of Christ, he asserts, the goodness,

⁷¹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V, Man is Created*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014), 442.

⁷² Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 442.

⁷³ Balthasar notes that this view mostly stems from the prominence that the Beatitudes take in the book Revelation. He writes: “Revelation, which cites the Beatitudes more frequently than any other book of the New Testament, relates them almost without exception to the martyrs who have persevered to the end in their almost hopeless battle against overpowering evil”. “It is the martyrs”, he continues, “who have washed their garments in the blood of the Lamb (that is, they have given up their lives in communion with him) and, so, take part in the first resurrection and in his eschatological wedding feast”. Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

⁷⁴ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

⁷⁵ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

⁷⁶ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 444.

blessedness, and justice that God has always willed for humanity,⁷⁹ are realities that should already now, in this life, be anticipated, sought, and, importantly prayed for.⁸⁰

In accordance with the views expressed in his theodramatics, as mentioned above, Balthasar furthermore emphasises that the way in which the coming kingdom of God transpires in this world, is exactly in and through the dramatic performance of Christ's life; in and through Christ's embodied actions on the world stage. Jesus' concern for the poor and persecuted, as read about in the Beatitudes, is not restricted to the words that he utters, as if he was "imparting some theoretical instruction", but becomes a lived reality through the way he acts towards, and enters into the "most intimate solidarity, indeed, identity with those who suffer poverty, hunger, tears, and persecution".⁸¹ According to Balthasar, Christ's whole dramatic life is aimed at, and lived in solidarity with, people who have been marginalised, exploited, and dehumanised by the powerful and the rich; people who have been forsaken and forgotten by the mighty rulers of this world, and also, therefore, feel forsaken and forgotten by God. Christ's mission does not start "with the so-called important" and end "with the so-called unimportant", but "proceeds in the opposite direction".⁸² Through his ever-deeper kenosis into the world, Christ comes to stand "with his whole being behind the least", Balthasar writes.⁸³ And in doing so, he takes their "burden of poverty, hunger, tears, and oppression ... superabundantly ... upon himself".⁸⁴ Balthasar continues by saying the following in this regard:

Jesus himself spent his entire public life [drawing close to those in need] in his attitudes and his actions... [He] drew close ... to all the kinds of people whom no Pharisee would ever have touched. 'He went about doing good'. He is so ardent an apostle of love of

⁷⁹ Balthasar makes the point that, in reading the Old Testament, it is seen that justice for the *poor, hungry, and persecuted*, has – from the very start – been part of God's will for the world. Acknowledging the helpful contribution of Liberation Theology in this regard, Balthasar holds that the Old Testament writers continually insist on an intrinsic bond between one's righteousness before God, and one's ethical behaviour towards others. He writes: "We can ... recall the oft-remarked seamless transition from the tablet of the law, which regulates man's relation with God ... to the second, which regulates his relation to his fellows". He also notes how "the prophets – primarily Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, but also others as well – stress that the blatant violation of the second tablet implies an unnoticed but equally blatant violation of the first." Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 445.

⁸⁰ In his book on prayer, Balthasar writes the following: "The wish 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' is ... to open the world of time to its invasion by the whole *being* of the kingdom of heaven... What, in prayer, we yearn for, the 'coming' for which we plead, is not something as yet non-existent... It is the eternally Real; we, who are unreal, need to allow it to conquer us. So the reality of contemplation is the eternal reality of the kingdom of heaven; through contemplation it also becomes a reality here and now, for mankind and for the world". See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 104.

⁸¹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 445.

⁸² Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

⁸³ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 446.

⁸⁴ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 446.

neighbour that some have plausibly misunderstood him as [simply] a humanist, just as some have regarded Francis ... as a mere nature lover.⁸⁵

Balthasar consequently argues that, as Christ draws near to, and enters into solidarity with, those who are poor, hungry, and oppressed, and as he speaks to them in love, washes their feet, feeds them, and heals them, he restores and attests to their God-given dignity in the most profound manner.⁸⁶ Through Christ's actions, the "little ones" are indeed lifted up and seen for who they truly are, namely, "creaturely mirrors reflecting the whole dignity" of God, the One who created them in his image and calls them by their names.⁸⁷ For Balthasar, Christ's kenotic existence thus becomes the foundation for, and guarantee of, the dignity of all those are usually pushed aside by the rich and powerful. The "more radically" a man or woman is "stripped of any personal power", he argues, "the more clearly visible the presence of the Son of God becomes" in him or her.⁸⁸ Since Christ descended into the worlds as a slave, it is exactly those who are marginalised and exploited by the mighty, whose dignity is restored and affirmed by his 'coming'.⁸⁹ This is then why, Balthasar writes, the poor and the persecuted, the hungry and the weeping, can and should, already in this life, be called blessed; for where they are, Christ also is, and where Christ is, restoration takes place, dignity is affirmed, and justice "rolls down like living water", to quote the prophet Amos.⁹⁰

As the essay continues, Balthasar contends that these words and actions by Christ, which brings what is truly "human into view",⁹¹ have provoked two different responses throughout history. On the one hand, they have been met with awe and wonder and a sense of calling to cooperate with Christ in doing good in the world. Mostly, however, when understood rightly, the message of Christ's words and deeds, has been met with exactly the opposite response, namely, with anger, hatred, and disgust, on account of the fact that it confronts and threatens the kingdoms of this world and relativizes the authority of the rich and the mighty. Balthasar writes that it is indeed "where true humanism is proclaimed and human rights are truly championed", as happens in the life of Christ, "that the persecution starts".⁹² The "more compellingly the truth of the Christian message shines forth, the more wildly it is refused as an intolerable claim".⁹³

⁸⁵ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 449.

⁸⁶ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447, and *Mysterium Paschale*, 11.

⁸⁷ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

⁸⁸ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

⁸⁹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

⁹⁰ Amos 5:24.

⁹¹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 458.

⁹² Balthasar *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 452. According to Balthasar, the irony is that these persecutors are often men "who call themselves 'humanists', but who are determined to enforce human rights with their own preferred tools – which may include nuclear weapons". See also Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 58.

⁹³ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 451-452.

This already becomes evident in the drama of Christ's own life. In reading the Gospels, it is constantly seen how Christ's words and deeds insult and anger the worldly powers. The more "radiantly Jesus reveals his identity as the Son of God", and makes his message known to the world, Balthasar writes, "the more energetically he is rejected" and "the more intolerable his presence becomes within polite society".⁹⁴ The way in which his actions retrieve "the *humanum*" and restore it to its "original purpose and destined splendour",⁹⁵ leads to such outrage, that the only possible outcome can be his execution at the hands of the powerful – something Balthasar strongly emphasises towards the end of this essay.

At this point, we can return to Balthasar's exploration of, and engagement with, Christ's life and ministry in the work *Theo-drama* itself. Also here, especially in the fourth volume, Balthasar focuses on how Christ's proclamation of God's coming kingdom on the world stage leads towards, and find its cathartic climax in, his violent death on the cross. For Balthasar, it is important to emphasise that "right from the outset", Jesus' life is moving in a definite direction, that is, "towards passion and death".⁹⁶ The reason for this, as mentioned above, is the fact that Christ's message challenges and provokes the powers and principalities of this world, who then responds in the only language that they are truly fluent in, namely, the language of violence. According to Balthasar, the only way for the mighty to refute the claims Jesus makes is, in fact, by "killing off the Claimer".⁹⁷ Christ's "solidarity with the poor (in every form), Balthasar writes, has "a catastrophic logic", which can only but "bring him to the cross".⁹⁸ For Balthasar, Jesus' death is thus "not an isolated event but the final consequence of a righteousness he had maintained through his life".⁹⁹ According to Walatka, this word 'righteousness' that Balthasar uses, refers to both Jesus' "total faithfulness to the Father" and "his loving mercy" and "solidarity with all those in need".¹⁰⁰ Balthasar also then writes:

⁹⁴ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 451. According to Balthasar *this* response to Jesus' words and deeds, can be seen to stand in continuity with "the fundamental theodramatic law of world history: the greater the revelation of divine (ground-less) love, the more it elicits a groundless ... hatred from man". See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 338.

⁹⁵ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 450; *Engagement with God*, 58.

⁹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 247.

⁹⁷ See Edward T. Oakes, 'Envoi: The Future of Balthasarian Theology,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar*, 272. See also Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 237, where Oakes writes: In Balthasar's thought, "Jesus is punished for the claim he made, a punishment that was historically unavoidable, given the setting of first century Judaism in Roman-occupied Palestine".

⁹⁸ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 138; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 122.

⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 259; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 125. Balthasar interestingly notes that this understanding of Jesus' death as "the ultimate consequence of his initiative on behalf of righteousness", provide a helpful "link to a theology of liberation" (which was very contentions in the circles he was finding himself in at the time of writing the latter part of his theodramatics, as will be discussed at the end of the chapter). See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 259. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 161.

¹⁰⁰ Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 125.

[A]t the purely earthly level, the claim Jesus makes by his words and his actions provokes and ‘entices’ his death. From the very beginning of his public ministry (Mk 3:6), people are discussing how they may destroy him, and a first attempt is made (Lk 4:29). [As his ministry continues] [t]he net is drawn tighter and tighter around him, for example, in John’s account of the disputes: “You seek to kill me” (Jn 8:40), until the catastrophic final act begins with treason from within his own ranks.¹⁰¹

For Balthasar, the “provocation” of Christ embodied existence on the world stage could only thus “end tragically”.¹⁰² This does not mean, however, that the cross is an unintended or merely consequential development in Christ’s mission. According to Balthasar, Christ’s death, elicited by the provocation of his life, had, in fact, from the very start been part of God’s redemptive plan for humanity. It is something that has been “foreseen and for-willed from all eternity”.¹⁰³ For, to quote an old Patristic axiom that Balthasar is particularly fond of, “what has not been assumed by Christ’s human nature, cannot be redeemed”.¹⁰⁴ If Christ’s incarnation was to be fully redemptive, and if death, as “the universal, radical annihilator” was to be overcome and destroyed,¹⁰⁵ then Christ’s descent into the world, and his solidarity with humanity, also had to include this reality.¹⁰⁶ Balthasar accordingly emphasises that Christ did not only die because he was born and walked the earth, but also, as Gregory of Nyssa remarked, was born and walked the earth so that he could eventually die (and share in and conquer “the deadliness of death from within”).¹⁰⁷ Death is thus both the consequence of Christ’s life, and the reason for it. That is not to say that Christ deliberately reached “out for death in advance by his own action”.¹⁰⁸ He simply preached and performed the coming kingdom of God, knowing, however, that a certain inescapable fate awaits him, which he would have to face, in obedience to the Father,

¹⁰¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 497.

¹⁰² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 435.

¹⁰³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 435.

¹⁰⁴ This saying is usually attributed to Gregory Nazianzus but is also found in the writing of many other Patristic thinkers in the East and the West. See Nicholas Healy and David Schindler, ‘For the Life of the World: Hans Urs Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar*, 55; and Oakes, *The Pattern of Redemption*, 245.

¹⁰⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487.

¹⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 498. Cf. also Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 12, 22. Balthasar writes in *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 54: “The central issue in theo-drama is that God has made his own the tragic situation of human existence, right down to its ultimate abysses; thus, without drawing its teeth or imposing an extrinsic solution to it, he overcomes it. ‘No sign shall be given to this generation but the sign of the prophet Jonah ... and behold, something greater than Jonah is here’ (Mt 12:39ff)”.

¹⁰⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 492; *Mysterium Paschale*, 20-1; Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Life out of Death: Meditations on the Paschal Mystery*, trans. Martina Stöckl (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 33-4; Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. cat.* 32. The original quotation reads as follows: “If one examines this mystery, one will prefer to say, not his death was a consequence of his birth, but that the birth was undertaken so that he could die”.

¹⁰⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 493.

for his life and message to bring about true salvation and deliverance for humanity and the world.¹⁰⁹

This last point, that Christ was not only conscious of the fact that he is has been sent to and for the world, but also of the fact that his mission, which he undertook in obedience to the Father for the sake of humanity, would end in death, forms an integral part of Balthasar's account of Jesus' public life and ministry, especially in the fourth volume of his dramatics. Balthasar continually emphasises that, while Christ's words and deeds were filled with and spoke of light (to the extent that he could truly be called the "light of the world"), he knew, and continually told his followers, that "night is coming", that his and the world's "hour of darkness" would soon arrive.¹¹⁰ When exactly this 'hour' would come, and what exactly it would entail, remained, however, a mystery to the Son; not because these details were hidden from him (he is, after all, God), but because he chooses, Balthasar argues, to remain ignorant in this regard. According to Balthasar, Christ "refuses to anticipate either the time or the content of the hour", but rather actively gives this last, climactic moment of his life and ministry over to the Father, so that he can fully, as human being, embrace "the totality of the world that is to be reconciled".¹¹¹ Riyako Cecilia Hikota writes in this regard:

[According to Balthasar], Jesus 'laid up' the knowledge he could have had for reason of the economy of salvation ... He is completely ignorant of 'the hour', even though from the beginning [he] is entirely aware that his whole life directs towards [it]. Balthasar emphasises this point and insists that we should take [Jesus'] words [in this regard] literally (unlike the Scholastic position that Jesus merely pretended not to know). The Son of God is also God, so there is no doubt that he is omniscient. Therefore, his genuine ignorance is nothing but the result of his wish to become more fully human. He could have known everything, but he chose not to know some things [so as to enter ever deeper into solidarity with humankind and surrender the last moment of his life to the Father's will].¹¹²

While keeping in mind all of what has been said above, we can now move on to the second 'syllable' of Christ's mission on earth, namely, his death and descent into hell, which Balthasar sees as "his mission's centre of gravity", the 'end' which his life, on the one hand, brings forth,

¹⁰⁹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 494-5.

¹¹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 233; Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 48.

¹¹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 234. See also Balthasar, *Credo*, 47.

¹¹² Riyako Cecilia Hikota, *And Still we Wait: Hans Urs Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday and Christian Discipleship* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 38-9. For Balthasar's discussion of Patristic and Scholastic treatments of this topic, see *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 191ff (a section titled 'Mission and the Measure of the Knowledge and Freedom of Jesus').

and to which it, on the other hand, has always been ordered. To return to an idea expressed in the previous chapter's discussion of the contemporary theological trend of 'dialogue': there are certain moments when more than mere words and deeds are required to bring about a *dénouement*, moments when defeat seems inevitable, and death needs to be faced, in order for new life to emerge, which is exactly the case in the Christ-drama.

4.4. Christ's Death – For Us and With Us

Although Balthasar is adamant about the fact that each 'syllable' of Christ's mission is of fundamental importance within the larger unity of Christ's dramatic existence, Jesus' death and his descent into hell, takes a principal place in the Christology that he develops in the last three volumes of his dramatics. "God's entire world drama", he writes, "is concentrated on and hinges on this scene".¹¹³ Just as the mission of Christ forms the focal point of all history, so Jesus' cross is, in Balthasar's thought, the focal point of his mission. It is the "centre and zenith of the theodramatic action", which "sums up" and "provides a lasting framework and horizon for" everything else, in this life and the life to come.¹¹⁴ For Balthasar, an essential task in his theodramatic theory is thus, in the words of Gregory Nazianzus, to investigate "that problem and that teaching, which so often are passed over in silence, but – for that reason – [should be studied] with all the more eagerness ... That precious and glorious divine Blood poured for us: for what reason and to what end has such a price been paid?".¹¹⁵ It is to this investigation by Balthasar, which, like many other parts of his theology is both "traditional and original, grounded in dogmatic teaching and markedly speculative",¹¹⁶ that we now turn our attention.

For Balthasar, the first words that should be uttered about Christ's death and descent into hell, which serves as a disclaimer of sorts, preceding everything else that will be said, is that it is an ineffable mystery (which defies and transcends every human conception), and cannot ever be

¹¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 318. That a play has one, all-defining scene is a common feature throughout the history of theatre, Balthasar argues in the first volume of *Theo-drama*. He remarks: "For the most part the flow of the dramatic tension converges on one or more central scenes where it reaches its greatest density; then it expands and relaxes again as light is shed from above; many of Shakespeare's plays are built around a single scene on which everything hangs". See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 348-9.

¹¹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 50. In his small booklet on the *Apostolicum*, Balthasar describes the cross as an 'event' in which "all the unsurveyable epochs, from the beginning to the end of the world, are brought together". See Balthasar, *Credo*, 48. This fact that Christ's passion is an event which ripples out throughout history and effects all eternity, is emphasised by Balthasar's (almost curious) inclusion of an extensive reflection on the book of Revelation at the beginning of the fourth volume of his theodramatic project. Balthasar's reflections on the cross are thus framed by his reflections on the Eschaton, as the fifth volume of his dramatics also mainly draws on the book of Revelations. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 15-70; and also, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 19ff (where Balthasar picks up from where he left off in the fourth volume).

¹¹⁵ Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio 45* (PG 36, 653A). This quotation by Gregory Nazianzus appears at the very start of Balthasar's monograph on the *Triduum* titled *Mysterium Paschale*. See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 117.

“reduced to a ‘system’”.¹¹⁷ The cross, in fact, “explodes all systems”, Balthasar remarks.¹¹⁸ While we can and should speak about Christ’s death, we should know, he emphasises, that all speech about the Lord’s ‘hour’, including, importantly, his own, will evermore remain inadequate and subject to critique. For Balthasar, is thus not strange that “the Passion narratives, and subsequently the theological interpretations of the cross, employ different theologoumena, circling concentrically around a transcendent core”.¹¹⁹ As the full meaning of Christ’s death always exceeds any human description or explanation, it is only natural that a plurality of perspectives would emerge throughout the ages, and that also today, there is no single theory or scheme that can claim to offer a definitive answer to the questions posed above (in the words of Gregory Nazianzus). According to Balthasar, the Paschal mystery is, and remains, a mystery that asks to be contemplated by the Church, and not a riddle that needs to be solved (to use Origen’s words).¹²⁰

Balthasar begins his lengthy treatment of the cross by briefly looking at a few biblical themes pertaining to the Paschal mystery, as he, also here, wants to primarily ground his reflection in the scriptural account of Christ’s life, or then, death.¹²¹ Next, he sets out to survey, engage with, and critically evaluate various theologies of the cross that have been offered and adhered to during the history of the Church. As a *ressourcement*-theologian, who continued to stand under the influence of someone like Henri de Lubac throughout his life, the first theologians that Balthasar turns to are naturally the Church Fathers. These early Christian thinkers, he notes, largely understood and presented Christ’s passion as an ‘*admirabile commercium*’, a ‘wondrous exchange’, where Christ, in the overtly dramatic words of Gregory Nazianzus, “plays our role (*dramatourgeitai*), in our name”, so as to achieve our redemption.¹²² After his

¹¹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 229, 237, 319; and also, *New Elucidations*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 319

¹¹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 237.

¹²⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 229, and Kevin Tortorelli, *Christology with Lonergan and Balthasar* (Cambridge: Melrose Books, 2005), 96. Cf. also Origen’s interesting comments on the ‘mysteries’ contained in Scripture. According to Origen, Scripture’s “super-terrestrial mysteries ... are not puzzles [to] be solved ... but becomes all the more mysterious the more one penetrates it”. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ed. *Origen, Spirit and Fire: A Theological Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 89.

¹²¹ Balthasar writes that some of the main motifs that come to the fore in the Scriptures with regards to Christ’s death, are that Christ (1) gives *himself* up for our salvation – both as sacrificial lamb, who “obediently lets things happen”, and as Priest, who “deliberately acts by willing consenting to us”; (2) takes upon himself the death that was destined for us, thereby dying for us and also with us; (3) brings about salvation and liberation for all humanity, from the “slavery of sin”, but also from the “world powers” and the “powers of darkness”; (4) imparts to humanity a new freedom to live for God and others (“as children of the Most High”); and (5) expresses, in a definitive sense, God’s gracious love and mercy. Once again, in listing these motifs, Balthasar does not want to put forward any “self-contained system” but is merely attempting – at the very start – to set in place some sort of foundational frame of reference (rooted in the biblical witness). See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 240-244 and Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 118, 159-60.

¹²² Balthasar *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 250-1. Balthasar holds that, according to this view, Christ, as the “central figure of the world stage”, does not only ‘portray’ himself, “but us too in him, on the basis of an appropriation

discussion of patristic soteriology (in a section which includes a myriad of quotations from, Irenaeus, Augustine, the Cappadocian Fathers, and Maximus the Confessor), he moves on to certain medieval views, promulgated by the likes of Anselm, the first systematic theologian of the atonement whose use of the concept *satisfactio*, Balthasar argues, is much more interesting, helpful, and even ‘aesthetic’ than the “Latin legalism” that it is often held out to be.¹²³ Balthasar also looks at Thomas Aquinas’ soteriology and shows how he attempted, with varied success, to fuse Anselm’s views with earlier patristic conceptions, while re-introducing Augustine’s notion of Christ’s personal grace as *gratia Capitis*, which “overflows from Head to members”, ensuring an “organic link between the New Adam and the rest of mankind left in shadows”.¹²⁴ Following his discussion of Anselm and Aquinas, a discussion which contains both commendation and criticism, Balthasar turns to more recent understandings of the Triduum and its salvific importance, which builds on, and further develops, certain strands from the tradition. In doing so, he particularly highlights two contemporary approaches which he himself finds quite helpful (while acknowledging that they, too, have certain shortcomings, especially when viewed on their own). These two contemporary approaches, which could be seen to form the core of Balthasar’s own constructive theology of the cross, are ‘representation’ and ‘solidarity’.

According to Balthasar, representation (or *Stellvertretung* in German),¹²⁵ draws on both patristic and medieval atonement theories, and emphasises that Christ was indeed crucified *pro nobis* (as the Nicene creed states), which can be translated as ‘for us’, and also, he emphasises, as ‘in our place’. In attempting to maintain some form of ‘substitution’, this approach focuses on the way in which Christ takes up within himself, and hence represents, the “hopelessness” of the world’s “resistance to God”; how he, assumes and becomes, through his death on the cross, the world’s ‘No’ to God – a ‘No’ that is grounded, Balthasar writes, in humanity’s desire

(*oikeiosis*), whereby he images and imprints (*typoun*) our fallen nature within himself”, so that “what is defective is thus consumed ... and genuinely incorporated”. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 160.

¹²³ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 255-261 for his reflection on Anselm’s thought; and also, Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 161-162. It is interesting to note that Anselm is one of the twelve theologians Balthasar singles out in Volumes II and III of his aesthetics, as thinkers who gave God’s glory (and *beauty*) a “central place in their vision” (Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume II*, 13). As part of the ‘Clerical Styles,’ Balthasar devotes a major section of *Glory of the Lord, Volume II*, 211-253, to what he calls Anselm’s “aesthetic reason” (see *Glory of the Lord, Volume II*, 213). This theme is also taken up in the fourth volume of his dramatics, where he contends that Anselm’s atonement theory should not be seen in judicial, but in aesthetic and indeed dramatic terms. For a reading of Anselm which builds and expands on Balthasar insights, see David Bentley Hart’s section ‘A Gift Exceeding Every Debt,’ in *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 360-72 (especially 366-7).

¹²⁴ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 262-266 for his engagement with Aquinas’ soteriology. See also Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 162.

¹²⁵ For more on the “originality and vigour of Balthasar’s use of the term”, see Michelle Schumacher informative essay: ‘The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs Balthasar,’ *Theological Studies* 60, no. 1 (February 1999): 53-71.

“to be autonomous without acknowledging its origin”, which leads to the God-lessness of death.¹²⁶ According to Balthasar, this is done so that, through a “miracle of transfiguration”, the “world’s darkness can be taken into the inner light of the Trinity”, where the “estrangement of the sinful ‘No’” can be “overtaken and encompassed by ... the divine ‘Yes’”.¹²⁷ Within the Trinity, Balthasar writes, “there is room” for “all the alienation and sin of the world”; the Son “can draw all this into his relationship with the Father”, so that sin can be “burnt up, as it were, in the fire of [God’s] love”.¹²⁸ It is therefore not merely a case of Christ “balancing or cancelling-out” humanity’s guilt, which is laid on Christ as the world’s ‘scapegoat’ *par excellence*.¹²⁹ No, Christ freely chooses to bear all sinners and the “hopeless impenetrability of their sin” within himself to the point of the absolute God-forsakenness reached on the cross,¹³⁰ so that all human darkness can ultimately be consumed and transformed by the Trinity’s loving grace.¹³¹ As Schumacher explains, with the help of several quotations from Balthasar himself:

[According to this approach of ‘representation’], reconciliation cannot take place from outside (for our benefit); it must occur from the inside (in our place). This “from within” is achieved “by the process of God’s self-emptying in the person of his Son” who brings liberated humanity “back to the open spaces of divine freedom”. Furthermore, [the Son] takes the tragic one into himself”, a self that has been emptied by virtue of his obedient love for the Father, and he endures humanity’s fate through to the bitter end, thereby

¹²⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 329-330.

¹²⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 349-50.

¹²⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 85.

¹²⁹ Balthasar writes: “perverse finite freedom casts all its guilt onto God, making him the sole accused, the scapegoat...” Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 335. Part of Balthasar’s discussion here, is also then dedicated to René Girard’s project which, he writes, “is surely the most dramatic project to be undertaken today in the field of soteriology and in theology in general”, since in “his view, world history and all the values realised in it are based on a primal tragedy that has now be disclosed; it comes to a climax – and this is also its turning point – in the tragedy and rejection of Christ”. This primal tragedy Girard refers to, Balthasar explains, is indeed the tragedy of the scapegoat – where an innocent victim is blamed for the sins of society and violently killed by a mob. For Girard, this scapegoat-mechanism (which is found in all cultures), thus reaches its climax in Christ, where it is also definitively unmasked (for what it truly is) and overturned, as Christ truly is the innocent one, who takes upon himself the sins of all humanity. While Balthasar is sympathetic to Girard’s thought, and asserts that he “has rendered us a service”, the one major criticism he has is that Girard does not give enough attention to the divine initiative involved in Christ’s salvific death (and resurrection); that he is *too* anthropological in his approach, and that the closed-off scientific system he attempts to construct, “impinges on the possibility of transcendence”. According to him, Girard “have brought us to the final elements of the drama of reconciliation, yet without offering a satisfying conclusion”. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 298-13; Michael Murphy, *A Theology of Criticism: Balthasar, Postmodernism, and the Catholic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138.

¹³⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 349.

¹³¹ For Balthasar, Christ’s death on the cross is thus a thoroughly trinitarian ‘event’. As he already declares in the last volume of his aesthetics (in preparation for his dramatics): “The whole idea can be contained only within the trinitarian context, so that the entire act of judgment remains contained within the love of the Father who gives the Son up (John 3:16), and the love of the Son who places himself at the Father’s disposal: within this brackets of this love lies the whole momentum of the curse of sin of the world, which crashes against the one who bears it (and ultimately, in his return to the Father, *reverses* its effects)”. See Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 225.

bridging the distance between the sinner and God. In this way, the Son “creates nearness” in the very process of assuming our state of estrangement from God.¹³²

For Balthasar, this approach of ‘representation’ is indeed then a helpful way of speaking about the mystery of Christ’s death on the cross. By emphasising the *pro nobis*, the fact that Christ dies ‘for us’, or ‘in our place’, so as to take humanity’s rejection of the self-giving, “reckless” love of God into the very life of God, it is not only asserted that Christ became sin for our sake (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal 3:13), but this assertion is also placed within a larger Trinitarian framework, which, in Balthasar’s estimates, is the only locus where it could and should function.¹³³ Yet, it is not only the approach of ‘representation’ that has a place in Balthasar’s theology of the cross. He also points to another contemporary approach, which, while often being regarded as a “late arrival” in the discourse about Christ’s death, should be seen, according to him, as something that has always latently been part of the tradition, from the patristic era onwards.¹³⁴ This approach is that of ‘solidarity’, where it is held that Christ did not only suffer and die for humanity, or in humanity’s place, but also with humanity, that is, in solidarity with the suffering and death that humanity is subjected to, as sinful perpetrators, but also as victims of the reality of sin in the world.¹³⁵ According to Balthasar, Christ’s “life pursues a horizontal course up to his death”, but then “comes a drop” as he “enters into solidarity with all those who have died in body and in spirit”.¹³⁶ In the preface of his booklet, *Heart of the World*, he writes:

The very form of the cross, extending out into the four winds, always told the ancient church that the Cross means solidarity: its outstretched arms would gladly embrace the universe. According to the *Didache*, the cross is ‘*semeion epektaseos*’, a ‘sign of expansion’, and only God himself can have such a wide reach: ‘On the Cross God stretched out his hands to encompass the bounds of the universe’ (Cyril of Jerusalem). ‘In his suffering God stretched out his arms and embraced the world ...’ (Lactantius). ‘O blessed Wood on which God was stretched out!’ (Sibylline Oracles). But God can do this only as a man, and his form is different from that of the animal in that ‘he can stand up straight and spread out his hands’ (Justin). And thus it is that he can reach out to the two peoples,

¹³² Schumacher, ‘The Concept of Representation in the Theology of Hans Urs Balthasar,’ 59. The quotations in this paragraph by Schumacher come from *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 239-41; and also Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 29-30.

¹³³ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 122. See also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 110; *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 78.

¹³⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 267.

¹³⁵ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 120.

¹³⁶ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 60.

represented by the two thieves, and tear down the wall of division (Athanasius). Even in its outward form the Cross is all-inclusive.¹³⁷

This approach of ‘solidarity’ can be seen to stand in continuity with, and bring to its culmination, Balthasar’s account of how Christ, in and through his kenotic descent into the world, draws close to, and identifies with, those who are marginalised, exploited, dehumanised, tortured, and killed by the tyrannical rulers of the world. According to Balthasar, Christ’s concern for, and solidarity with, suffering humanity throughout life and ministry, continues to intensify, until he himself, like countless others before and after him, is brutally murdered by the powers of the day. In “love and obedience”, he writes, Christ “will not surrender” his “solidarity”, as he wants “to share” in humanity’s “destiny” until the very end.¹³⁸ It could thus be said that, during Christ’s anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, and during the pain he experienced at the hands of the Roman soldiers, and during his cries of agony on the cross, and during the last breath he drew, and during the moment of his death, Christ ‘was’ – and ‘is’ – with all those who had suffered, and will suffer, the same fate.¹³⁹ The “most unbelievable, most cruel tortures, prisons, concentration camps and whatever other horrors there may be”, he writes, “can be seen in close proximity to the Cross, to that utter night, interrupted only by the unfathomable cry of ‘Why?’”.¹⁴⁰ Christ suffering does indeed not stand apart from, or over against, other suffering on earth, but is a suffering in solidarity with “the pains of all wounds, the groans of all the sick, the sighing of all who mourn, the tears of all who weep, the insult borne by all the oppressed”, to quote a prayer by Heinrich Suso that Balthasar was fond of.¹⁴¹ Ben Quash writes (in a passage that is particularly relevant for the following chapter’s engagement with the play *Woza Albert!*):

[Balthasar] hears in the cry of dereliction on the cross – in the *middle* of history – a cry which does not in any way diminish all the particular cries of particular human beings in particular situations in the rest of human history. It is a cry in solidarity with them. It is therefore in non-competitive, but sympathetic relationship with all the cries of registered and mirrored in literary dramas, which themselves respond to and honour the actual suffering of human beings in their real, lived lives, as they press (i) *for* justice (ii) *against*

¹³⁷ See Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 13; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 389, and also *Mysterium Paschale*, 129, where Balthasar says the following: “That the cross of Christ means solidarity was something that the ancient Church never ceased to see in its very form; spread out in all the world’s dimensions, its arms thrown open wide, all-embracing”.

¹³⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 348; *Heart of the World*, 133.

¹³⁹ Balthasar asserts: “The redemptive of the Cross was by no means intended solely for the living, but also includes in itself all those who have died before or after it”. Balthasar, *Credo*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 501.

¹⁴¹ According to Balthasar, Christ’s Passion “embraces all past and future points of world time”. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 363. For the prayer by Suso, see *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 456.

the final word which death seems to pronounce on their strivings, and (iii) *for* some reconciliation between the individual imperatives, which drive them and their surrounding context. Yet, as the cry of the incarnate Son of God Jesus' utterance is also a 'super-cry', in the context of a 'super-drama' which can claim to incorporate all the dramas of human life. Like the many cries of the suffering in history (and incorporating them in some way) the cry of Jesus from the cross is hurled outward as a challenge – a call for some sort of answering judgment from a watching adjudicator who may or may not respond.¹⁴²

This emphasis on Christ's solidarity with humanity in his suffering and death, also then lies at the very heart of one of the most important topics in Balthasar's larger theological project, namely, Christ's descent into hell, which he principally addresses in the monograph *Mysterium Paschale* – a work that can be regarded as an "integral part of" his theodramatic theory, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.¹⁴³ In his attempt to uncover what the Church means when it confesses that Christ *descendit ad infernos*, that is, descended 'into hell', or 'to Hades', or to 'the realm of the dead', Balthasar argues against any interpretation where Christ is seen as some sort of warrior-king, who triumphantly enters the netherworld, binds up the devil, delivers the righteous, and leads them to salvation. For Balthasar, it is, rather, important to accept and declare that Christ really died, that he was really dead, in solidarity with all those who have died throughout history. He writes:

... Jesus was really dead, because he really became a man as we are, a son of Adam, and ... therefore, despite what one can sometimes read in certain theological works, he did not use the so-called 'brief' time of his death for all manner of 'activities' in the world beyond. In the same way that, upon earth, he was in solidarity with the living, so, in the tomb, he is in solidarity with the dead ... Each human being lies in his own tomb. And with this condition ... Jesus is at first truly solidary.¹⁴⁴

According to Edward Oakes, this understanding of Christ's *descensus* by Balthasar, perhaps "constitutes his single greatest innovation to the tradition"; a tradition that has very often held that Jesus, after his death on the cross, wilfully went down "some prison steps to claim what rightfully now belongs to him: the 'just ones' of the Old Testament who are being 'unlawfully'

¹⁴² Quash, 'Hans Urs Balthasar's "Theatre of the World",' 28-9.

¹⁴³ Oakes, *The Pattern of Redemption*, 237. With regards to the *importance* of Holy Saturday (and Christ's 'descent into hell') within Balthasar larger theology (and understanding of the Triduum), see Wilhelm Maas's *Gott und Hölle: Studien zum Descensus Christi* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1979), where he writes: "Für Balthasar ist die Lehre vom Descensus nicht ein dogmatisches Lehrstück neben anderen, sondern es ist die Mitte und eigentlich der ganze wesentliche Inhalt seiner Theologie. Balthasar ist *der* Descensus-Theologe schlechthin (245).

¹⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148-9.

held by their jailer Satan”.¹⁴⁵ While this idea of the ‘harrowing of hell’ is hinted at in scriptural passages such as 1 Peter 3:19-20, is the central focus of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*,¹⁴⁶ has an important place in many patristic writings, and has indeed seized the imagination of Christianity, and especially its artists and icon-writers,¹⁴⁷ throughout the ages, Balthasar is adamant that these “speculative and rhetorical-popular” aspects of the tradition should be challenged.¹⁴⁸ For him, this ‘hell’, of ‘hades’, or ‘Sheol’, or ‘realm of the dead’, which the Creed speaks of, is not some sort of penitentiary, where sentient persons are actively held captive by the devil. He rather sees it as a place, or, in fact, ‘non-place’, marked by complete lifelessness, where everything that ‘was’ in this world, ‘is’ no more. “According to the sense of the classical Old Testament texts”, Balthasar writes, “the dead person is lifeless, powerless, without effect, and, above all, without contact with God”.¹⁴⁹

When it is thus said that Christ descended into this realm of the dead, this word, ‘descend’, should not, according to Balthasar, be understood as an “intransitive verb in the *active* voice (as in, ‘he descended the staircase’), but should rather be understood passively (as in, ‘the ball descended the staircase’).¹⁵⁰ We “have here no active descent”, he writes, “far less, a triumphant descent to take possession or even a descent that is a struggle in battle”; we only have “this ‘sinking down’ into the abyss of death, a passive ‘being removed’”.¹⁵¹ He “who was the Speech, the Communication, and the Mediation of God”, truly dies like all other human beings in

¹⁴⁵ Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 237.

¹⁴⁶ A central ‘scene’ in this writing is where ‘death’ cries out as Christ enter Sheol: “Who is it who dare to enter into my dwelling alive?” See B. Harris Cowper, *The Apocryphal Gospels* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 347-387.

¹⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 150-1. See also Gerald O’ Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 197-99, 283-84; Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007). For an interesting discussion on how art and iconography often preceded and influenced Christian doctrine, see the chapter ‘Seeing God: Trinitarian thought through iconography,’ in Sarah Coakley’s *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 190-265.

¹⁴⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV, Spirit and Institution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 407-8.

¹⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 408. For Balthasar, ‘Hell,’ ‘Hades,’ or ‘the realm of the Dead’ – as used by the Creed – should thus also not be understood as a place of punishment or damnation. According to him, it is only after Holy Saturday that the “New Testament concept of ‘Hell’ emerges from the Hades of the Old Testament”. In many ways, it is a “Christological concept ... Christ becomes the judge who has measured out all the dimensions of man in his own experience, and now can assign to each his lot eschatologically ... Hell was necessarily the fate of man, where he had recognised the vicarious deed of God but consciously rejected it”. See Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 233-34. For more on this idea of ‘Hell’ after Holy Saturday, and Balthasar’s view that the task of the Christian is to hope that *all* humanity will be saved (a position that thinkers such as Origen and the Cappadocians argued for), see his provocative study, *Dare We Hope ‘That All Men be Saved?’ With a Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), especially the sections on ‘The Obligation to Hope for All’, and ‘Apokatastasis’ – the last two chapters at the end of the book.

¹⁵⁰ Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 237.

¹⁵¹ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 229.

history, and “what it was about his life that made it revelation breaks off”.¹⁵² This is then why the biblical account, unlike the mythologies of antiquity, is completely silent about Christ’s death, and why Christ himself, as the “Risen One”, does “not provide any report about what he has seen or done” in *Sheol*.¹⁵³ Balthasar writes:

The more eloquently the Gospels describe the passion of the living Jesus, his death and his burial, the more striking is their entirely understandable silence when it comes to the time in between his placing in the grave and the event of the Resurrection. We are grateful to them for this. Death calls for this silence, not only by reason of the mourning of the survivors but, even more, because of what we know of the realm of the dead. When we ascribe to the dead forms of activity that are new and yet prolong those of earth, we are not simply expressing our perplexity. We are also defending ourselves against a stronger conviction which tells us that death is not a partial event. It is a happening which affects the whole person, though not necessarily to the point of entirely obliterating the human subject altogether. It is a situation that signifies in the first place the abandonment of all spontaneous activity and so a passivity, a state in which, perhaps, the vital activity now brought to its end is mysteriously summed up.¹⁵⁴

According to Balthasar, it was thus “as a humanly dead man that the Son descended to the dead, and not as a victorious living one, with an Easter banner”.¹⁵⁵ Just as Christ stood into solidarity with humanity, while being alive, he is also in solidarity with humanity, in death. The Son really dies, the Word of God really goes silent. This is precisely the issue” of Holy Saturday, Balthasar writes, Christ “being in solidarity with the dead”.¹⁵⁶ Unlike the “Orphic and apocalyptic heroes”, Christ does not say or do anything in the realm of Hades, but is just as life-less and God-forsaken as every other human being who has perished throughout the ages.¹⁵⁷ And this fact, according to Aidan Nichols, “solves” for Balthasar the problem of

¹⁵² Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 50. For more on this idea of the ‘Word-gone-silent’, see Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 82, 90, 143, 234; *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 401; *Christian Meditation* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 39-47; and *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 320, 323, 325, 348.

¹⁵³ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 408; Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 245-6. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 348-9, where Balthasar writes in this regard: The Poet “never shows on the stage everything that happens; he let many things, even important ones, happen behind the scene or between acts ... [These are] techniques that *Shakespeare* ‘employs in a sovereign manner’”.

¹⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148. Cf. also Adrienne von Speyer’s words in this regard. She writes: “Death is the end, and as such it is a mystery. It is not the kind of end which is succeeded by a continuation, a reconstruction. It is simply *the end, a complete* cessation. God has totally changed man’s relation to his life and environment, but he has not told him what he will do with him when life comes to an end. Yet man has some experience of this end: he experiences the death of his fellow men, he sees them being lowered into the earth, he knows that their bodied decompose, that all human contact with them is broken off. No love, no remembrance is able to call them back...” See Adrienne von Speyer, *The Mystery of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 11-13.

¹⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Credo*, 49.

¹⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 408; *Credo*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 408; *Credo* 49.

theodicy, as God, in Christ, does not merely look down on human misery, suffering, and death from ‘high above’, but chooses to share in, and take upon himself, these tragic realities that is brought about by sin and humanity’s own “abuse of freedom”.¹⁵⁸ He does this, not because he has to, but as a free act of love,¹⁵⁹ thereby ensuring that all human darkness, brought about by sin, is taken into the light of the divine life, which can contain, overcome, and transform even death itself.¹⁶⁰

According to Balthasar, both these approaches of ‘representation’ and ‘solidarity’, while having certain shortcomings, have a valuable contribution to make to our (always inadequate) attempt to grasp something of the Son of God’s death on the cross. He would indeed like to emphasise that Christ both suffered and died ‘for us’ and ‘with us’; that Christ’s passion is both ‘in our place’ and in solidarity with the suffering and death that human beings cause and experience in this world as a result of the reality of sin.¹⁶¹ Having said this, Balthasar also goes on to affirm, together with the Church throughout the ages, that this mystery of Jesus’ death, as explored above, is not the end of the drama of the Christ-event. As Graham Ward writes in his engagement with Balthasar’s theology: “crucifixion” and “absence” is not the end of “the kenotic story”.¹⁶² For just as Christ’s life, which heralds the kingdom of God and is lived in solidarity with the poor and the outcast, ends in death, so his death, which he undergoes ‘for us’ and ‘with us’, ultimately ends in life. Christ’s cries of dereliction on the cross, and the silence of his descent into hell, do not fall on deaf ears. “From out of the silent horizon”, Balthasar writes, “the cry is answered by the lightning response of decisive action”.¹⁶³ “Good Friday turns into Easter” and “this answer is relevant in all ages being both the answer to *this* particular cry, and ultimately ... the answer to every cry”.¹⁶⁴ Ben Quash writes in a passage that follows on the important quotation above:

The key thing for Balthasar, is that this cry – in which others in their particularity are incorporated – is answered. The dark horizon lights up. The silent adjudicator speaks. And the word uttered by the divine Judge, is one of vindication of Christ’s act of obedience and freely-accepted self-sacrifice. In responding in this way, Balthasar feels able to say that all

¹⁵⁸ Nichols, ‘Introduction’, 7. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 501, *Mysterium Paschale*, 201; and *Credo* 54.

¹⁵⁹ See Balthasar *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 501.

¹⁶⁰ See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 244-6, and also Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 333-5.

¹⁶¹ Balthasar writes: “If both attempts are taken together, it is possible to come up with a promising new approach”. He also, however, emphasises that “such a synthesis ... cannot and must not be a system” (as the cross, as stated above, “explodes all systems”). See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 266.

¹⁶² Ward, ‘Kenosis,’ 24.

¹⁶³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 21.

cries can, in principle, hope to be answered too. The ‘shape’ of an answer has been disclosed, which is in some sense transferable to other contexts, especially in the degree to which those contexts pose the question in terms that bear comparison with Christ’s own posing of the question.¹⁶⁵

We will now turn to the third and final ‘syllable’ in Christ’s mission, the “completion of God’s Word to humanity”, namely, that of resurrection.¹⁶⁶ This last ‘syllable’ will not only reveal “who Jesus Christ in reality was”, and assert that death, “the final enemy”, has been defeated, but will also beckon humanity, liberated from the darkness of sin and the “unbearable dungeon of” our “own ego”, to imitate and re-perform the life-giving drama of Christ, through the God-given mission of each person’s own life.¹⁶⁷

4.5. Resurrection

In this last syllable of the Word-made-flesh’s mission on the ‘world-stage’, which Balthasar calls the “radiant side of the Cross”,¹⁶⁸ we indeed see how Jesus is “raised up and so shown to be what he always was”, namely, the definitive revelation of God and his goodness on earth.¹⁶⁹ The resurrection, Balthasar writes, is “the final identification” of the world’s “principle actor”.¹⁷⁰ It is the “proof” that the “claims” he made were true and the actions he performed were, and always will be, God’s decisive will for humanity.¹⁷¹ It is also the final assertion that his message cannot be brought to a halt, even by the power of death. The resurrection says that suffering, death, and destruction will not have the final word in this world, but that justice, goodness, freedom, love, and life will ultimately prevail. While Christ really died, as emphasised above, and it momentarily seemed if all hope was lost, he does not stay dead, but is abruptly brought back to life, thereby conquering death’s power and removing its sting, as Paul writes.¹⁷² In him and through him, the Father changes “death into life”, and this dramatic event, which can be seen as the “all-controlling turning point” in history, causes nothing short of a “revolution”, Balthasar remarks; a “revolution” which becomes “operative wherever sin and death reigns in the world”.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁵ Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s “Theatre of the World”,’ 29.

¹⁶⁶ Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 127; Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487, 503; *Heart of the World*, 91.

¹⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487, 503; *Heart of the World*, 91.

¹⁶⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 238.

¹⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51.

¹⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51.

¹⁷¹ See Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 115-29.

¹⁷² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 362; *Mysterium Paschale*, 205.

¹⁷³ Balthasar, *Credo*, 53; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 363.

For Balthasar, it is important to recognise that the ‘great reversal’ of the resurrection, like all other aspects of Christ’s life (and death), is a thoroughly Trinitarian event. The resurrection’s “fundamental structure”, he writes, has a “Trinitarian character”.¹⁷⁴ It is within the Trinitarian dynamic that the “radical change” from “eternal death to eternal life”, from “absolute night” to “absolute light”, from “total alienation” to “an unimaginable closeness” takes place.¹⁷⁵ After the realities of sin, suffering, and death have been taken ‘into’ the Trinity through Christ’s passion and *descensus* (where they are consumed by the infinite grace, love, and life marking God’s triune existence), the Son is brought back to life by the Father, through the power of the Spirit, who is the ‘bond of love’ between them, as Augustine said.¹⁷⁶ Balthasar continually asserts that it is “to the Father that the initiative in the Son’s Resurrection” should be “ascribed”.¹⁷⁷ It is the Father “who acts”, he writes, and “he acts precisely as who he is for the world, namely, its Creator, who brings his creative action to its completion in the resurrection of the dead”.¹⁷⁸ According to Balthasar, Christ’s resurrection, where life is brought forth from the ‘nothingness’ of death’, can thus be seen as a “superabundant consequence” of an “event within God himself”; an “event” that brings to fulfilment the whole order of creation, which was also wrought, in the beginning, *ex nihilo*.¹⁷⁹

In keeping with his high valuation of corporeal reality throughout his theological project, it is important for Balthasar to emphasise that the ‘event’ of the resurrection is not merely a ‘spiritual’ occurrence, but involves Christ’s physical body.¹⁸⁰ Just as it is affirmed that Christ really suffered and died as a true human being during a certain historical hour, so it also needs to be affirmed that Christ is really raised from the dead, in the flesh, three days later. The same Jesus who was “bodily delivered up for us”, is also “bodily” raised up by the Father.¹⁸¹ The resurrected Christ whom we meet on Easter morning, is not a ghost, or a spirit, or simply an “image” that is shown to us.¹⁸² Christ does not “come back” as a “spiritist phenomenon”, Balthasar writes, but as a living person of flesh and blood; as someone who was truly dead, and is now truly alive.¹⁸³ It is thus not the case that Christ’s body stands in the way of salvation,

¹⁷⁴ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 203.

¹⁷⁵ *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 362.

¹⁷⁶ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 228; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 131-2, 319-28, 362-67; *Mysterium Paschale*, 203.

¹⁷⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 204.

¹⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 203-17 (a section titled ‘The Affirmation’s Trinitarian Form’). See also *Credo*, 53-4.

¹⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 204, 213.

¹⁸⁰ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 194, 215, 225-6, 229. See also Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option of the Poor*, 128-9.

¹⁸¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 390.

¹⁸² *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 95.

¹⁸³ *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 95.

as the Gnostics once held. According to Balthasar, it is, in fact, Christ's body itself that brings about liberation and salvation for humanity and "safeguards the value of" all other "finite and flesh-and-blood bodies".¹⁸⁴ The "kernel of truth in early Christian Logos-Sarx Christology", he writes, is that the body is the "locus of salvation"; as the Patristic axiom reads: *caro cardo salutis*, redemption 'hinges on the flesh'.¹⁸⁵ In this regard, Balthasar writes the following in the last volume of his theodramatic project:

Even at this early stage in the dispute with the phenomenon of myth – which, in the great gnostic systems, will deliberately develop its vertical structure contrary to Christianity – the Christian is given a clear view of the fundamental opposition between it and Christian teaching. On the one hand, there is inconsistent, futile, and confusing speculation, a 'disputing about words' (2 Tim 2:14); on the other, God's firm foundation', 'sound teaching', as taught by the Church, the 'pillar of bulwark of the truth': namely, the mystery of Christ, 'manifested in the flesh' (1 Tim 3:15-6). Right from Paul and John, up to Ignatius, Irenaeus and Tertullian, this 'in the flesh' is the central argument against all the mythical teachings of redemption, however similar they may seem to Christianity, and whether they are pre-Christian or copies of the Christian teaching... That the unifying principle itself should actually enter into a body (and an individual body at that) is something that must contradict them. All Christian teaching proceeds from the experience of the bodily resurrection of Christ, which is by no means mythical and speculative, but sober and historical.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ See Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2015), 66. Balthasar writes: In raising Jesus from the dead, that is, "in raising bodily his Word-made-man, God takes no backward step in relation to the Incarnation of his Word. We are not to believe that Jesus had to disappear in his bodiliness and become spirit, so that faith in him might be liberated from the obstacle which his personality set up and in that way achieve for the first time its own perfect purity as faith in the invisible – which is what G Ebeling thinks". Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 206. For the link between Jesus' resurrected body and the Eucharist and the Church, see the insightful section 'The Church and the Paschal Mystery (which includes subsections on 'The Dramatic Dimensions of the Eucharist' and 'The Dramatic Dimensions of the Communion of Saints'), *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 389-423. With regards to how Christianity's message of Christ's bodily resurrection stands against Gnosticism (in different guises throughout the ages), see Balthasar comments in *Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 155, where he remarks: "If there were no such thing as the resurrection of the flesh, then the truth would lie with Gnosticism and every form of idealism down to Schopenhauer and Hegel, for whom the finite must literally perish if it is to become spiritual and infinite. But the resurrection of the flesh vindicates the poets in a definite sense: the aesthetic scheme of things, which allows us to possess the infinite within the finitude of form (however it is seen, understood or grasped spiritually) is right". See also *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 512, where Balthasar writes: "It is the bodily resurrection of Christ that affirms ultimately the goodness of creation, "of the body, of sex, of fellowship, of work. He brings all this goodness into the ultimate freedom in the presence of God". In the Epilogue of his Trilogie he warns: "[S]o many today crave to spiritualise the Christ-event – a perennial temptation for theology in every age", and therefore we need "anti-gnostic theology", drawn from the premises of a "Logos-Sarx Christology". Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Epilogue*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 99.

¹⁸⁵ Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 99.

¹⁸⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 51-2.

The question that can then be asked is, what does this bodily resurrection of Christ ultimately mean? For “what reason and to what end” has Christ not only died, but was he also raised in the flesh, to re-employ the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, as quoted above? Once again, as was the case with the cross, Balthasar is adamant about the fact that the resurrection is a mystery that transcends all human conceptions and interpretations, and that we will never be able to give a singular, absolute exposition of its meaning. “The event” of the resurrection, he writes, “is without analogy”.¹⁸⁷ Also here, fixed ‘systems’ are to no avail. While speaking about the resurrection, something he believes one should definitely do, Balthasar thus continually acknowledges the provisionality and inevitable shortcomings of our words, noting that this attempt to describe the ‘indescribable’, is, in many ways, the paradox of doing theology.

Balthasar then goes on to propose that, for him, an important aspect of the mystery of the resurrection is the way in which it illuminates and confirms the fact that Christ’s mission on earth, which, as said, stood at the centre of his dramatic existence and found its cathartic climax in his death on the cross, was divinely ordained and discloses the very heart of God.¹⁸⁸ According to Balthasar, the reality of the resurrection proves that what Christ said and did was, and evermore remains, true; that his words and his deeds, as actor on the world stage, represent, and serve as an embodiment of, God’s will for humanity and the whole of creation. According to Edward Oakes, Balthasar sees the resurrection as a “validation” of the “provocation” of Christ’s life, a “provocation” that necessarily led to the attempted “refutation” on Golgotha.¹⁸⁹ For Balthasar, Oakes writes, only God could validate a “claim” such as the one we read about in the Gospels. It can thus be said that, in raising “this man Jesus from the death”, a “death he underwent, of course, only because of the ‘claim’”, God evermore said ‘Yes’ to the performance of Christ’s life.¹⁹⁰ This means that, after the resurrection, those who follow in Christ’s footsteps can also have confidence in his message, even in the face of persecution and death. They can know that the words he spoke and the actions he performed carry the approval of, and expresses the will of, God, and they can also trust that by re-performing this message, they, too, shall be vindicated, in this life or the next.

According to Balthasar, the resurrection is, however, also more than a mere “validation” of Christ’s life. It also signals that the reality of death, which Christ suffered ‘for us’ and ‘with

¹⁸⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 194.

¹⁸⁸ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 127.

¹⁸⁹ Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272; and also, Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 188, 195, 231-2; as well as his essay ‘The Apologetics of Beauty,’ in *The Beauty of God*, eds. Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands and Roger Lundin (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 209-226 (especially 219).

¹⁹⁰ Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272.

us' (as both the consequence of his life and the end to which his life has always been ordered), will not have the final word in the drama of human existence.¹⁹¹ As can be seen throughout his theodramatic project, the tragedy of human finitude is a central concern in Balthasar's thought. Already in the first volume of *Theo-drama*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, he offers a lengthy exploration of how suffering and death not only dominate the world stage, but are also all-pervasive on the theatre stage, which attempts to mirror the drama of earthly existence.¹⁹² This discussion is continued in subsequent volumes, and in working through his theodramatic theory, it becomes clear that, for Balthasar, human mortality, as the "ultimate limit of existence", is indeed the greatest riddle and crisis of this play of life.¹⁹³ He continually notes that there is no real human answer to the problem of death, whether it is one's own death (what he calls "my death"), or death as a universal phenomenon (what he calls "our death"), that is, the "dying of old people and sometimes of the young"; "death in hospitals, death in the newspaper columns, in the statistics of 'crime and accidents'" and "in war and concentration camps".¹⁹⁴ Every "answer proposed by man, after all his brooding and philosophising, simply falls short", he asserts.¹⁹⁵ The fact that Jesus of Nazareth is thus raised from the realm of death, in the body, is for Balthasar the most profound turning-point in history. For here, at last, an answer has been given "from above", to the "question of all of us who are from below"; here, at last, the "great annihilator" has been "annihilated"; here, at last, humanity's chief enemy "has been destroyed"; here, at last, finitude has "been swallowed up in victory", prompting humanity to exclaim, in the words of Paul, "where, O death, is your sting!" (1 Cor. 15:20-3).¹⁹⁶ Balthasar writes:

[H]e is the continuity for which we have been looking, the connecting thread linking ruin and rising, which does not break even in death and hell. It is he who walks along paths that are no paths... through hell, hell which has no exit, no time, no being; and by the miracle from above, he is rescued from the abyss, the profound depths, to save his brothers in Adam, along with him.¹⁹⁷

What makes the drama of Christ's bodily resurrection so momentous and consequential, according to Balthasar, is not simply the fact that he who suffered and died is not dead anymore.

¹⁹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487ff.

¹⁹² See, once more, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 343-408.

¹⁹³ See, for example: Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 37-41; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 117-135, 487-504; and also, the section 'Existence in Contradiction,' in *Life out of Death*, 13-22.

¹⁹⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 126.

¹⁹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 134.

¹⁹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 132, 487; Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 44; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 128.

¹⁹⁷ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 91.

That “a dead man should begin to live again”, he writes, “is not, in the world of the Bible, an entirely unique occurrence”.¹⁹⁸ In the Gospels we read, after all, how someone like Lazarus is also brought back to life before Christ’s own passion and resurrection, not to speak of the “pagan parallels known to us from the history of religion”.¹⁹⁹ What makes the resurrection the all-defining moment in history, lies, rather, with the fact that the one who lived ‘for us’ and ‘with us’, and also suffered and died ‘for us’ and ‘with us’, is brought back to life ‘for us’ and ‘with us’.²⁰⁰ In the resurrection, Balthasar holds, Christ does not leave “the dead behind”, but gathers “them up” and takes “them along”.²⁰¹ Death’s power over humanity, as a whole, is therefore broken. The reality of death, per se, is robbed of its potency, as it is evermore consumed and transformed by the triune God, who is the “Living One”, as well as the “Giver of Life”.²⁰² For Balthasar, the resurrection, as it occurs in the drama of the Christ-event, thus has universal relevance and significance. It is something that echoes throughout all ages, and penetrates every instance of human sin, suffering, and death, from the beginning of the world, until the world’s end.²⁰³

The resurrection does, however, not mean that the realities of sin, suffering, and death are completely gone and forgotten. While these realities have been overcome in Christ, and have been stripped of their power, as Paul declares, they are still very much part of the drama of human existence, this side of eternity, as every human being knows all too well. Their very real and terrifying traces are indeed still seen and felt all over. According to Balthasar, something of this paradoxical reality, already becomes evident in, and is addressed through, the ‘person’ of the resurrected Christ himself, whom we meet on Easter Sunday. While being alive, the One that emerges from out of the grave still has the *stigmata* of suffering and death on his body. There has been a “dynamic transition”, death has made way for life,²⁰⁴ but the wounds of Christ remain visible for all to see. Christ, it could be said, is raised in his “woundedness”; even in being alive, he is seen to be “Lamb who was slain”.²⁰⁵ Balthasar writes that, “when the Risen One comes personally to meet his disciples, they are able to recognise him because, essentially, of his identity with the crucified”; because of his “identity with the dead Jesus of Nazareth, bearing the marks of his wounds”.²⁰⁶ We even read in the Gospel of John how Christ invites

¹⁹⁸ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 193.

¹⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 199.

²⁰⁰ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 194.

²⁰¹ Balthasar, *Credo*, 54-55.

²⁰² Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 195.

²⁰³ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 21.

²⁰⁴ See Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 493.

²⁰⁵ Anne Hunt, *What are They Saying about the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 59.

²⁰⁶ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 209.

Thomas to insert his finger in the wound in his side, which is what prompts Thomas' confession that Jesus is Lord – the very first confession of this kind in the Scriptures.²⁰⁷ To quote Bérulle, even after his resurrection, Christ's "mortal wounds" remain "open", exactly since humanity still experience death and suffering in this life, while awaiting Christ's second coming, when there will finally be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain.²⁰⁸ Balthasar writes in this regard:

This new life [of Christ] ... remains nevertheless life out of death, life characterised by its passage through death. It is life which on the one hand has power over death ... but on the other hand remains profoundly marked by the event and experience of death...²⁰⁹

Balthasar's theology of the resurrection is thus intrinsically connected to, and flows forth from, his theology of the cross.²¹⁰ The fact that Christ has been brought back to life by the Father, and, through this dramatic event, has overcome human finitude *eph-hapax*, does not mean that his or the world's suffering and death should now be forgotten, ignored, or brushed aside. Christ's resurrection does not speak of life *without* death, but of life emerging *out of* death. The disciples', as well as our own, encounter with the resurrected Christ, who continue to bear the wounds of the cross, does not lead to a denial of the tragic realities of life, but to a confession that these realities will not have the final say in this world; that, just as the Father answered Christ's cries of dereliction, he can and will also answer all other cries in history; cries that are very often mirrored on the theatre stage.²¹¹ In the new aeon that Christ's resurrection brings forth, death is still present, but it makes way for, and opens up to, life – definitively in the world to come, yet also already now, in a provisional manner, as God's kingdom breaks into the world through the drama of the Christ-event and those who re-enact this drama through the

²⁰⁷ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 219, 221-2.

²⁰⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 336-7. According to Quash, it is almost as if human sin and the realities of human suffering and death "keep Christ's wounds alive and concrete 'from below'". See Quash, 'Drama and the Ends of Modernity,' in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, 139. Besides Bérulle, Balthasar also quotes Pascal in this regard, who held that "Jesus' agony will last until the end of the world" and argued that this continuation of Christ's passion "is confirmed ... by those Christian mystics who were privileged to experience something of the dark night of the Cross". This idea of the continued suffering of the Son (for and with humanity) goes back to a Patristic thinker such as Origen. See, for example, Balthasar, *Origen, Spirit and Fire*, 122. See also Regis Martin, *The Suffering of Love: Christ's Descent in the Hell of Human Hopelessness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 67; as well as Kilby, *Balthasar*, 116.

²⁰⁹ Balthasar, *Life out of Death*, 39. See also Anne Hunt, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery: A Development in Recent Catholic Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 76-77.

²¹⁰ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 193, and also *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 386.

²¹¹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 21, and also Quash, 'Hans Urs Balthasar's "Theatre of the World",' 29-30.

performance of their own lives. Balthasar writes that God is indeed thus the one “who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not” (Rom 4:17).²¹²

This encounter of humanity with the crucified-yet-resurrected Christ, or rather, the crucified-yet-resurrected Christ’s encounter with humanity, has a very important place in Balthasar’s theology, in general, and his dramatics, in particular. Balthasar is fascinated by accounts of how Christ discloses himself to people after his resurrection,²¹³ whether it be Mary Magdalene in the grave yard, or the twelve in Jerusalem, or Paul on the road to Damascus.²¹⁴ For Balthasar, what is striking about these encounters is the way in which they typically lead to the sending of the person who has come face-to-face with Jesus. Time and again, those who meet Christ are “given a personal commission” and entrusted “with something unique to do”.²¹⁵ According to Balthasar, Christ’s mission, and especially this mission’s last ‘syllable’, namely, his resurrection, “opens up a new acting area”, where all is invited, encourages, and enabled, through the Spirit, to share in, and re-perform, the *missio Christi* through the unique mission of their own lives.²¹⁶ “God does not play the world drama alone”, Balthasar writes, but “makes room for man to join in the acting”.²¹⁷ As “death turns to life”, also “in our hearts”, we, too, are called “to play our part” in God’s drama of salvation and liberation.²¹⁸ The drama of Christ, which is “fundamentally inclusive”, invites and challenges us “to leave the auditorium, step onto the stage and resolutely join in the action”.²¹⁹ Balthasar writes in this regard:

[Through the resurrection, God enables man] to act authentically in Christ’s acting area and so respond to God’s prior action... The acting area is the ‘in-Christ’ and ‘together-with-Christ’... Our good works arise because heaven has been opened up to us through the kindness (crestotes) of God. To live within the sphere of grace, where heaven has been

²¹² Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 219.

²¹³ Balthasar writes that “one cannot decide *a priori* how the Risen One will appear to his disciples – whether alike or unlike, near or distant, familiar or strange”. According to him, there is therefore “no point in setting up a determinate mode of appearance ... as norm of the rest”. Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 252.

²¹⁴ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 209 and especially then 217-66 (a section titled ‘The self-attestation of the Risen One’) in which Balthasar deals extensively with Christ’s appearances to his followers after his resurrection.

²¹⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51; *The Christian State of Life*, 10.

²¹⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 91.

²¹⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 91.

²¹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 16-7; *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 53-4, 124.

²¹⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 78. Balthasar poetically describes this moment of calling, issuing from an encounter with the crucified-yet-risen Christ, as follows: “Go out; venture beyond the well-guarded fold ... this is the hour of mission! For I myself went out from the Father and, by going from him, I became obedient unto death, and by obeying I became the perfect image of his love for me. The going out itself is love; the going out itself is the return. Just as the Father has sent me, so do I send you. Going out from me as a ray from the sun, as a stream from its source, you remain in me, for I myself am the ray that flashes forth, the stream that is poured out from the Father. To give is more blessed than to receive. Just as I radiate the Father, so also are you to radiate me. So, turn your face to me that I can turn it out into the world. You are to be so separated from your own ways that I can place you on the way that I am”. Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 34-5.

opened up to us, is ... to live in the kingdom of God, which is present in Christ and, from our perspective, is 'coming', but still has to fight to assert itself within the historical ages to come... In this context, therefore, 'created for good works' means that ... we are enabled [through Christ's life, death, and resurrection] to do those things, to engage in that 'actio' in which the bonum shows itself to be, in the full sense, the transcendentale ... [In Christ, human beings are not only] negatively 'redeemed', but positively endowed with missions that make them persons of profile and quality within the prototypical mission of Jesus".²²⁰

In our discussion above, we have seen how the drama of Christ on the world stage consists out of a mission-in-three-parts, namely, Christ's life and ministry (where his words and actions herald the kingdom of God), Christ's death on the cross (where he dies 'for us' and 'with us'), and Christ's resurrection (where he overcomes the power of death and invite and enable others to join-in on God's drama of salvation and liberation). This is indeed then the drama of the Christ-event; the threefold 'pattern of redemption', which echoes throughout the ages, and asks to be re-performed on both the world stage and on the theatre stage. Balthasar writes:

From a theological point of view, nothing more is possible and nothing more is to be expected in world history over and above the fact of the Christ-event, apart from its interpretation and its continuing effects, both of which, henceforth, more and more provoke and stimulate the dramatic action within history.²²¹

On this note, we can move on to what Balthasar sees as one of the key consequences of the drama of the Christ-event on earth, namely, the 'Christian life', or 'Christian discipleship'. Balthasar's 'Christology of mission' indeed opens up to an 'anthropology of mission', and, it could be said, an 'ecclesiology of mission', with the word 'mission' once again referring to 'role' in a theological register.²²² Balthasar believes, as noted above, that each encounter with the provocation of the Christ-event, leads to "an entirely new, dramatic way of life", a life that is grounded in, and emulates, the "the archetypal personality of Christ", and is aimed, in its entirety, at bringing about God's goodness in the world.²²³ "A really adequate history of

²²⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 52-3, 213.

²²¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 49.

²²² Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 135-7. He writes: Just as the "Ignatian category of mission shapes Balthasar's Christology in key ways ... mission plays a ... central role in Balthasar's anthropology. Indeed, it is the core of his anthropology" (137).

²²³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 367, 406, 420. See also Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 377, where he speaks about how the grace of Christ, "effects a transformation of the very being of the creature" and inaugurates a new way of life. One of Balthasar's critiques of Karl Barth's theology is that he misconstrues the relationship between Christ and the believer to such an extent that it "really only goes in one direction and true mutuality is lost". He hopes to correct this 'misstep' in his own theology, by showing how the drama of Christ beckons a response in the drama of the Christian's life, who comes to participate in, and give expression to, the Christ-event, through his or her own day to day existence. See Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 67. See also John

liberation is to be found, wherever there is a humanly adequate response to the word of Jesus, in an unconditional trusting discipleship of him”, he writes.²²⁴ “Now that his word and example have been among us, active human love – individual and social, personal and acting through structures – cannot be postponed”, as each of us are called to cooperate with Christ “in the transformation of the world to the greater glory of God”.²²⁵

4.6. The Christian Life

At the start of our discussion of Balthasar’s understanding of the Christian life on the world stage, it is important to return to comments that were made at the start of the previous chapter. Here it was noted that, for Balthasar, the ‘form’ of Christ is not merely an image or an icon that asked to be contemplated, but a dramatic act in and upon the world, which discloses God’s goodness to humanity and the whole created order. This is indeed then what became apparent in our discussion above: that the beautiful form of Christ, as explored in Balthasar’s aesthetics, should be seen as a liberating performance that consists out of three distinct-yet-united acts, which has engendered an all-determining transformation on earth. It was also noted at the beginning of the previous chapter that this performance of Christ invites a dramatic response; that it is not merely a “self-sufficient armchair drama”,²²⁶ but that it beckons the onlooker, as an actor in his or her own right, to join in on the action and to become part of the theodrama. This is something that is made possible by Christ’s resurrection, which is the concluding ‘syllable’ of his mission, and also, it should be added, by his ascension and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to Christ, and who convinces and enables us to “carry out, recall, and follow” our mission.²²⁷ It is then to this dramatic ‘response’, which is the topic of many sections in Balthasar’s theodramatic project and other monographs such as *The Christian*

Webster, ‘Balthasar and Karl Barth’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Balthasar*, 241-55 (especially 252), and Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 132-33.

²²⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 28-9.

²²⁵ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 129; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 137.

²²⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22.

²²⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51-4. See also Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, Volume III, The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harris (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) 80, 297; and *Mysterium Paschale*, 210-217, where he writes: “The resurrection of the Son is the revelation of the Spirit... He must depart so that the Spirit may come; he will ask the Father ... to send to the disciples another Paraclete, who will abide with them for ever” (210). See also Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 114, where he writes: “The event of Pentecost is closely linked with the precise details of the Ascension. The disciples’ gaze is held fast by the Lord’s upward motion; without seeing him, their eyes follow him as he disappears into the clouds and proceeds to a destination beyond their imagining. As to the logic and ethics of [their] mission, the Spirit will [now] instruct them”. For a helpful discussion of the relationship between Christ’s Resurrection, his Ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Balthasar’s *dramatics* see the section ‘Resurrection and the Sending of the Spirit’ in Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 135-6.

State of Life,²²⁸ and which also stood at the very heart of his own life-narrative,²²⁹ that we will now turn.

It can be said that, for Balthasar, the ‘Christian life’ has to do with the heeding of what Ignatius termed the ‘call of Christ’,²³⁰ and with discovering and enacting one’s God-given role, or mission, on the world stage. This mission typically mirrors and stands in continuation with the *missio Christi* itself, as it originally took place in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, as discussed above. The ‘Christian life’ is thus about saying ‘Yes’,²³¹ with Mary,²³² to the drama of the Christ-event, about entering, ever deeper, into the ‘acting area’ that is opened up by Christ’s death and resurrection, and about faithfully embodying and re-performing, through the grace of God and the working of the Spirit, Jesus’ liberating truth in and to the world, through the drama of one’s own existence. Balthasar’s understanding of the ‘Christian life’ is indeed then strongly dependent on the logic and language of analogy. Just as every creaturely reality, in its particularity, is contingent on, shares in, and analogically expresses something of the reality of God, as affirmed in the *analogia entis*, so every Christian mission, in its particularity, is also contingent on, shares in, and analogically expresses something of Christ’s mission,

²²⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 15-23 (the introduction to his theodramatic theory), 481-644 (the section ‘Transition: From Role to Mission’); *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 53-89 (the section ‘The Unfolding Drama’), 302-11 (the section ‘The Form of Life: Being Born of God’), 394-416 (the section ‘The New Christian Reality’), 417-29 (the section ‘Man without Measure’); *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 33-56 (the section ‘Christ’s Position in the Theodrama’), 202-59 (the section ‘Christ’s Mission and Person’), 263-83 (The section ‘Theological Persons’); *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 427-504 (the section ‘The Battle of the Logos’); *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 175-80 (the section ‘Integrating the Horizontal Dimension’).

²²⁹ As noted in the second chapter, Balthasar’s himself experienced a life-altering moment of ‘calling’ during an Ignatian retreat just before his doctoral exam (which prompted his decision to become a priest and sustained his ministry and work as theologian throughout his life, even after he left the Society of Jesus). He wrote that even after thirty years he could still find the exact tree where he received his mission (“as by lightning”), and first heard the words: “you have been called”. This notion of ‘calling’ (and fulfilling one’s God-given mission) also played an important role in his work as student chaplain in Basel, where he regularly led Ignatius retreats in the Black Forest, and continually engaged in pastoral discussions focused on helping (especially young) people discern their *vocation* on earth (in the light of the *missio Christi*). See Henrici, ‘A Sketch of von Balthasar’s life,’ 16.

²³⁰ See Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 9, 391. Balthasar writes that this ‘call’ “is not just something required for the establishment of a Christian state of life; it is the very essence of the Christian state of life and even of the Christian life, as such”.

²³¹ See Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 399, where he writes: “Mission ... requires man’s ‘Yes’ – an act not less important than the act by which God calls his chosen one... [Man’s yes] is ... the acceptance of God’s call and mission – his simple cooperation in the eternal ‘Yes’ of God”.

²³² For Balthasar, the ‘prototype’ of the human ‘Yes’ (uttered in response to, and in continuity with, the divine ‘Yes’ spoken in Jesus), is found, first and foremost, with Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). Mary’s ‘Yes’, Balthasar writes, is the “supreme instance of the true Christian and human attitude before God ... [It is] without a trace of mere passivity or resignation ... [but] calls for the active participation of man’s united powers, a wholehearted effort to banish anything that could spoil the purity of first receiving the divine message and substance, and then living it”. See Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 121, and especially the Mariology which he develops in *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 283-360 (aptly titled ‘Woman’s Answer’). See also the ecumenically-minded discussion of this aspect of Balthasar’s theology in Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 250-273 (a chapter titled ‘The Finite Yes’).

resulting in what could be called an *analogia missio*.²³³ By making use of the logic and language of analogy, Balthasar can speak of an “inexhaustible multiplication” of Christ’s “once-and-for-all and unique” mission on the world stage;²³⁴ of how, instead of bringing an end to all drama, the drama of the Christ-event is transposed into an infinite number of further dramatic expressions. These dramatic expressions, while being utterly unique, personal, and contextual,²³⁵ arises “centrally” out of Christ’s “own centre”.²³⁶ Every “nuanced mission”, Balthasar affirms, is “a participation in the whole mission of Christ”.²³⁷ Marc Ouellet explains:

Between Christ and the Christian, as between God and a creature, there is no univocity, but an analogy, i.e. a certain similarity, but only within the greatest dissimilarity. There is an analogy of being, but also an analogy of acting and of attitudes [that is to say, of mission] ... [W]e become persons in Christ, by a gift of our freedom to the mission which likens us to, and associates us with, [him]. The ethical decision in response to the call of grace constitutes a theological person.²³⁸

Balthasar is thus convinced that, as human beings respond to the “call of Christ” and re-perform the drama of his existence, Christ continues to play in “ten-thousand places”, to quote the words of Gerald Manley Hopkins, which serve as the epigraph of this dissertation. What could, however, be asked at this point, is what does it look like when someone re-performs the mission of Christ, through the mission of their own lives? What does a life of Christian mission, which

²³³ See Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). He writes, for example, that the “*analogia missio* is more than an arbitrary or superficial similarity; it is rather a matter of the Church actually and actively *participating* in the missions of Son and Spirit. This is what it means for the Church to have a speaking and acting part in the theo-drama. To be sure, it is a supporting role, but no less vital for that. Mission is ‘the whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world’. To engage in mission after the pattern of Christ’s mission has nothing to do with triumphalism but everything to do with passion: ‘that travail in mission ... the expending of life itself, for the sake of more life’, 72. Cf. also Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 387; Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar, A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995[1991]), 79; Ward, ‘Kenosis,’ 45; and also, the essay on similar ideas in Aquinas’ thought written by Michael Waldstein titled ‘The Analogy of Mission and Obedience,’ in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington: The Catholic University Press, 2005), 92-114.

²³⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 270.

²³⁵ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 406. For Balthasar, it is important to emphasise that each person’s God-given mission is indeed utterly unique (“every call is a personal one,” he writes; *The Christian State of Life*, 410); typically involves a very specific task “as part of God’s [greater] plan for the world” (*The Christian State of Life*, 359); and that it is tied to, and constitutive of, the individual’s innermost ‘self’ (a ‘self’ created and called, in love, by God ‘before the foundations of the world’; Eph 1:4-5), *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 402. In responding to, and sharing in Christ’s mission, we are “equipped by the Holy Spirit with [the] most personal mission”, which becomes (and has, in fact, always been) the “very core of our being”, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 138. The one “who is called”, he affirms, “becomes himself [or herself] by serving and sharing in God’s work in Christ”, *The Christian State of Life*, 136-7. For Balthasar, ‘mission’ is thus intrinsically linked to ‘personhood’; to what it means to be an individual ‘person’ in the fullest sense of the word. See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 50-1, 207-8.

²³⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 393.

²³⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 68-9.

²³⁸ Marc Ouellet, ‘The Foundations of Christian Ethics according to Hans Urs Balthasar,’ in *Hans Urs Balthasar*, ed. Schindler, 237.

stems from, and analogically expresses something of, the mission of Christ, practically entails? While acknowledging the complexities of these questions,²³⁹ Balthasar argues that, for him, a life of authentic Christian mission, principally means to have the same ‘mind as Christ’ (Phil 2:5), and to live, in the particular context of one’s own life, as Christ himself lived. This is a life that is not marked by egoism and self-interest, but by servitude, solidarity, and sacrifice; a life of “faith, hope, and love”,²⁴⁰ which is aimed, in its entirety, at bringing about God’s goodness in and for the world. At the beginning of his ‘Nine Propositions on Christian Morality’, Balthasar states that Christ himself can be seen as the “concrete categorical imperative”, the “personal norm” of how humanity should think and act on earth.²⁴¹ The person who is called by God, and whose mission is “cut from Christ’s”, is thus not sent into the world with an idea or a philosophy, but with a ‘form’ (or then ‘performance’) that asked to be imitated in the most concrete manner possible. It is the “beloved Son, who in his mission” brings “the kingdom of heaven to earth”, who is the “presupposition for all Christian existence and action”.²⁴² Christ, Balthasar asserts, is the “the ‘syllogistic form’ of all Christian thinking and living”.²⁴³

Balthasar then holds that, when looking at Jesus’ performance on the world stage, as described above, it is evident that the Word-made-flesh “did not live to please himself (Rom 15:3), ‘did not seek his own honour’ (Jn 5:41)”, and “‘did not cling to his form of divinity’ (Phil 2:6)”.²⁴⁴

²³⁹ Given the fact that each Christian mission, as a reflection of Christ’s mission, is unique (as emphasised above), Balthasar warns that we should be wary of “overly narrow interpretations” of what it means to be “sent on mission into the world”. Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 143. Just as it can be said that “truth is symphonic”, Christian mission, arising from the infinite depths of Christ’s own mission, undoubtedly has a rich diversity to it. See Balthasar’s monograph, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), wherein he makes a passionate plea for the importance of ‘plurality’ (also then within the ‘body of Christ’), through making use of the metaphor of a symphony orchestra. He writes: “Symphony means ‘sound together’. First there is sound, then different sounds and then we hear the different sounds singing together in a dance of song... In the symphony ... all the instruments are integrated in a whole sound... The orchestra must be pluralist in order to unfold the wealth of the totality that resounds in the composer’s mind”. He then goes on to argue that the same can be said about the ‘truth’ of God (and, it could be added, something such as Christian discipleship). He notes: “Today, therefore, perhaps the most necessary thing to proclaim and take to heart is that Christian truth is symphonic... The Church’s reservoir, which lies at its core, is ‘the depth of the riches of God’ in Jesus Christ. The Church exhibits this fullness in an inexhaustible multiplicity, which keeps flowing, irresistibly, from its unity”. Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 7, 15, and also 81-4 (a section dealing with Christian *action* and *ethics* in the world). See also Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 435.

²⁴⁰ With regards to the ‘Christian virtues’, Balthasar writes: “Faith, hope and love are the life of Christ incarnate in his members”. Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 112.

²⁴¹ See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ‘Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics,’ in *Principles of Christian Morality*, ed. Heinz Schurmann and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 79-84. Balthasar wrote these propositions for the ‘International Theological Commission’ right in the middle of working on his theodramatic project. See Scola, *Hans Urs Balthasar*, 101-2. See also Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, 206.

²⁴² Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 43.

²⁴³ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 107.

²⁴⁴ See Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 88; and also, *New Elucidations*, 66-7.

He rather lived a life of kenosis, a life of self-donation, which revolved around loving and serving the Father, *from whom* he had been sent, and, importantly, loving and serving others, *to whom*, and *for whose sake*, he had been sent. This, Balthasar remarks, is also then the core of ever Christian mission, the commission that rings forth from the *missio Christi* on the world stage, namely, to love and serve God and to love and serve other human beings, especially the poor, hungry, and persecuted, as Christ himself did.²⁴⁵ Following Christ's resurrection, he writes, human beings are called "to subordinate the form of their existence to that of Christ", following in his footsteps by loving "both God and men".²⁴⁶ Every Christian mission, he asserts, is indeed marked by "love of God and love of neighbour as revealed by Christ", which can be "accomplished only by taking one's stand where" Christ took his, by recalling "to the world the form of Christ".²⁴⁷

In reading through Balthasar's writings, it is rather surprising to see how much emphasis he places on the second part of this commission, contrary to what is often thought. Part of the reason for this, has to do with Balthasar's conviction that "love of God" and "love of neighbour" are "perfectly one", and that the latter can, in fact, be seen as an expression, sign, and even 'sacrament' of the former, especially given Christ's kenotic solidarity with every last person.²⁴⁸ According to Balthasar, a life of Christian mission in obedience and servitude to God, presupposes "the habitual act of a loving readiness for service" in the world".²⁴⁹ It is not "complacent and self-absorbed, but is ready to take initiatives in the social area".²⁵⁰ Christian mission, he writes, can thus be said to involve: opening up "the very depths of one's heart" to the other, and affirming their "unique worth and dignity";²⁵¹ pressing "for the removal of injustices in the distribution of goods, or racial discrimination, or the repression of classes or people";²⁵² being "in solidarity with the poor and not with the rich";²⁵³ and actively taking part

²⁴⁵ Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 25, 57, 71, 75, 81, 169, 385, 427.

²⁴⁶ Balthasar, *A Theology of History*, 117-8.

²⁴⁷ Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 221-2.

²⁴⁸ Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 418. Balthasar writes that, since Christ lived, died and was raised *for* and also *with* every last human being, "Christ is the Brother in all brothers, the divine Neighbour in all human neighbours. That is why we can speak of our brother, not as 'Christ in disguise' but as the sacrament of Christ"; "for this turning to the neighbour is more than just a command of God. The divine Son and Friend lives so truly in the neighbour that it is henceforth possible to seek and find him wholly in one's neighbour". See Balthasar, *Prayer*, 215.

²⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 420. See also Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, 238, where he writes: "[It is] no longer a matter of merely recognising the rights of other people, but rather, according to Jesus' example ... a question of vital service to one's neighbour ... The 'greater', more Christian person is the person who serves more deeply, like Jesus".

²⁵⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 420.

²⁵¹ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 56-9. Balthasar continues to write: "We must learn from the very beginning not to use our natural eyes when looking at our neighbour... Rather must we look at him 'with the eyes of faith' so that we may see him as God sees him in Jesus Christ".

²⁵² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 422.

²⁵³ Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, 13.

in every “effort to humanise” the world”.²⁵⁴ For Balthasar, all of these actions can be seen as expressions of a person’s “love of God”.²⁵⁵ In *The Christian State of Life*, Balthasar writes the following:

There is for [the Christian] ... no other happiness than the accomplishment of the service to which he is called and which – O wonders of wonders! – consists for him exclusively in the calling of love ... [Christian mission] is a summons to leave one’s selfish and isolated self and to enter a state that is, by definition, the end of all isolation. For it is the state of Christ, whose whole personhood is identified with service and love for the Father, and for the Father’s sake, for mankind. The very transition from one’s own state to the state of Christ and, in particular, the acceptance of what these transitions mean, make it impossible for the Christian to live henceforth for anything other than for God and his neighbour... Because he lives ... in Christ, there can be for him no other concept of personhood than that which is given expression in mission, service and the renunciation of self.²⁵⁶

At first, to live a life of Christian mission with and for the sake of others in obedience to the ‘call of Christ’ almost seems like an impossibility. For, as emphasised in the previous chapter, a defining aspect of sinful humanity is our self-centeredness, which results in a discord between what we are called to do, namely, to selflessly serve God and our neighbour, and what we end up doing, which is to pursue our own good. While the drama of the Christ-event reveals to humanity its true purpose on the world stage, our default inclination is to act in exactly the opposite manner, even when acknowledging Christ’s truth, responding to his call, and consciously taking up our God-given mission on the world stage (something Paul knew all too well, as seen in Rm 7:15-20). Balthasar is obviously fully cognizant of this reality, and he therefore does not see a life of Christian mission, expressing the *missio Christi*, as something that occurs instantaneously. For him, as a follower of Ignatius, it is rather a constant process of purification and formation (or *paideia*), brought about by God’s grace and the working of the Spirit,²⁵⁷ in which a person is gradually impressed with, and transformed into, the form of

²⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 87.

²⁵⁵ Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 148.

²⁵⁶ Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 79-80, 224.

²⁵⁷ For more on the role of ‘grace’ in this process of purification and formation, see Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 72-83 (a section titled ‘Grace and Mission’), and also *A Theology of History*, 120, where he writes: “This is the seed of grace, which is always both the seed of a mission and, for that very reason, at the same time a seed of formation and development. It is only in the context of being sent upon a mission that any moment of time can finally ripen and in which [by grace] ... a full correspondence is attained (on the pattern of Christ) between what is demanded of us and what we manage to do”. See also *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 402, and *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 528. For more on the role of the Holy Spirit in this process, see, once more, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 50-55, and *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 360. See also *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 377-78, where Balthasar writes: “...because of the character of grace (to be an event of transformation), it leaves room for all real events and

Christ; a process Balthasar calls “Christian attunement”.²⁵⁸ According to Balthasar, a life of Christian mission is thus ultimately about being *in via* with Christ; about learning to be more and more *disponible* to God’s will, to use Stanislavski’s notion; about increasingly opening oneself up, and saying ‘Yes’ (with Mary), to Christ’s truth, and God’s calling on one’s life; about living *into* one’s baptism and gradually coming to know what it means to be a ‘person in Christ’ (and, in this process, finally becoming one’s true ‘self’; the ‘self’ created and called by God).

For Balthasar, it is important to emphasize that, as we increasingly assent to God’s calling on our lives, and are increasingly formed and enabled through God’s grace and the working of the Spirit, to perform our God-given mission on the world stage, we will also, like Christ, be confronted with the darkness of suffering and death – not merely as a natural end of life, but also as a direct consequence of sin and humanity’s opposition to, and rejection of, God’s love. What Christ said and did on the world stage, which included serving and entering into solidarity with the hungry, poor, and oppressed, brought him directly to the cross; and if we follow in his footsteps, and re-perform the *missio Christi* through the dramas of our own lives, we can expect the same fate.²⁵⁹ As stated above, “where true humanism is proclaimed and where human rights are truly championed ... persecution starts”.²⁶⁰ According to Balthasar, a life of Christian mission does not attempt to avoid these realities, for that would ask of one to compromise on Christ’s message and give in to the sinful demands of this world. It rather embraces suffering and death, also in solidarity with, and even “on behalf of”, others,²⁶¹ knowing that in these moments of absolute darkness, we are not alone or forsaken, but that Christ himself suffers and

phases that makes up man’s way to God: conversion, progress, backsliding, cooperation and obstacles. Redemption is not affected ‘in one lump’, so to speak, as if all the petty details of daily life were ultimately meaningless... Redemption comes to us respecting our incarnate lives in time, leaving room for us to continue to change as we follow in the footsteps of the incarnate Lord. The steps we take in this discipleship have their own inherent meaning and weight. God takes our decisions seriously, working them into his plan by his holy providence”.

²⁵⁸ See Ben Quash’s discussion of this aspect of Balthasar’s dramatics in Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar’s Theatre of the World,’ 20-22, and Quash, ‘The Theo-drama’, 149, where he speaks about how mission arising from “a deep contemplation of the life of the Lord ... requires training”. This idea of being “attuned” to Christ, has an important place in Balthasar’s theology (and is especially prominent in his aesthetics). See, for example, the section ‘Christian attunement’ in *Glory of the Lord, Volume I*, 241-7, where he writes: “Both elements connate totality – both the believer’s offering of himself to God and the impressing of the Christ-form by God upon the believer... Constant contemplation of the whole Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transforms the beholder as a whole into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18)... in such a way that we are here both entitled and compelled to speak of a Christian ‘attunement’ to or ‘consonance’ with God (242).

²⁵⁹ Walatka writes: According to Balthasar, “those who carry out their own mission in Christ, in the midst of the same world where Jesus lived and died, should experience to experience the reality of the cross within this mission”. Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 149.

²⁶⁰ See, once more, Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 452.

²⁶¹ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 281-2; and also, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, trans. Dennis D. Martin and Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 23, where Balthasar speaks about how sharing “with the Lord a concern for [one’s] neighbour, [leads to shared] suffering and shared anxiety”.

dies with us, and, in fact, joins us in crying out in protest against the injustices of this world.²⁶² The follower of Christ furthermore knows that these realities of suffering and death are not the end of the drama; that they will not have the final say in this world; that the message of Christ, also then as performed by us, cannot and will not be brought to a halt, not even by the power of death. For, while Christ really died, ‘for us’ and ‘with us’, he was also raised up again in glory, ‘for us’ and ‘with us’. This reality of the resurrection speaks, once and for all, of life overcoming death, of light overcoming darkness, of love overcoming hate, of justice overcoming injustice, of peace overcoming violence, and of freedom overcoming oppression – definitively, as said, in the world to come, but also already in the here and now, where God’s kingdom is gradually breaking into our world. While marked and governed by “life into death”, the Christian life, according to Balthasar, is thus also marked and governed by “life out of death”,²⁶³ by the joyful and defiant, and, Balthasar would say, “stubborn”,²⁶⁴ hope of the resurrection. This hope, he writes, is a “hope against hope”, which battles against all “meaninglessness and futility”,²⁶⁵ and asks to be visibly embodied and performed on the world stage by those following Christ, especially “in places where, humanly speaking, and from the point of view of this world, no further hope remains, or where no involvement seems worth the trouble”; places, it could be said, where ‘death’ needs to be turned into ‘life’.²⁶⁶ In an important passage in the last volume of his theodramatic project, Balthasar writes the following:

Christian hope, theological hope, goes beyond the world, but it does not pass it by; rather, it takes the world with it on its way to God... This implies that the Christian in the world is meant to awaken hope, particularly among the most hopeless; and this, in turn, means that he must create such humane conditions as will actually allow the poor and oppressed to have hope. Hope must never be individualistic; it must always be social. It cannot simply hope that others will attain eternal salvation; it must enable them to cherish this hope by creating conditions that are apt to promote it.²⁶⁷

²⁶² As Donald MacKinnon writes in the introduction to Balthasar’s booklet, *Engagement with God*: “For authentically Christian faith and existence [according to Balthasar] there is no passing by the *via dolorosa*, no escaping the sheer surd-element of Good Friday” – for this is where we meet Christ, and even more importantly, where Christ – the One whose wounds evermore remains visible on his body – meets us. See Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 8.

²⁶³ Balthasar, *Life out of Death*, 54. See also *The Christian State of Life*, 220, where he writes: “The following of Christ is, then, far more than just a moral acceptance of his commandments and counsels, a mere imitation of his deeds and virtues. It is, here and now, a life based on the reality of his death and resurrection. In this, the Christian state reveals itself as a true stand in Christ ... as a stand in the full revelation of him who ‘descended into the lower parts ... [and] ascended also above the heavens, that he might fill all things’ (Eph. 4:9-10).

²⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 63.

²⁶⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), 83, and also, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 96.

²⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 63; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 363; *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 333; and also, *Explorations in Theology, Volume I*, 109.

²⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 176.

According to Balthasar, the *missio Christi*, which includes Jesus' life and ministry, as well as the "unity-in-duality" of his death and his resurrection,²⁶⁸ is thus something that can and should be re-performed on the world stage, not only by those who are, for example, called to ordained ministry,²⁶⁹ but by anyone who comes into contact with, and receives a specific God-given calling through, the drama of Christ. This is something that can occur through the reading of the Gospels, or through an interaction with someone who is faithfully following in Christ's footsteps. It can even occur through watching a play such as *Woza Albert!*, where the life of Christ is re-imagined on the theatre stage, as will be seen in the next chapter. In a fascinating passage at the end of *Theo-drama III*, Balthasar writes that the "concept of 'mission' is by no means used in an elitist sense".²⁷⁰ No, anyone, "even outside of Christianity", he holds, "who is willing to break out of his egoistic narrowness and do the good simply for its own sake, is given a light which shows him the way that he can and should go", a light which "both uncovers truth and communicates a life that is more alive".²⁷¹ The invitation to live one's life in accordance with the life of Jesus of Nazareth, is thus all-inclusive; it is an invitation that is offered to everybody. There is no avoiding Christ's "gesture of embrace", Balthasar writes.²⁷² Christ "has a way of making himself understood to everyone"; Christianity, and also the Church, has "no monopoly here".²⁷³ Each human being is beckoned, following a "personal encounter with the living Christ,²⁷⁴ to say 'Yes' to the performance of the Christ-event, and, in doing so, to become a co-actor with Jesus on the world stage. Ben Quash writes:

[For Balthasar, Jesus Christ] as the active risen one, is able to encounter and dramatically engage any number of his fellow human beings in the context of the world drama. All are

²⁶⁸ See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 333.

²⁶⁹ While Balthasar held the priesthood (and the whole hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, including the 'primacy of Peter') in very high regard, and understood his own 'mission' as one of ordained ministry, he believed that what is needed in the Church today is 'ordinary' Christians, who, in their day to day lives, faithfully re-perform the *missio Christi* (which is then why he, together with Adrienne von Speyer, started the secular order of the Community of St. John, which remains operative up until this day). In his important booklet, *Razing the Bastions*, he says the following about the importance of lay ministry (with words that would later be echoed in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*): "Today there is no doubt that the hour of the laity is sounding in the Church. Previously ... the laity counted for little. The theology was made by priests and the result accorded with that fact. The church buildings of that time (such a heavy burden for our acts of worship today, since it is impossible or very difficult to realise the liturgy in them as a community celebration), at best allowed only the lay elite into the most sacred precincts, while the people had to remain at the back. Today, a sleeping giant is stretching himself; undreamt-of powers, lying idle up to now like the powers in water not yet brought together to form a dam, and pregnant with primal energies, are beginning to move... The future of the Church (and today she has the greatest opportunities) depends on whether laymen can be found who live out of the unbroken power of the Gospel and are willing to shape the world". Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions: On the Church in This Age*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 38-43.

²⁷⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 528.

²⁷¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 528-9.

²⁷² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 433; *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 241.

²⁷³ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 241.

²⁷⁴ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 215.

invited to respond to him, and to interact with him. He is the unavoidable provocation to which each one of us must at some point or another react, and thereby take a stand which defines us in the wider constellation shaped around Christ by the Spirit.²⁷⁵

With these words by Quash, we near the end of our discussion on Balthasar's theodramatic theory, and are about set to return to where we began in this dissertation, namely, to South African protest theatre and the play, *Woza Albert!*. Before doing so, it is, however, important to briefly say something about the socio-political dimensions, shortcomings, and possibilities of Balthasar's dramatics, as discussed over the last two chapters – a topic which is much debated in Balthasar scholarship today. In *Theo-drama I*, Balthasar explicitly states that one of the aims of his theodramatic theory is to “do justice to concrete Christian existence in its personal [and importantly!] social, and political dimensions”.²⁷⁶ Many scholars, however, have expressed their doubts if he succeeds in this aim, and have also expressed some confusion about some comments he had made about Liberation Theology, also then in a short section in *Theo-drama IV* and other minor writings. In what follows, I will briefly address this rather contentious issue, before looking at the surprisingly strong socio-political emphases in many of Balthasar's sermons; something which, in my opinion, can serve as an encouragement for using Balthasar's thought to engage with a play such as *Woza Albert!*, which originated in response to the unjust political system of apartheid.

4.7. The Political Dimensions of Balthasar's Theological Dramatic Theory

When assessing the socio-political dimensions of Balthasar's theodramatic theory, in particular, and larger theological project, in general, the first thing that should be noted is the strong emphasis that is placed on these dimensions in the opening sections of the first volume of his dramatics. From the very first pages of this work, it is clear that when he speaks of ‘the good’, it should be understood to include the socio-political realities of this world. This is also then confirmed by Balthasar's inclusion of ‘Orthopraxy’, which, according to John de Gruchy, could be seen as another term for ‘Liberation Theology,²⁷⁷ as well as ‘Dialogue’ and ‘Political Theology’ in his discussion of contemporary theological trends, which will provide the building blocks of his theodramatic theory. All three of these trends, as seen in our discussion in the previous chapter, have strong socio-political focuses, which Balthasar does not shy away from, but actively explores and engages with in the light of his proposed theodramatic theory. It is also in the context of this introductory discussion that Balthasar states that one of the main

²⁷⁵ Quash, ‘Hans Urs Balthasar's “Theatre of the World”,’ 27.

²⁷⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 119.

²⁷⁷ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 129.

aims of his dramatics is to “do justice to concrete Christian existence in its personal, social, and political dimensions”.²⁷⁸

When reading through the five volumes of his dramatics, it is indeed then seen how Balthasar, while developing different aspects of his theodramatic theory, sporadically addresses, and engages with, various socio-political issues. Examples of this include his discussion on how ‘the struggle for the good’ has been portrayed on the theatre stage throughout the ages; how drama has the ability to place certain ethical demands on people’s lives; and how the Christ-event, through which the kingdom of God breaks into the world, challenges earthly kingdoms, and asks for the “removal of injustice”, the countering of “racial discrimination”, and the ending of “repression of classes or people”, while bringing about “hope” for the “poor and the oppressed”.²⁷⁹ It is, however, also the case, as some commentators have noted,²⁸⁰ that at certain key moment in his dramatics, especially in the last three volumes, Balthasar seems to be oddly quiet about the possible socio-political implications of his thought.

It is often suggested that one of the main reasons behind Balthasar’s hesitation to address socio-political matters at certain key points in his theodramatic theory, is the number of uncertainties he harboured with regards to Liberation Theology at the time; uncertainties that would have been fuelled on by his friendship with Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI,²⁸¹ and should also be understood against the larger political developments in the world and in Germany, where the GDR ruled with an iron fist in the East. In one of the last interviews Balthasar ever conducted, he explicitly stated that, for him, ‘Liberation Theology’, with its “preferential option for the poor”, is the most promising development in Catholic theology today,²⁸² but in the years leading up to this assertion, Balthasar raised a few concerns about this ‘theological movement’ out of Latin America, most notably in a short, almost detached section in *Theo-drama IV*,²⁸³ and in an essay titled ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation

²⁷⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 119.

²⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 422; *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 176-66.

²⁸⁰ See Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 1-20. See also Thomas G. Dalzell, ‘Lack of Social Drama in Balthasar’s Theological Dramatics,’ in *Theological Studies* 60, no. 3 (1990): 457-75.

²⁸¹ Ratzinger’s opposition towards Liberation Theology is well documented. With Ratzinger as *prefect*, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, for example, published at least three official statements that critiqued certain aspects of Liberation Theology: “Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez” (1983), “Introduction on Certain Aspect of the ‘Theology of Liberation’ (1984), and ‘Introduction on Christian Freedom and Liberation’ (1986). All of these texts are collected in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).

²⁸² Balthasar, ‘Last Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar’ (Ignatius Press YouTube Channel), from the 53rd minute onwards. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygKIWUa-iLM> [Accessed 20 November 2018].

²⁸³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 476-87.

History'.²⁸⁴ These concerns included, amongst other things, that the theological tradition would be replaced by contemporary sociological, and especially Marxist, analyses; that the whole of salvation history would only be seen and understood in socio-political terms; and, most importantly, that a dangerous Prometheism would take hold of Christianity, where everything would depend on humankind's own, self-initiated actions on the world stage.²⁸⁵

With regards to these concerns of Balthasar, the following could be said: On the one hand, his words of caution definitely carry some weight and should not be dismissed out of hand, as someone like John de Gruchy has argued.²⁸⁶ There is always the danger that Christianity can be co-opted for, and reduced to, certain promethean ends, in which one man-made kingdom is simply replaced by another. On the other hand, it should also be said that Balthasar's warnings do not really seem to apply to any of the prominent liberation theologians of his time, and that if he had put more effort into reading the works of, say, Gutiérrez, or Sobrino, or Boff, he would have come to different conclusions much earlier.²⁸⁷ What is, however, interesting and important to take note of is that, even while Balthasar was voicing these concerns, he also, in the very same texts, strongly affirmed and applauded Liberation Theology's focus on the plight of the poor, the destitute, and the oppressed. He even remarked that, in its "summoning of" the Christian's "crucial, world-transforming cooperation", Liberation Theology "reveals the dramatic situation of the Christian in this world, as perhaps nothing else does" – a remark which, as Walatka notes, is "no small praise for someone constructing a theodramatic theology".²⁸⁸ While Balthasar believed that the Christ-event and the coming of the kingdom of God should not solely be construed in socio-political terms, as he was afraid Liberation Theology might try to do, he remained convinced that socio-political liberation still formed an

²⁸⁴ For an insightful treatment of Balthasar's reading of Liberation Theology (which expands on everything said in this short discussion), see Kevin Mongraine, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002)166-74.

²⁸⁵ For Balthasar, this temptation to place the focus on humanity own actions and initiatives, is not only problematic because he believes that true liberation (also then understood politically), should be grounded in what God does (principally through Christ); but also because he is quite sceptical about humanity's ability to bring about the 'good' on the world stage on their own, without digressing back into exactly the same unjust, power-hungry and oppressive 'systems of rule' that was once fought against. For Balthasar, as Rowan Williams writes, the "world is not a world of well-meaning agnostics but of totalitarian nightmares, of nuclear arsenals, labour camps and torture chambers". Whereas the coming kingdom of God, "built on the foundation of" Jesus Christ, is always marked by 'weakness' (as emphasised above), earthly kingdoms that are built up by humanity (even then by those initially fighting against injustice), usually succumb to the lure of 'power'. As "the will-to-power increases with each success", Balthasar writes, "it is hardly possible to say where working for sheer survival [will turn into] working for the sake of pure domination". See Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner,' in *The Analogy of Beauty*, 11-34 (here 33); and also, Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 482-3.

²⁸⁶ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 131-33.

²⁸⁷ See Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 66; and also, De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 134-5.

²⁸⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 482; Walatka, *Von Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 60.

essential part of Christianity's larger message.²⁸⁹ In the section on Liberation Theology in *Theo-drama IV*, he thus writes, that it is the “strict Christian duty to fight for social justice on behalf of the poor and the oppressed” – a work “according to which the Christian, and indeed everyone, will be judged”.²⁹⁰ He also repeats this sentiment in his essay, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History’, where he declares that the political “liberation of the poor and the oppressed ... is one of the signs demanded of the Christian”,²⁹¹ and that, since Jesus “sides with the poor”, the Church, too, “must by preference side with the poor”.²⁹² In “practical terms”, he continues in the same essay, Christian should shape “the world as a whole in a manner conforming with Christ”, and indeed “convert hearts to their political responsibility”, so that the “conversion of structures” could be affected.²⁹³ The only effective way to “convert the structures of the world from sinfulness and to transform them”, he declares, is “by the – dramatic! – collaboration of all”.²⁹⁴

Even though Balthasar thus expressed some concerns about Liberation Theology, it can confidently be stated that he did not ever waver in his belief that the drama of the Christ-event is focused towards, and intrinsically tied to, the lives of those who are hungry, poor, and oppressed.²⁹⁵ In an important and oft-quoted passage, Balthasar asserts:

Whoever is concerned about the demolition of injustice, lovelessness, and hard-heartedness in any shape or form – by helping the poor, by really taking up the cause of the rights of the proletariat ... by fighting for the elimination of war, of nationalism, of racial hatred, or against whatever there is of unbearable injustice in the world – stands right at the place where one encounters God (in Jesus Christ).²⁹⁶

The thoughts expressed in this passage are not unique, but permeate numerous of Balthasar's writings, especially those who are closely related to his theodramatic project. This has hopefully been seen throughout this chapter, where I – together with the work *Theo-drama* itself – consulted numerous other texts such as the essay ‘The Beatitudes and Human Dignity’, and well as books such as *Mysterium Paschale, Engagements with God, Theology and History*,

²⁸⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,’ trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, in *Liberation Theology in Latin America*, ed. James Schall (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 128.

²⁹⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 486.

²⁹¹ Balthasar, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,’ 138ff.

²⁹² Balthasar, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,’ 142.

²⁹³ Balthasar, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,’ 146.

²⁹⁴ Balthasar, ‘Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History,’ 146.

²⁹⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator: Skizzen der Theologie: Band 3* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), 371, as quoted and translated in De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 131.

²⁹⁶ Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator*, 374, as quoted and translated in De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 131.

and importantly, *The Christian State of Life*, to name but a few. One part of Balthasar's corpus that I have purposely not included in our discussion so far, but that I would like to briefly turn towards at the end of this chapter, is Balthasar's sermons, in which he interestingly places a very strong focus on the socio-political dimensions of both the drama of the Christ-event and the drama of Christian mission. As was noted in the second chapter, Balthasar saw his work in ministry as an extension of his theological endeavours, and vice versa, and by looking at some of his most prominent sermons one is indeed encouraged to take up Rowan Williams challenge to bring Balthasar's theological thought into contact with the concrete political dramas that are playing out on the world stage and on the theatre stage in our contemporary world, as we will attempt to do in the following chapter.²⁹⁷

4.8. Balthasar's Sermons

The first sermon by Balthasar that I would like to focus on at the end of this chapter is the Christmas homily titled 'Setting Out into the Darkness with God', a reflection on Luke 2. In this sermon, Balthasar tells the story of how the shepherds, after being addressed by angels who shone "upon them with the blinding glory of God", set out with great "expectation, curiosity, and hope" to find and to see with their own eyes the "word that has 'happened'", the "word that has taken place", the "words that has been done" by God.²⁹⁸ Great is their surprise when, upon leaving the "unwonted light of divine glory and the unwonted sound of heavenly music" that filled the skies,²⁹⁹ they are sent to a manger, of all places, where they find, Balthasar writes:

...a child. Some child or other. Not a special child. Not a child radiating a light of glory ... but on the contrary: a child that looks as inglorious as possible ... there is nothing elevating about the manner in which it lies either, nothing even remotely corresponding to the heavenly glory of the singing angels. There is practically nothing even half worth seeing... Indeed, in its poverty, it is decidedly disappointing. It is something entirely human and ordinary, something quite profane, in no way distinguished –except for the fact that this is the promised sign, and it fits.³⁰⁰

And so, Balthasar holds, the shepherds, who themselves probably looked and felt like "shabby beggars", became some of the first witnesses to the truth of the Christ-event, namely, that God, in becoming flesh, does not cling to any glory or splendour, but, from the moment that he is

²⁹⁷ Rowan Williams, 'Afterword: Making Differences,' in *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, 175.

²⁹⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 275.

²⁹⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 275.

³⁰⁰ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 276.

born into the “poverty of the crib”, moves into “the darkness of the world”, where he enters into absolute solidarity with humanity, especially with the “poor and the powerless”.³⁰¹ From the very start, Balthasar holds, the life of the “Word-in-action” is thus marked by a ‘giving of the self’, as Christ associates with those who are excluded and pushed aside by the rich and the powerful of this world – something which would eventually lead to the “loneliness and forsakenness” of the cross, from where he “descends to his dead human brothers”.³⁰² After this initial reflection on Christ’s birth in the manger, and how it sets into motion his life of kenosis, ultimately resulting in him being executed, Balthasar turns to the followers of Christ – those who “deep in their hearts” receive “a mission” that emanates forth from the *missio Christi*.³⁰³ He asserts that they, too, like Jesus, are sent to the poor and the desolate, the outsiders and the oppressed, and that they are asked to “identify with them all”.³⁰⁴ For this is indeed where God is, where Christ is, namely, with those who suffer and long for liberation, restoration, and salvation.³⁰⁵ Balthasar declares:

It is true, therefore: in order that he shall find God, the Christian is placed on the streets of this world, sent to his manacled and poor brethren, to all who suffer, hunger and thirst; to all who are naked, sick and in prison. From henceforth, this is his place... This is the great joy that is proclaimed to him today, for it is the same way that God sent a Saviour to us... It is an appeal to my heart, demanding the investment of my total self... if I stay locked within myself, if I seek, I shall not find the peace that is promised to the man on whom God’s favour rests. I must go. I must enter the service of the poor and the imprisoned.³⁰⁶

Balthasar then acknowledges the difficulty of heeding this call of Christ, not only because it asks of one to move beyond one’s “own comfort”, but also because it will lead to “laughter and mockery”, and bring the follower of Christ face-to-face with the “powers of darkness”, with those who are “resolved to gain power at any price, through hatred and annihilation”.³⁰⁷ Just as Christ’s mission was met with violent opposition, so too our missions will be met with hostility, prompting the believer to ask: “What is the point of my efforts, my dedication, my sacrifice”, especially if the cries “of those unjustly oppressed” continues to grow “louder every day?”³⁰⁸ From a creaturely point of view, everything may seem very dark, Balthasar confesses; one’s “dedication may seem unproductive and a failure”, and severe suffering and even death may

³⁰¹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 276-7.

³⁰² Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277.

³⁰³ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277-8.

³⁰⁴ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 278.

³⁰⁵ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 278.

³⁰⁶ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277-8.

³⁰⁷ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 278-9.

³⁰⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 279.

lie on the horizon.³⁰⁹ However, in these moments, he asserts, we can know that we are not alone, but that we walk where Christ, the One who was born in a manger and died on a cross, walked; that we are “on God’s path”, which is the “path of divine love itself”; that Christ is with us, and that even “in the midst of an overpowering darkness”, his light can, and will, break through, bringing “peace and joy where there were nothing but despair and resignation”.³¹⁰

This theme of Christ’s concern for, and solidarity with, the marginalised, the poor, and the oppressed, also has a central place in many other sermons by Balthasar. In another Christmas homily titled ‘Levelling Downward’, he emphasises the “holy poverty” of the manger, and how “fitting” it is that Christ’s first visitor would be “poor shepherds” and not the “kings or the wise men”.³¹¹ Quoting Claudel, Balthasar notes that the Son probably immediately felt “at home with them”.³¹² This was the “level adopted by God himself in the incarnation”, he writes, “the level of poverty, crib, flight; of Nazareth, the wilderness, nomadic existence; of the cross and the grave”.³¹³ The purpose of Christ’s life was indeed to give “himself away” to, and identify with, the poorest of the poor, in what could be seen in Balthasar’s words as an “exchange of love”.³¹⁴ According to him, this is also then what those “who are serious about Christianity” are called to do in and through the missions of their own lives, namely, to give themselves to, and enter into solidarity with, those on the margins of society.³¹⁵

Another important sermon in this regard is the New Year homily, ‘To and Fro in the Immensity of God’s Realm’, where Balthasar begins by reflecting on Hannah’s song and the way it echoes through in different Psalms. He then asserts that God indeed “lifts the poor from the dust and mire because by his very nature he shows solidarity with the lowly and humble”.³¹⁶ That this is the case, he holds, is definitively seen in the life of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who, in taking on a human form, “experiences the pitiless depths of poverty, humiliation and dying abandoned by God”.³¹⁷ “What we see”, Balthasar holds, is that “Light and Life and Love” allows itself “to be poor and humiliated and to die in forsakenness”, and in doing so, plumbs “all the depths of the human lot”, so as to take the realities into “the divine life”, and bring about “rescue and hope”.³¹⁸ Christ’s death, where he dies in the most brutal manner possible as “Grünewald’s

³⁰⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 280.

³¹⁰ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 280.

³¹¹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 292.

³¹² Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 292.

³¹³ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 293.

³¹⁴ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 293.

³¹⁵ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 293.

³¹⁶ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 13.

³¹⁷ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 14.

³¹⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 14-5.

crucifixion shows”, and also, his resurrection, break the bonds of sin and all its consequences in the world, including those pertaining to the socio-political sphere of life.³¹⁹ Balthasar remarks:

As Hanna sang: “God brings down to Sheol and raises up”. Here, at last, this finally comes true. Here, as Paul says, death becomes swallowed up in life, and its sting is drawn. The other paradoxes, too, are solved: the poor, those who mourn and who hunger for righteousness, are called blessed because God has now entered into solidarity with them in the most intimate manner, because his almighty power is not a tyrannical and haughty omnipotence: it is gentle and even poor in a certain sense, because it has no other weapon than love and that justice that is inwardly one with it.³²⁰

Also in this sermon, Balthasar emphasises that these acts of Christ ask for a response; that they beckon humanity to join in on Christ’s mission, through the mission of their own lives.³²¹ Balthasar states that New Year’s Day is the feast of “Mary, the Mother of God”, whose example inspires us to say ‘Yes’ to God’s calling, and to live a life “that is simply devoted to the discipleship of Christ”.³²² He holds that there are, indeed, “urgent tasks to be performed in the world”.³²³ We, for example, have to “fight for earthly justice, against hunger and disease, tyranny and terrorism”.³²⁴ These tasks, Balthasar continues, should be approached “with courage”, even though we know that, for the time being, “evil and negativity and death” remain part of our earthly reality, and that, like Christ, we can expect to experience staunch opposition, as the powers and principalities of this world still attempt, two thousand years later, to bring an end to the truth that Christ proclaimed to and about humanity.³²⁵ In times of tribulation, Balthasar concludes, we can and should:

... find consolation in the fact that God in Jesus Christ is with us and that he is far more acquainted than we are with all the dimensions of existence. He has experienced them, and he allows us to participate in *his* experience... “When I am weak”, says the Apostle, “then I am strong”. If I am poor with Christ ... then I am rich. If my heart lets itself be pierced, together with Mary’s heart, it will be open and maternal, able to give succour to those who are overburdened. So, let us not be afraid of the future that is opening up before us. It will

³¹⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 15.

³²⁰ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 15.

³²¹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 15.

³²² Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16.

³²³ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16.

³²⁴ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16.

³²⁵ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16.

continually swing us back and forth between the light and the dark, but we shall never swing beyond God's reach.³²⁶

One of Balthasar's strongest assertions that the Christian life of mission should not only be focused on loving and serving God, but also on loving and serving one's neighbour, is found in a Sylvester's Day sermon titled 'Examination of Conscience'. In this sermon, Balthasar begins by saying that "every citizen has the power, by participating responsibly in public life, to contribute creatively to the common good", and that if someone wants to live an "entirely private life", that is, a life only focused on their "own well-being", they are not only "depriving others", but are also themselves being "deprived" of the blessings that a 'life-with-others' brings.³²⁷ He then says that if this is true for non-Christians, it is even more true for those who have received a mission from God and are following Christ, the One who *only* lived for others. In a passionate appeal to his fellow-Christians, Balthasar makes the following comment:

Every Christian has his personal relationship with God, his prayer of the heart, his unique sharing in God's love for the world, in Christ's suffering for the world. But this personal sphere does not exist in private seclusion; in its very intimacy it exists for the community. The Christian is fundamentally a man who has been dispossessed. He lives for God and his fellowman because he knows that he is not the author of his own existence; thus, in gratitude for his life, he must lead a life of thanksgiving. He gladly does what he can and gives what he has... The Christian must always be available, whether he is waking or sleeping, praying or working, speaking or being silent – because he has been made *in principle* available... Ultimately, our obligations to God and our obligations to our neighbour are identical. Whenever we pray to God, it is also for the world and its good; whenever we serve those around us, we are also doing the will of God, ministering to the coming of his kingdom "on earth as in heaven" ... At this point the religious dimension merges into the political... Neither religion nor civic life is private...³²⁸

To be a follower of Christ, Balthasar concludes, is thus to be purged and freed from the "tide of our own egoism" and to take an "inner decision, at a fundamental level" to live as Christ did, which is a life of service to others; a life where it is not simply enough to "fill out some green form for development aid, or an Albert Schweitzer Hospital, or read the *Gulag Archipelago*", but in which one really does "something here and now, very personally and very modestly", in the place where you have been "brought up, in family, community, Church, and

³²⁶ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 16.

³²⁷ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 302-3.

³²⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 303-4.

state”.³²⁹ This ‘following of Christ’, Balthasar remarks, is not something that occurs instantaneously, as noted above, but is “expressed and slowly confirmed in small, everyday acts of concern for our fellowman and of dedication to God”.³³⁰

In all of these sermons it becomes clear that, for Balthasar, the drama of the Christ-event, in which we are brought face-to-face with “perfect, selfless love and service to the very last”, as he says in ‘Waiting for God’ (a homily for *Advent*), is the “innermost meaning and core of all mankind’s questions”, including, importantly, “those of politics, economics, and other fields”.³³¹ Balthasar’s sermons thus confirm that his theology, in general, and his theodramatic theory, in particular, indeed have strong socio-political implications which can, and should, as Rowan Williams noted, be brought into conversation with the tangible socio-political realities of this world.³³²

4.9. Conclusion

Over the last two chapters, we have gradually worked our way through Balthasar’s theodramatic theory, as developed in his five-volume work *Theo-drama*, which is the second instalment of his dogmatic trilogy. We commenced with a discussion of his understanding of the relationship between drama as performed on the theatre stage and drama as performed on the world stage, and eventually proceeded, in this chapter, to discuss his understanding of the drama of the Christ-event, which takes the form of a three-fold mission, consisting out of the ‘syllables’ of ‘life’, ‘death’, and ‘resurrection’. It was subsequently argued that this drama of the Christ-event, as Balthasar already hinted at in the first volume of his dogmatics, does not bring an end to all dramatic activity on the world stage, but has exactly the opposite effect. This can be seen in the way in which human beings, in encountering the risen Christ, are called to re-perform, and give further expression to, Christ’s liberating mission, through the dramatic missions of their own lives. It can, however, also be seen on the theatre stage, as the drama of the Christ-event, as ‘drama of all dramas’, serving “as the answer to all humanity’s dramatic explorations”, often inspires and enthuses new dramatic expressions in the most unexpected of ways, as discussed in the previous chapter. This is what happened with the early mystery plays, or the works of Calderón, or Shakespeare, and many other playwrights throughout history. This is also, then, what happened during some of the darkest hours in South Africa’s history, when a secular Jew and two young actors from the Soweto township decided to re-stage the Christ-

³²⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 306.

³³⁰ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 306.

³³¹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 255.

³³² Rowan Williams, ‘Afterword: Making Differences,’ 234.

drama in Johannesburg's Market Theatre, amidst, and in response to, the realities of apartheid South Africa – a fascinating occurrence, to which we will now turn in the next chapter.

– 5 –

South African Protest Theatre and A Theological Engagement with *Woza Albert!*

“Theatre is involved with extending people’s visibility and vision; helping people to be seen and to see, helping them to accept responsibility of their lives. It’s a way of illuminating the world that surrounds one.”

Barney Simon¹

“For two years [we] had been researching, reading the Bible, talking about ‘What if Christ would come back to South Africa?’, which is a subject that came about by accident in a bus when people were arguing.”

Mbogeni Ngema²

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we return to South African anti-apartheid protest theatre and the play, *Woza Albert!*, as initially discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. I will begin by looking at the history of drama and the theatre in (southern) Africa, from pre-colonial times until the mid-20th century – a history that is of crucial importance for any engagement with, and understanding of, South African protest theatre, in general, and a play such as *Woza Albert!*, in particular. This will be followed by a discussion of how, from at least the 1950’s onwards, drama and theatre performances were increasingly used to bear witness to, and speak out against, the socio-political realities in this country, especially by a group of emerging playwrights, directors, and actors who were associated with Dorkay House on Eloff Street, in Central Johannesburg. As part of this discussion, I will introduce the playwright and anti-apartheid activist, Barney Simon, and also discuss the genesis of the Market Theatre, which came to be known as the “theatre of the struggle”.³ Next, the focus will shift to the play *Woza Albert!*, as developed by the actor-duo, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, in cooperation with Simon. After giving an account of the fascinating story of how the play came into being, I will present an overview of the play’s plot. This will be followed by a theological reading of the play, which is informed by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as discussed in the previous two chapters, so as to answer the research question of the dissertation.

¹ Quoted in Pat Schwartz, *The Best of the Company: The Story of Johannesburg’s Market Theatre* (Johannesburg: AD. Donker Publisher, 1988), 83.

² Mbogeni Ngema, “Working with Barney was a revelation that became consistent with my work up until this day,” in *The World in an Orange*, 189.

³ Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, ‘Art, politics, or business? Theatre in search of identity, 1968-2000,’ in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, ed. Tobin Nellhause (London: Routledge, 2006), 477-87 (here 483).

5.2. Pre-Colonial Theatre and the Introduction of Christianity

Towards the end of Elsa Joubert's celebrated novel, *Missionaris*, one of the characters make the striking comment that Western settlers did not bring God to Africa, but that God has been here from the very beginning.⁴ The same could be said about drama and the theatre. Throughout his theological dramatic theory, Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that human beings, from different parts of the world, have always had a primordial need to mimetically act out before one another the intricacies of life on earth, especially as it relates to sacred realities; and when one examines the histories of the people and cultures on the African continent, also in its southernmost regions, one finds many performative traditions that have been part and parcel of communities' lives for millennia. There is, indeed, in the words of Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, "sufficient evidence to suggest that there existed in the early societies rich and varied dramatic forms", long before any colonialist set foot ashore on the African continent.⁵

Someone who has done extensive research on this topic is the Africanist scholar, poet, and playwright, Credo Mutwa. According to Mutwa, the theatre in Southern Africa is "as old as Man himself", as can be seen, for example, from the earliest rock paintings by the San people, which dates back tens of thousands of years and vividly depict ritual dances and dramatic performances.⁶ He also notes that, later, when nomadic tribes began to move southwards from the rest of the continent, different "traditional performance forms" came into existence, which fulfilled important religious, social, and moral functions in communities, and ranged from "singing and dancing", to "simple but highly skilled and highly organised storytelling by an expert storyteller", to the "actual enactment of stories" by "trained players of both sexes", who were chosen for this task by the elders.⁷ One prominent example of such enacted storytelling that Mutwa refers to is that of *Umlinganiso* in the Zulu culture, which, quite tellingly, can be translated in English as 'the living imitation'.⁸ *Umlinganiso*, Mutwa writes, was aimed at keeping the memories of the ancestors alive, passing religious and moral wisdom along, depicting present realities, and establishing a sense of identity and "cohesion" among the

⁴ See Elsa Joubert, *Missionaris: Roman* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1988), 310. The line in the novel reads as follows: "Dit leer my ... dat ons God nie na Afrika bring nie, God is hier, was altyd hier." [This teaches me ... that we do not bring God to Africa, God is here, was always here].

⁵ Robert Mshengu Kavanah, *The Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* (Chicago: Zed Books, 1985), 44.

⁶ See Credo Mutwa, 'Umlinganiso... The Living Imitation,' *S'Ketsh* 4 (Summer 1973): 30-32. *S'Ketsh* was an influential alternative theatre magazine/journal that was founded by Robert Amato and Mango Tshabangu, who were both members of Workshop '71, an "experimental theatre group" that became a "became a nucleus of politically practitioners" from the 1970's onwards. See also Kavanah, *The Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, 54.

⁷ See Credo Mutwa, 'On the Theatre of Africa,' *S'Ketsh* 3 (Summer, 1973): 38; Christopher B. Balme, *Decolonising the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235.

⁸ Mutwa, 'Umlinganiso,' 32.

members of a community.⁹ It comprised out of “traditional stories” being “acted out as plays by trained players, under the keen supervision of *inyanga* (praise singers) and *isangoma* (diviners), with audience participation in the singing and the dancing”.¹⁰ In this form of storytelling, he writes, “each person representing a particular character in the story” would walk, speak, and even behave “as that particular character is supposed to speak, walk, and behave”.¹¹ *Umlinganiso* thus required ‘acting’ of the highest quality, where participants momentarily ‘became’ the characters that they portrayed, often convincing audience members that they were “actual incarnations” of the persons they were representing.¹² These performances, Mutwa continues, usually took place “in specially constructed” arenas, which were rectangular in form and had two different stages.¹³ The first stage-area, called the *Inkundla*, was constructed at the one end of the ‘theatre’ and was the place where the ‘play’ usually started and ended, while the second stage-area, called the *Ishashalazi*, was constructed at the other end of the theatre, and was the place where the main dramatic events were performed.¹⁴ Audience members stood on the floor between these two sections, from where they not only beheld, but also actively took part in, the action of the play.¹⁵

Following Mutwa’s research, it could be said that it was these elaborate performances by trained ‘actors’ on specialised ‘stage’ set-ups, that Europeans were confronted with when they first set foot on the Africa continent.¹⁶ From the many records compiled by settlers and missionaries, it is common knowledge that they were not too enthusiastic about this discovery. Even though some reports did recognise the “potential” of African “primitive theatre”,¹⁷ and someone like John Kirk, who was part of David Livingston’s exploration team and eventually worked as a missionary in present-day Malawi, even suggested that African dramatic ‘techniques’ could be added “with great advantage” to the “European style” of acting and dancing,¹⁸ most colonial officers, and especially missionaries, were dismissive of, and even strongly opposed, these dramatic activities. In his book, *Winning a Primitive People*, Donald

⁹ Mutwa, ‘Umlinganiso,’ 32.

¹⁰ Mutwa, ‘Umlinganiso,’ 32.

¹¹ Mutwa, ‘Umlinganiso,’ 32.

¹² Mutwa, ‘Umlinganiso,’ 32.

¹³ Mutwa, ‘On the Theatre of Africa,’ 38.

¹⁴ Mutwa, ‘On the Theatre of Africa,’ 39.

¹⁵ Mutwa, ‘On the Theatre of Africa,’ 39. Cf. also Yao-Kun Liu, ‘uNosilimela – An African Epic and Mythology,’ in *Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa*, eds. Lokangaka Losambe and Devi Sarinjeive (Claremont: New African Books, 2001), 70; and also Robert McClaren Mshengu, ‘South African: Where Mvelinqangi still Limp (The Experimental Theatre of Workshop ’71),’ *Yale Theatre* 8, no.1 (Fall, 1976): 41.

¹⁶ Rolf Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa: Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970’s* (Pietermaritzburg: Hadedu Books, 1999), 2-3.

¹⁷ Christopher Kamlongera, *Theatre for Development in Africa with Case Studies from Malawi and Zambia* (Bonn: Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung, 1989), 3.

¹⁸ Quoted in Kamlongera, *Theatre for Development in Africa*, 1.

Fraser, the mission statesman and strategist from Scotland who worked among the Ngoni people at the end of the 19th century,¹⁹ had the following to say about a tribal 'performance' that he attended during his time on the continent:

I turned aside to my tent, ashamed for what I saw and burning with a sense of the loathsomeness that had been let loose. Next morning, I assembled the village, and spoke to them about the degradation of last night's performance. I blushed to speak of those things, while the old women and men looked up, unashamed and wondering at my denunciation.²⁰

This response from Fraser, supposedly one of the more open-minded and accommodating missionaries in the 19th century,²¹ is representative of the general sentiment towards African traditional 'theatre' by European incomers in early colonial times. One of the key objectives of Christian missionaries was, then, to do away with these performative practices that were closely linked, as mentioned above, to the religious and social identity of the native people.²² These dramatic enactments, it was claimed, were the epitome of "paganism and sin", and contributed to the "barbarous" life that marked life on the "dark continent".²³ One can argue that part of this fear of, and aversion to, the histrionic aspects of traditional African cultures had to do with what Jonas Barish calls the "antitheatrical prejudice" that has been part of Western culture, from the time of antiquity, and that has also taken hold of Christianity from its very beginnings. It is noteworthy that most of the mission societies that were active in Africa from the 17th till the 20th centuries, had their roots in, and remained under the strong influence of, different Pietist and Puritan movements in Europe and England.²⁴ These movements, as Balthasar pointed out in his theodramatic project, were particularly averse to any form of drama or theatre, also in their own contexts. It thus comes as no surprise that, when these missionaries arrived on the African continent, they set out to eradicate traditional dramatic practices that

¹⁹ See Ralph Covell, 'Fraser, Donald,' in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 224.

²⁰ Donald Fraser, *Winning a Primitive People: Sixteen Year's Work Among the Warlike Tribe of the Ngoni and the Senga and Tumbuka Peoples of Central Africa* (London, 1914), 76.

²¹ See Covell, 'Fraser, Donald,' 224.

²² Penina Mlama, *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach to Africa* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1991), 122.

²³ Mzo Sirayi, *South African Drama and Theatre from Pre-Colonial Times to the 1990's: An Alternative Reading* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 28, 81; David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From Precolonial Times to the Present Day* (Martlesham: Boydell and Brewer, 1995), 16-7.

²⁴ See the section 'The Pietist Impulse in Missions and Globalizing Christianity,' in *The Pietist Impulse in Christianity*, eds. Christian T. Collins Winn, Christopher Gehrz, G. William Carlson and Eric Hols (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2011), 283-316.

were intrinsically connected to what they regarded as “demonic and primitive traditional religious beliefs”.²⁵

The reason why missionaries came to Africa was, of course, not simply to do away with local cultures and customs, but to spread the Gospel and to Christianise the indigenous African population, and this is indeed what they attempted to do. People were instructed in the Christian faith, baptised, and compelled to become ‘good’ and ‘civilized’ Christians, whose lives emulated those of their European ‘neighbours’. In this process of evangelisation, much emphasis was placed on the written word of the Bible, as one could expect from Protestant missionaries from countries such as Germany, England, and Scotland.²⁶ African languages were transcribed, texts were translated, and native people were taught to read and to write, so that they could have access to, and copy, the Scriptures, as well as other accompanying “religious and moral literature”, most notably John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which played an all-important role in missionary activities at the time.²⁷ Robert Moffat, the Scottish Congregationalist missionary who translated the Bible, as well as Bunyan’s classic allegorical work, into Setswana, believed, for example, that the “simple reading and the study” of the Bible and other texts, will convert the whole of Africa to the Christian faith, and that the task of the missionary was “to gain for [these texts] admission and attention” in native communities.²⁸ Many African people who grew up in an oral cultures were thus bestowed with what could arguably be regarded as the “gift of literacy”.²⁹ This did, however, not bring an end to communities’ love for, and inclination towards, enacted storytelling, and it soon happened that the very texts that were translated by the missionaries, were dramatized and performed alongside, and in continuity with, the existent tribal ‘plays’. While most early missionaries

²⁵ Jesse Weaver Shipley, *Trickster Theatre: The Poetics of Freedom in Urban Africa* (Indianapolis: Bloomington, 2015), 27.

²⁶ With regards to the Pietist missionaries from Germany, Sarah Pugach writes (for example): “This Pietist background encouraged this focus on text, especially when it was biblical. Pietists saw the Bible as a text for general consumption, and not the personal provenance of the learned elite. Consequently, the Bible was the crux around which Pietist life turned for all believers, regardless of social or class status, and certainly regardless of race. To missionaries raised in a Pietistic framework, it was thus important that Africans be able to read biblical passages in their own languages, and in so doing make the text their own”. See Sarah Pugach, ‘A Short History of African Language Studies in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on German Contributions,’ in *The Routledge Handbook of African Linguistics*, eds. Augustine Agwuele and Adams Bodomo (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 17.

²⁷ Pugach, ‘A Short History of African Language,’ 17. On the use of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in missionary activities, see Sylvia Brown’s article, ‘Bunyan and Empire,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, eds. Michael Davies and W.R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 665-682; as well as Isabel Hofmeyr’s *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of the Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially chapters such as ‘Making Bunyan Familiar in the Mission Domain’ (56-75) and ‘Translating Bunyan’ (76 – 97). The whole second section part of the book is dedicated to the topic, ‘Bunyan, the Public Sphere, and Africa’ (113-216).

²⁸ Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842), 618.

²⁹ See Simon Gikandi’s remarks on pages 172 and 181 in his edited volume, *The Encyclopaedia of African Literature* (London: Routledge, 2003).

propagated the belief that Christianity was solely centred around written texts, and that it was incompatible with any histrionic activities, native Africans, with their rich performative traditions, clearly sensed that the stories of Christianity, including the story of Christ, were bursting with dramatic potential, and asked to be embodied and enacted together with their own traditional, religious ‘dramas’.³⁰

With time, many missionaries began to recognise the opportunities that were opened up by these enactments of biblical and other Christian narratives. Whereas written texts, even when translated, often had an alienating effect on the local communities and restricted their receptivity to Christianity,³¹ the dramatic portrayal of these same texts seemingly allowed the Christian message to take hold of, and become incarnated in, African cultures. Drama, it was realised, could very well serve as an instrument of evangelisation, as a way of infiltrating local communities, and spreading the Good News in a mode and style that people were open and responsive to.³² Several of the mission stations and schools, including the Lovedale Missionary Institute, near Victoria East, and the Mariannhill mission station, near Durban, thus developed into hubs of dramatic activity.³³ With the help and encouragement of missionaries, biblical stories about Adam and Eve, Joseph in Egypt, David and Goliath, the Prodigal Son, as well as, as Kerr confirms, the Nativity and the Crucifixion, were staged.³⁴ Different dramatic renditions of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* also came into existence.³⁵ Native people were moreover presented with, and schooled in, works from the Western dramatic canon, especially plays which could, according to the missionaries, contribute to Christianising and Westernising African societies. Prominent examples of works that were taught and performed alongside the biblical dramas in mission stations and school at the time, included medieval mystery and morality plays, the *auto*

³⁰ See Kenneth Ngwa and Gerald West’s entry under ‘African Art,’ in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Bible and the Arts*, ed. Timothy Beal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 369-381, which discusses how African natives, with their history of “storytelling as a communal event” (involving “voice, body, attire, etc.”), transformed the biblical texts into “verbal art”, from early on. See also Gerald West’s book, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2016), where he tells the story of how the Bible and other religious writings, which were “brought to Southern Africa as part of a project of imperialism and trade”, were wrested from “the hands of those who brought it”, and “appropriated” by Africans; the story of “how the Bible has been embodied by ordinary African women and men, with its narratives being located alongside Africa’s” (5). See especially the chapter, ‘The Appropriated Bible,’ 232-317.

³¹ Cf. the edited volume by Ramadan S. Belhag and Yassin A. El-Kabir, *Christian Missionarism and the Alienation of the African Mind* (Tripoli: African Society of Social Studies, 1986).

³² Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 33.

³³ Peterson, ‘Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre,’ 231-232.

³⁴ Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 33.

³⁵ See Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, 120ff, and also her essay, “‘Dreams, Documents and Fetishes’: African Christian Interpretations of *The Pilgrims Progress*,” *The Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 4 (2002): 450-55.

sacramentales by someone such as Calderón,³⁶ and, above all, the works by Shakespeare.³⁷ What is rather remarkable, though, is that while missionaries undoubtedly attempted to convey, and stage, these ‘dramas’ in their ‘pure’ European form, local communities inventively altered their plots, settings, and characters, so that they would make sense in, and form part of, their traditional African understandings of the world, and mirror and give expression to their current experiences. With regards to Shakespeare, Jane Plastow writes, for example: “Africans came to own Shakespeare. Shakespeare was appropriated. His imagined spaces – ‘fair Verona’, and times – ancient Rome and Greece, could easily be reimagined as African”.³⁸ The same is true of the biblical stories, where the Christ-narrative, for example, was transposed so that it occurred in 18th or 19th century colonial Africa. The *Pilgrim’s Progress* also underwent a process of indigenisation. As Sylvia Brown writes: “Bunyan could be stolen. Instead of serving imperialism, he could be wrestled away from those who had brought him, as part of the project of conversion and civilisation, of colonisation and conquest. His writings could be contested, appropriated, or turned to indigenous purposes”.³⁹

It is not the aim of this chapter to assess and offer any verdicts on the complex history of the missionary enterprise in Africa, which was certainly tied to, and played a central role in, the larger colonial project of ‘empire-building’.⁴⁰ What is quite interesting to take note of, however, especially in the light of Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as discussed in the last two

³⁶ One of the first ‘Western’ plays that was translated and performed in Shona language (in modern-day Zimbabwe) was Calderón’s *Life is A Dream* (which had the translated title ‘Mutambo Wapanyika’). See Ranga M. Zinyemba, *Zimbabwean Drama: A Study of Shona and English Plays* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986), 20ff; and the entry under ‘Zimbabwe’ in *The World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre: Africa*, eds. Don Rubins, Ousmane Diakhaté and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh (London: Routledge, 1997), 358.

³⁷ Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, 33; Bhekizizwe Peterson, ‘Apartheid and the Political Imagination,’ 231-232.

³⁸ See Jane Plastow’s introduction in her edited volume *Shakespeare in and out of Africa* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer Ltd., 2013), x. For more on the reception and appropriation of Shakespeare in (southern) Africa, especially in early colonial times, see: Martin Banham, Roshni Mooneeram and Jane Plastow, ‘Shakespeare in Africa,’ in *Shakespeare on Stage*, eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 284-299; Adele Seeff, *South Africa’s Shakespeare and the Drama of Language and Identity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and David Johnson, *Shakespeare in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), especially the first three chapters of the book, 13-110.

³⁹ Brown, ‘Bunyan and Empire,’ 674.

⁴⁰ Rolf, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 3. Much has been written, especially in post-Colonial times, on the intrinsic relationship between Christian Mission and Western Imperialism. See, for example, Hilary M. Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Elbourne, *Blood Ground: Colonialism, Mission, and the Content for Christianity in the Cape Colony and Britain, 1799-1853* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002); and the edited volume by Dana L. Robert, *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). In his article, ‘Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered: A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766-1816’ in the *Journal of Church and State* 51/4 (2009), 663-669, Edward Andrews describes the differing views on the missionary enterprise as follows: “Historians have traditionally looked at Christian missionaries in one of two ways. The first church historians to catalogue missionary history provided hagiographical descriptions of their trials, successes, and sometimes even martyrdom. Missionaries were thus visible saints, exemplars of ideal piety... However, by the middle of the twentieth century ... missionaries were [often] viewed quite differently. Missionaries were now understood as important agents in the ever-expanding nation-state, or ideological shock troops for colonial invasion”.

chapters, is the fact that the introduction of Christianity in Africa did not bring an end to ‘drama’ on the continent, but had exactly the opposite effect, despite the hostility of the early missionaries towards the theatre and their active attempt to eradicate the rich performative traditions of the native people. Like many other places in the world throughout history, it indeed also happened here in Africa that, amidst staunch opposition from within the Church itself, the Christian message, as found in Scripture and conveyed in a work such as Bunyan’s *The Pilgrims Progress*, stimulated and engendered new dramatic performances – performances that did not stand in contradiction to, or negate, other forms of drama, but came to expression in and through these forms, and imbued them with new possibilities and meaning. It is, furthermore, interesting to take note of the way in which native communities responded to, and came to appropriate, medieval mystery and morality plays, and above all, the comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare, works which, according to Balthasar’s estimates, are deeply grounded in, represent, and serve as further analogical expressions of, the drama of the Christ-event and salvation history. Although missionaries undoubtedly had certain ideological motifs when they first introduced local communities to these dramas, as well as the performative traditions they formed part of, they could not control the reception of these plays, and it is fascinating to see how even someone like Shakespeare could be Africanised, and later also used in the fight against colonial oppression and apartheid, in the same way that the liberating stories of the Bible and of Christ would be used, as will be seen in the subsequent sections of this chapter.⁴¹

5.3. Dhlomo, Kente, and Fugard

By the end of the 19th century, a process of rapid urbanisation took place in South Africa, as people from all races moved from the rural areas to newly-established cities, such as Johannesburg, where gold was discovered in 1884.⁴² From the very beginning, measures were

⁴¹ Plastow, *Shakespeare in and out of Africa*, x. On the way the plays of Shakespeare was used in the fight against colonialism and apartheid, see Martin Orkin’s seminal study, *Shakespeare against Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1986); Rohan Quince’s *Shakespeare in South Africa: Stage Productions During the Apartheid Era* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000); and the three book-long studies on the reading of Shakespeare on Robben Island, namely, David Schalkwyk’s *Hamlet’s Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Ashwin Desai, *Reading Revolution: Shakespeare on Robben Island* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); and Matthew Hahn, *The Robben Island Shakespeare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). These last three books, among other things, relate how an edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* was smuggled onto Robben Island by the political prisoner, Sonny Venkatrthnam, who disguised the book with Diwali Cards. Between 1975 and 1978, this volume, which came to be known as the “Robben Island Bible”, was passed on between 33 different prisoners, and came to play a particularly important role in Nelson Mandela’s life, political thought, and ideas on the struggle against apartheid.

⁴² Allan Paton would later describe this reality in his important novel *Cry, the Beloved Country!* as follows: “All roads lead to Johannesburg. If you are white or if you are black they lead to Johannesburg. If the crops fail, there is work in Johannesburg. If the farm is too small to be divided further, some must go to Johannesburg... Everyone is coming to Johannesburg. From the Transkei and the Free State, from Zululand and Sekukuniland. Zulus and Swazis, Shangaans and Bavenda, Bapedi and Basuto, Xosas and Tembus, Ponds and Fingos, they are all coming to Johannesburg. Allan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country!* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948) 62, 64.

set in place to ensure the segregation of black and white communities, and after the Native Land Act of 1913 was passed, even the few multi-racial neighbourhoods that had come into existence, disintegrated overnight, leaving behind a severely fragmented society. At the time, drama and the theatre, while not completely unimportant, did not necessarily play that significant role in white communities.⁴³ Theatres-complexes were built and several new plays were composed and staged, also in Afrikaans,⁴⁴ but the theatre was mainly seen as a “bourgeoisie undertaking” that offered “light entertainment” for a small, specific market, namely, the “well-to-do” white urbanite.⁴⁵ In black communities, however, drama and the theatre had a much more prominent place in people’s lives. In the townships,⁴⁶ original performances, which combined traditional African dramatic elements with that which was taught at mission stations and schools, were regularly staged at places such as community centres and church halls, and by the 1920’s, there were several black acting troupes that were performing newly-composed works all over the country.⁴⁷ One of the most famous and successful acting troupes from that time was the *Lucky Stars*, a troupe that was led by Essau Mthethwa and had ties to, and was influenced by, the dramatic activities at the Mariannhill mission station.⁴⁸ The performances of the Lucky Stars were filled with indigenous, as well as Christian themes and imagery, and consisted mostly of short sketches, dancing, and choral song in native languages, which, on the one hand, looked back at, and attempted to reconstruct something of, life in earlier, pre-colonial times, while, on the other hand, also portraying, and commenting on, people’s current realities in the cities, which were deteriorating by the day.⁴⁹

When speaking about black theatre in the first half of the 20th century, it is important to mention the name of Herbert I.E. Dhlomo, who was the most prolific and important playwright at the

⁴³ Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 4; Loren Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910* (London: Routledge, 1999), 48.

⁴⁴ See, for example, P.J. du Toit, *Amateurstoneel in Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: Academia, 1988), and F.C.L. Bosman, *Hollandse en Engelse toneel in Suid-Afrika, 1800 tot vandag en die Afrikaanse drama* (Pretoria: J.H. de Bussy, 1951). Some of the first important Afrikaans plays were S. J. Du Toit’s *Magrita Prinsloo*, C.J. Langenhoven’s *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika* (‘The Hope of South Africa’), and C. Louis Leipoldt’s *Die Heks* (‘The Witch’). This last-mentioned play was inspired by the German poet and dramatist Ernst’s van Wildenbruch’s poem ‘Das Hexenlied’ and told the story of two ‘foreigners’ out of Italy, Elsa and her illegitimate child Janetta, who are awaiting execution in the Ahrweiler-castle in the year 1425, after being found guilty of witchery.

⁴⁵ Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, eds., *South African Theatre: Four Plays and an Introduction* (Woodstock: HAUM Educational Publishers, 1984), xii; Dennis Walder, ‘Introduction,’ in *Township Plays*, xiii.

⁴⁶ ‘Townships’, or ‘locations’ as they were originally called, were “vast urban ghettos lying on the edges of cities ... with the minimum of facilities”. Black people “were forcibly moved to [these artificially created places] from their homes in the dynamic multi-racial sections of cities and towns... Meanwhile their old property was repossessed and became part of the white city or town”. See Temple Hauptfleisch, ‘Introduction to this Edition,’ in the book: Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, *Woza Albert!* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018[1983]), ix.

⁴⁷ Sirayi, *South African Drama*, 94-104.

⁴⁸ Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 30-31.

⁴⁹ Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 31; Kavanah, *The Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, 45; Marin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 23.

time.⁵⁰ Dhlomo was born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal, but eventually found his way to Johannesburg, where he worked as a librarian and journalist, while writing poetry, short stories and 24 full-length plays.⁵¹ His most famous dramatic work would be *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nonquause the Liberator* (1935), the first published play in English by a black African.⁵² Besides writing plays, Dhlomo also composed a number of critical essays about the theatre and his own craft as a playwright. In an early essay titled ‘Drama and the African’,⁵³ Dhlomo argued, in the same way that Credo Mutwa would later do, that “action, rhythm, and the other histrionic qualities” have always been part of African culture, and that the black playwright should not be afraid to excavate, draw on, and celebrate traditional “art forms”, while grappling with “the things that are vital and near the African today”.⁵⁴ For Dhlomo, who was educated at a mission school, this rediscovery of traditional performative practices did not mean that Western theatre techniques and, for example, Christian themes and subject matter, which were very prominent in township theatre at the time and also featured strongly in his own works, should be done away with.⁵⁵ Dhlomo rather proposed a form of “theatrical syncretism”, where African theatre, with its ingenious elements, would “borrow from” and “Africanise” European “dramatic forms”, while remaining true to its own heritage.⁵⁶ This idea would be further developed in later essays, and Dhlomo would specifically also come to focus on what African drama, in its own right, can contribute to Western theatre, with regards to music, dance, and, above all, rhythm. In his essay ‘African Drama and Poetry’, Dhlomo wrote that one of Africa’s “greatest gifts to the artistic world will be – and has been – rhythm”, which, according to him, is something which pertains to every aspect of life.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 4, 242; Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage*, 31.

⁵¹ For a full account of Dhlomo life and work, see the biography by Tim Couzens: *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1985). See also Walder, ‘Introduction,’ xi.

⁵² This play, which was based on a true historical event, told the tale of a young Xhosa priestess U-Nonquause’s fatal attempt to save her people from defeat through the killing of their cattle. The play begins by juxtaposing U-Nonquause’s “doubts about her visions with her fervent desire to help her people repel the invaders” and ends with “the vision of a dying Christian convert, Daba, who translates Nonquause’s divination into the premonition of Christianization”. In many ways, the play thus explored the continuities (and discontinuities) between indigenous religious beliefs and Christianity, and the preservation of tradition in the wake of colonisation. Dhlomo gave expression to these themes through the play’s music, which he composed himself. In the different musical numbers Dhlomo alternated between traditional tribal music and songs that resemble more recent Xhosa church music, such as the hymn that is sung at the end of the play when the converted tribe stands around Daba’s deathbed titled *Nkosi kawu sikelele* (God bless you). See Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 54-5; Herbert I.E. Dhlomo, *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1935).

⁵³ Herbert I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Drama and the African,’ *South African Outlook* 66 (1 Oct. 1936). This essay and others to which I will also refer have been republished in a special issue of *English in Africa* 4, no. 2 (1977), devoted to Dhlomo’s essays titled *Literary Theory and Criticism of H.I.E. Dhlomo*, ed. Nick Visser.

⁵⁴ Dhlomo, ‘Literary Theory and Criticism,’ 3-4.

⁵⁵ Dhlomo, ‘Literary Theory and Criticism,’ 7; Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 5.

⁵⁶ Dhlomo, ‘Literary Theory and Criticism,’ 7; Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage*, 33.

⁵⁷ Dhlomo, ‘Literary Theory and Criticism,’ 16. Dhlomo writes in this regard: “Rhythm is essentially African. The tribal African was under the rigid rule of pattern. There were rigid patterns of behaviour, rigid patterns even

With time, Dhlomo, who was often accused of being too optimistic about the future of black Africans in South Africa (given what was busy transpiring in the country), became increasingly involved in political activism,⁵⁸ and began focusing his writings “on the political and social plight of the black man”.⁵⁹ Already in one of his very first essays titled ‘The Importance of African Drama’, he hinted at the role that drama could potentially play in exposing and resisting the “exploitation” of the native people,⁶⁰ and by the end of the 1930’s, with the writing of his essay titled ‘Why Study African Dramatic Forms?’, he was actively calling for “dramatic representations of African oppression, emancipation, and evolution”.⁶¹ According to Dhlomo, South Africa needed plays written by “philosopher-playwrights”, which would tell the story of “modern” African history and help to effect change in a country that was desperately in need thereof.⁶² In order to promote African theatre that could bear witness to and resist the injustices of South Africa, Dhlomo played an instrumental role in establishing, and finding funding for, the Bantu Dramatic Society that would be based at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre on Eloff Street, in Central Johannesburg.⁶³ The purpose of the Society, as

in architecture (the hut) and in village in kraal planning. This love of pattern ... gave birth to a marked sense and love for rhythm. This sense of rhythm is seen even in the movement of tribal people ... The element is well-marked in African music and tribal plastic art. The dances, too, are strongly rhythmical”. It is noteworthy that ‘rhythm’ has become a very important category in theology, and it would be quite interesting to see how African thought can offer contributions in this regard. See, for example, the study by Alexandria Eikelboom, one of Graham Ward’s doctoral students, *Rhythm: A Theological Category* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Ward himself is also interested in rhythm as theological idea, and in an unpublished paper he delivered at the Volmoed Colloquium in Hermanus, South Africa, in 2014, he looked at the notion of ‘kenosis’ (with regards to Christology, the Christian life, and the writing of literature) in ‘rhythmic terms’. A key source for both Eikelboom’s book and Ward’s paper, is Erich Przywara’s thought as discussed in the second chapter. The full title of Przywara’s definitive work is *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics. Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (in German: *Analogia Entis: Metaphysik. Ur-Struktur and All-Rhythmus*), and he indeed saw God’s analogical relationship to the world (which involved both immanence and transcendence) as the all-defining rhythm of reality. See also the comments by David Bentley Hart in this regard in his essay ‘The Mirror of the Infinite’ which forms part of his book *The Hidden and the Manifest: Essays in Theology and Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 135. Hart, it should be mentioned, was one of the translators of Przywara’s magnum opus.

⁵⁸ Dhlomo, for example, became an active member of the ANC, and played an important role in the founding of its Youth League. See Ntongela Masilela, *The Cultural Modernity of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Trenton: African World Press, Inc., 2007), 96.

⁵⁹ Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 5.

⁶⁰ Herbert I.E. Dhlomo, ‘The Importance of African Drama,’ *Bantu World* (21 October 1933): 17.

⁶¹ Herbert I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms, 1939,’ *English in Africa* 4 no. 2 (1977): 37-42. See Kruger’s comments in *The Drama of South Africa*, 46ff; Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 5-6; and Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*, 21.

⁶² Dhlomo, ‘Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms, 1939,’ 37-42.

⁶³ The Bantu Men’s Social Centre was founded in 1924 by the Congregationalist minister, Rev. Ray E. Phillips, from the American Board Mission. The aim of the centre was to offer recreational activities to black South Africans, and included a gym, sporting equipment, a relatively well-stocked library, and a stage for music and drama performances. Social events could also be held here, and the struggle heroes Walter and Albertina Sisulu’s wedding reception took place at the centre, for example. Nelson Mandela was Sisulu’s best man on the day. The Bantu Men’s Social Centre played an all-important role in the early political activities of the ANC, and was a place where meetings could be held, ideas could be tested, and political education could take place. See Lindokuhle Mnyanda *Bantu Men’s Social Centre* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace, 2017), and Cecile Badenhorst, ‘New Traditions, Old Struggles: Organized Sport for Johannesburg’s Africans, 1920-1950,’ in *Ethnicity, Sport, Identity: Struggles for Status*, eds. J.A Mangan and Andrew Ritchie (London: Routledge, 2004), 93-114.

expressed in one of its pamphlets published in the 1930's, was to "encourage Bantu playwrights and to develop African dramatic and operative art".⁶⁴ Even though European plays would also be performed, often by combining Western and African dramatic elements, the main aim of the Society was to develop and stage productions that would emanate from, and speak to, the realities of black people's everyday lives, in both township and rural areas.⁶⁵ It is important to note that, while a majority of its members were black, the Society deliberately sought to be an inclusive and multi-racial organisation, and especially in its early days (before more restrictive segregation laws were set in place), a number of white and Indian actors, playwrights, and directors formed part of its productions.

Notwithstanding the many constraints that the Society faced, including the "lack of performance venues, transport, financial support, and rehearsal time because of the need for society members to be in full-time employment",⁶⁶ it still managed to stage many important and influential productions, also by Dhlomo himself, and, in doing so, a whole new generation of urban Africans were introduced to the liberating possibilities of the theatre. Together with the Bantu Men's Social Centre where it was based, it also contributed to, and formed part of, other significant developments at the time, such as the founding of the Union of Southern African Artists (or Union Artists, for short), which would help black musical and performing artists develop and showcase their work to the world, whether in township areas or white concert halls or theatre-complexes, while ensuring fair compensation. Union Artists initially did not have its own premises, but after a farewell concert was staged at the Bantu Men's Social Centre for the beloved missionary and activist, Father Trevor Huddleston (who himself played an enormous role in encouraging and helping black South Africans who were involved in the arts, and who was one of the driving forces behind Union Artists),⁶⁷ enough money was

⁶⁴ Quoted in Yvette Hutchison, 'Southern Africa,' in Martin Banham, *A History of Theatre in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 348; as well as in Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination,' 37.

⁶⁵ Hutchison, 'Southern Africa,' 348; Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination,' 37. The pamphlet stated, for example, that "Bantu life is full of great and glorious incidents and figures that would form the basis of first-class drama".

⁶⁶ Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination,' 37. Elsie Solomon, a theatre director who worked with the society in the 1930's, described the problem of rehearsals as follows: "One of the main difficulties has been that of rehearsal ... our great trouble has been the curfew, rehearsals have usually begun at about 8 pm, but actors had to leave at 9.30 pm and what can one do in one-and-a-half hours?". This passage appeared in *The Rand Daily Mail* of 8 May, 1933.

⁶⁷ Alongside his priestly duties, his work as teacher at St Peter's School in Sophiatown, and his continual involvement in political activism, Trevor Huddleston, as Pat Williams writes, also "fostered and nurtured the exceptional musical talent pulsing through his students at St. Peter's School, as indeed it did throughout the townships". Huddleston "saw that music brought his students to life and that music also kept them alive... [and] when the time came that there were enough enthusiastic and practiced young players, the Huddleston Jazz Band was born". It was Huddleston who bought South African jazz legend, Hugh Masekela, his first instrument, and who also later organised that Louis Armstrong sends one of his own trumpets to him, which was a life-changing moment for the talented trumpeter from Sophiatown. After 13 years in South Africa, Huddleston was forced to leave the country – both by the South African government and by the Anglican Church who called him back to

collected, also from overseas donors, to acquire an old, run-down textile factory, which stood between “dilapidated repair garages” and “car cemeteries”, and which was only fifty meters up the road, in Eloff Street.⁶⁸ Soon this building, which was called Dorkay House, became the centre of the alternative and, importantly, politically-active, creative scene in Johannesburg. It housed Union Artists’ administrative offices; offered rehearsal and performance space for musicians, actors and dancers; and, with time, became the home of the African Music and Drama Association, which presented training course for young, aspiring artists. At night, it turned into a full-blown jazz club, where people from all races could socialise and discuss politics, while enjoying the music from groups, such as the Malombo Jazz Quartet.⁶⁹ The “windows were cracked and stuffed with paper”, Pat Williams writes, “but the place was jumping”.⁷⁰ People were often even seen “making music, acting and dancing on the external iron fire escape at the rear end of the building”.⁷¹

In the early years of its existence, Dorkay House staged a number of large collaborative projects, which involved the creative input of various writers, composers, musicians, actors, and dancers. An example of such ensemble-productions is the “all-African Jazz opera” *King Kong*, which told the tragic tale of the rise and downfall of the boxer and township hero Ezekiel Dhlamini, with Todd Matshikiza and Miriam Makeba in the leading roles.⁷² Individual names also became associated with the establishment, one of which was Gibson Kente, who is often referred to as the “father of township theatre”.⁷³ Kente initially arrived in Johannesburg as a

England – which was a great tragedy both for the people Huddleston worked with and for Huddleston himself. Pat Williams describes the farewell concert that was held in his honour and ultimately allowed Union Artists to acquire Dorkay House, as follows: “In Huddleston’s honour, the citizens of the townships organised a farewell concert. It was held at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre, was called *The Stars are Weeping*. Ian Bernhardt produced it, and Todd Matshikiza wrote a heart-breaking farewell lament – ‘one of his most beautiful choral works’, Hugh Masekela told me nearly sixty years later, the wonder in his voice as he remembered it. It had been an unforgettable night... Throughout the evening, as word spread ... more and more artists arrived, including a sixty-voice choir; and then more and more, some having walked many miles, just turning up, wanting to play, or sing, or dance, to honour and pay tribute to Father Huddleston. It all ended, finally, sometime after 2.00 am. And then the aftermath, the unexpected gift! According to Hugh Masekela, the concert netted the equivalent of more than 4000 US dollars for the newly formed Union of Southern African Artists. See Pat Williams, *King Kong – Our Knot of Time and Music: A Personal Memoir of South Africa’s Legendary Musical* (London: Portobello Books, 2017), 26.

⁶⁸ Williams, *King Kong*, 27.

⁶⁹ See Gwen Ansell, *Soweto Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Politics in South Africa* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 97-8; Steve Gordon, *Beyond the Blues: Township Jazz in the ‘60’s and 70’s* (Cape Town: David Phillips Publishers, 1997), 10ff; Lars Rasmussen, *Mbizo: A Book about Johnny Dyani* (Copenhagen: Booktrader, 2003), 114.

⁷⁰ Williams, *King Kong*, 28.

⁷¹ Williams, *King Kong*, 35.

⁷² For more on this 1959 production, which featured an all-black cast and hit South Africa and the world by storm, see Williams’s book, *King Kong*, as well as Mona de Beer’s *King Kong: A Venture in the Theatre* (Cape Town: Norman Howell, 2001 [1960]). At the time, *The Star* newspaper described it as “the greatest thrill in 20 years of South African theatre going”. Ansell, *Soweto Blues*, 104.

⁷³ Sello Galane, ed. *Beyond Memory: Recording the History, Moments and Memories of South African Music. From the Diary of Max Mojapelo* (Somerset West: African Minds, 2008), 310.

young, talented jazz-musician from the Eastern Cape, and was immediately taken under the wings of the artistic community at Dorkay House. Over time, Kente began developing and producing his own musical productions, which were particularly aimed at township communities and combined both indigenous and Western theatre and musical elements, while being deeply rooted in the stories of the Bible and the Christian worldview. The first full-length production that he staged in the early 1960's, with a cast from Dorkay House, was called *Manana – the Jazz Prophet*, and told the story of Manana, a preacher and prophet, who uses jazz music to bring everyone in the townships to the Christian faith.⁷⁴ Other successful musicals followed, including works such as *Sikhalo* (1963), *Life* (1968), and *Zwi* (1970).⁷⁵ Kente and his actors, musicians, and dancers travelled throughout the country in an old green tour bus (which had written on it the slogan, 'Gibson Kente, Slick Musical'), and attempted to perform in every last township, regardless if they were part of the biggest of cities or the smallest of towns. Soon, he thus perfected, as Rolf Solberg writes, "what has come to be known as the South African township musical".⁷⁶ A key reason why Kente's musical melodramas achieved so much success, had to do with the fact that it was theatre from the townships, for the townships.⁷⁷ Kente sought out his performers from the local communities, and the stories he told reflected the life-realities of his audience members (as all good theatre is supposed to do, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar). For a person from the townships, to attend a Gibson Kente musical was like looking into a mirror, while the room was, of course, filled with smooth jazz melodies, which would remain in people's heads weeks after Kente's green bus had left. The focus of Kente's works, as he himself emphasised, was on "the lives of ... people, especially ordinary people" in the townships.⁷⁸

Even though Kente's musical productions, by mirroring the realities of life in the townships, naturally bore witness to the hardships that black people faced under apartheid (which had been official government policy since 1948), many, especially in the resistance movement, felt that

⁷⁴ See David B. Coplan, 'Popular Music in South Africa,' in *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, ed. Ruth M. Stone (London: Routledge, 2000), 425. Zakes Mda, another important South Africa playwright both in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, would later recall how this production of *Manana, the Jazz Prophet*, which he saw in the Bhunga Hall in a township on the outskirts of Sterkspruit in the Eastern Cape, inspired his love for the theatre and performance. See Zakes Mda, *Sometimes There is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 26-7.

⁷⁵ Gareth Cornwell, Dirk Klopper and Craig McKenzie, eds., *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 115.

⁷⁶ Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 12. Kavanagh would write in the 1972 summer edition of *S'ketsh* magazine: "For the moment there is no one to match Kente the musician, the choreographer, the director and the man with his finger on the popular pulse, Kente, the magician".

⁷⁷ See the journalist Rini Minervini's article 'A Moment to Keep Forever,' *Rand Daily Mail*, May 23, 1979, 12, as quoted in Anne Fuchs, *Playing the Market: The Market Theatre, Johannesburg* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 113.

⁷⁸ See the interview with Kente in Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 82-90 (especially 82).

his works were not political enough. This was a fair assessment. It appeared that Kente attempted to play it safe, probably out of fear that the government would ban his productions, which would put him and his cast out of work and even lead to their incarceration.⁷⁹ By the early 1970's, however, Kente decided to change course and wrote and produced three overtly political plays, which would interestingly also be some of his most religious works, namely, *How Long?* (1973), *I Believe* (1974), and *Too Late* (1975). All three of these plays lamented the atrocities of apartheid – not only through their dramatized plots, but also through the hauntingly beautiful gospel hymns that formed part of these works.⁸⁰ In a review of *How Long?*, in the daily newspaper *The Star*, Percy Baneshik commented that every performer acted as though their lives “depended on it”,⁸¹ and it was indeed the case that these political and highly religious productions resonated with, and spoke in a profound manner to, their township audiences across the country.⁸² As could be expected, the government was outraged and began calling Kente “the most dangerous person in the country”.⁸³ “People carry it [your political ideas] home”, they told him, “they sing about it because it is in the musicals ... [it's] very dangerous”.⁸⁴ In the end, all three plays were banned, and Kente, who was dubbed as ‘the Prophet’ by township communities at the time,⁸⁵ was also detained and had to spend a year in prison, as he had always feared would happen. Upon being released, he was again allowed to create, produce and perform new musicals, on condition that he refrained from including any political material in his works. Kente agreed to these terms and, for the most part, heeded the command. In some of his works that followed, however, such as the 1979 production, *Mama and the Load*, he did attempt to, at least covertly, speak to and challenge some of the socio-political realities in the country, which led to more conflict with the reigning authorities, as will be seen below.

⁷⁹ Rolf Solberg, *Bra Gib: Father of South Africa's Township Theatre* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2011), 23.

⁸⁰ Solberg writes: “As always, it was the music and sing that took the performance to another level”. In the play, *How Long?*, the climax of the show “by common consent” was the rendering of Psalm 23, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’, “arranged by Kente and sung without accompaniment at Grandma Khulu’s funeral”. Solberg, *Bra Gib*, 25.

⁸¹ Quoted in Solberg, *Bra Gib*, 25.

⁸² Solberg writes: What was particularly evident in these political productions “was the special relationship between audiences and actors... The theatre critic Robert Greig, whose interest in Kente’s work continued right to the end of Kente’s career, wrote an appreciative review of *How Long?* in which he noted how the intimacy of Kente’s relationship with the public recalled the world of the Elizabethan dramatists; a Gibson Kente audience threw themselves wholeheartedly into the play”. See Solberg, *Bra Gib*, 25.

⁸³ Quoted in Solberg, *Bra Gib*, 24. See also Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 84.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Solberg, *Bra Gib*, 24. See also Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 84.

⁸⁵ Kente was given this name because it was said that his work *I Believe* (1974) predicted the Soweto Uprising in 1976. *I Believe* focused on the anger of the youth in Soweto, and told the story of two revolutionaries, Zwelitsha and Zweli, leading an uprising against the government, which then ends tragically, as the young protestors are killed by the hundreds by security forces. This is indeed then what happened two years later, in almost exactly the same manner as described in the play.

While Kente's initial musical productions, which he produced and staged under the auspices of Union Artists, refrained from directly confronting and challenging the socio-political *status quo*, which does not take anything away from the important role that they played in communities at the time, there were other individuals associated with Dorkay House who followed a different route. From the get-go, they attempted to use the theatre to expose and explicitly speak out against the atrocities of life under the apartheid state, as Dhlomo proposed should happen. Names that could be mentioned in this regard include Bloke Modise, Lewis Nkosi, Gladys Sibisi, Zakes Mokae, and, very importantly, Athol Fugard, a white Afrikaner,⁸⁶ who landed in Johannesburg after dropping out of university, hitchhiking to Cairo, and working as a deck-hand on a British tramp steamer sailing across the Pacific.⁸⁷ Before moving on, a few words need to be said about Fugard, who would become one of the most performed playwrights in the world.⁸⁸

Athol Fugard grew up in Port Elizabeth, and, for a time, studied at the University of Cape Town, where he was especially influenced by his philosophy teacher, Martin Versfeld, an Afrikaner intellectual who, besides being a devout Catholic (something that was completely taboo in the Calvinist Afrikaner community at the time), was also strongly opposed to the apartheid system.⁸⁹ Before completing his final examinations, Fugard, however, realised, with

⁸⁶ Fugard's father was English and his mother was Afrikaans, but he would often refer to himself as an Afrikaner, as his father, "a crippled former jazz pianist" who suffered from alcoholism, did not really play a significant role in his life, whereas his mother, who hailed from Middelburg in Karoo and was as Afrikaans as one could get, was the most formative figure in his life. He would later note that even though most of his plays are written in English, it is important to note that every major character he ever created had an Afrikaans name. See Walder, 'Introduction,' xvii. Also listen to the Fugard's inaugural lecture as the first Humanitas Visiting Professor in Drama at Oxford University, in which he expounds at length on the role his mother played in his life and why he, firstly, thinks of himself as an Afrikaner. The lecture is available at: 'Athol Fugard: "Defining Moments",' University of Oxford Podcasts, accessed 21 August 2018, <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/people/athol-fugard>.

⁸⁷ Walder, 'Introduction,' xvii; and also, Albert Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard: From South Africa to the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1-2.

⁸⁸ In a 2012 BBC documentary about Fugard's life titled 'Athol Fugard: The Life and Times of Athol Fugard,' British filmmaker Tony Palmer claimed that Fugard is currently the most performed English playwright of any period, next to Shakespeare. See also Marianne McDonald's remarks in this regard in her book *The Craft of Athol Fugard: Space, Time, and Silence* (Los Angeles: Murasaki Books, 2012), 12.

⁸⁹ See Dennis Walder, *Athol Fugard* (London: MacMillan, 1984), 21. Versfeld's first published work after his dissertation (on Descartes' Metaphysics), a collection of five essays titled *Oor gode en afgode* ('Regarding Gods and Idols'), published in 1948 (the very year the Nationalists won the South African elections and formalised the apartheid system), spoke out in no uncertain terms against exploitation and racism (especially in his essay on the role of the State). Interestingly, Versfeld would in some of the other essays in this collection (on Augustine and Aquinas, as well as on Rousseau, for example) also contend, in much the same manner as the thinkers mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation, that the dawn of modernity coincided with the fragmentation of the 'unity' of the immanent and the transcendent realms, and argue for a return to an 'analogical' worldview which acknowledged a similarity-amidst-similarity between the created world and its Creator. See Marthinus Versfeld, *Oor gode en afgode* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1948). Versfeld most compressive treatment of 'analogy' is found in Chapter 4 of his study *Rondom die Middeleeue* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1962). For an insightful engagement with *Oor Gode en Afgode*, see the article by Ernst Wolff, 'Selfkennis, Verstandigheid en Inkarnasie: 'n Interpretasie van Martin Versfeld se "Oor Gode en Afgode",' *LitNet Akademies* 7, no.2 (Julie 2010): 257-79.

the help of Versfeld,⁹⁰ that he wanted to be a writer, and while listening to his favourite piece of music, Beethoven's 7th, he mustered up the courage to pack his bags and set out on his travels, as he believed that the one thing that a writer needed to do was to explore the world.⁹¹ These travels indeed then had a big impact on his life, as he had to work and live with people from all races, whom he befriended over time, which made him very uncomfortable about what was going on in his homeland, South Africa. "This country is in the grips of its worst drought – and this is in the human heart", he would come to proclaim.⁹² Upon eventually returning home, he met and married a young actress and playwright, Sheila Meiring, who introduced him to the world of drama and encouraged him to start writing plays, which he ended up doing. Together, they tried to establish a drama company in Port Elizabeth, but after a year or two they moved to Johannesburg, where they befriended and became involved with the communities at the Bantu Dramatic Society and Dorkay House on Eloff Street. They also began to spend a lot of time in Sophiatown, a township and black cultural hub that was "approaching the sentence of death imposed by Nationalist apartheid", as it was re-zoned as a white area, which meant that people would soon be moved to Meadowlands, Soweto.⁹³

At first, the only employment Fugard could find in Johannesburg ironically was at the 'Native Commissionaire's Court', where pass-law offenders, the very people he was befriending and working with in Sophiatown and Dorkay House, were tried and sentenced. During the short time that he spent here, where he was confronted, on a daily basis, with the "procession of faces" appearing before the judge, he became convinced that apartheid was not only inherently evil, but that it needed to be actively opposed – also by means of the arts and the theatre.⁹⁴ He therefore founded the African Theatre Workshop at Dorkay House for this purpose. The first play of this newly established theatre company that was produced and staged in 1958 at the Bantu Men's Social Club down the road, came to be called *No-Good Friday*, and aimed at expressing something of, and protesting against, the suffering of black people in South Africa.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ See Athol Fugard and Don MacLennan, 'A Conversation,' *English in Africa* 9, no. 2, 'For Athol Fugard at Fifty' (October 1982): 2.

⁹¹ Fugard recounts this story in his inaugural lecture as visiting professor at Oxford. University of Oxford Podcasts, 'Athol Fugard: "Defining Moments".'

⁹² Quoted in Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 111.

⁹³ For an account of the tragic occurrence of the forced removal of almost 60 000 black, coloured, and Indian South Africans from Sophiatown, so that the new white area called Triomf could be established, see, for example, the memoirs of writer and journalist Don Mattera, published as *Sophiatown: Coming of Age in South Africa* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). Many prominent South Africans spent time in Sophiatown and were part of the protest actions against this act of injustice, including Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Hugh Masekela, and Trevor Huddleston.

⁹⁴ See Fugard's interview with Mary Benson which was published under the title 'Keeping an Appointment with the Future' in *Theatre Quarterly* 8, no. 28 (Winter 1977-8): 78.

⁹⁵ See Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard*, 3.

It focused on issues such as the unbearable life-conditions in the “corrugated-iron shacks” in Sophiatown,⁹⁶ unemployment in ‘Goli’,⁹⁷ the pass laws, the trauma of economic migrancy, the racism and exploitation that black people faced on a daily basis,⁹⁸ as well as the reality of gangsterism and violence in the townships, and the inaction, or complicity, of the police force.⁹⁹ One of the defining aspects of the play, besides the prominence that it gives to jazz music, is its explicit use of biblical themes and imagery. The main protagonist of the play, Willie (“a man in his thirties”), is, in fact, explicitly portrayed as a Christ-figure, who, inspired by the local priest and jazz musician, Father Higgins (a character based on Trevor Huddleston and played by Athol Fugard in the original production), takes a stand against the injustices of the township. This ultimately results in his death at the hand of the gangster, Shark, who, as a Judas-figure of sorts, betrays his own people for money. At the end of the play, there is no sign of resurrection, but Willie’s actions and death show the other characters, as well as the audience, “how to live”; how to stand up for themselves and the weakest amongst them (such as Tobias, the ‘blanket boy’ from the Eastern Cape who is also killed by Shark), and to do what is right, even if it has fatal consequences.¹⁰⁰ Fugard’s first African Theatre Workshop play, *No-Good Friday*, with its portrayal of the hardships in the townships and the larger injustices that marked the South African society, left both black and white audience members “chilled by what they [had] witnessed”, and soon more productions of this kind followed.¹⁰¹ In 1959, they created the play *Nongogo*, which was also staged at the Bantu Men’s Social Club and, like *No-good Friday*, focused on the “struggle for existence” within “black township life”.¹⁰² After this, came the 1960 work *The Blood Knot*, which was developed and performed at the newly-built theatre on the fourth floor of Dorkay House, which was called The Rehearsal Room,¹⁰³ and

⁹⁶ Fugard, ‘No-Good Friday,’ in *Township Plays*, 5.

⁹⁷ In the play, the characters speak of Johannesburg as ‘Goli’, which is short of ‘Egoli’, a Zulu name for the city Johannesburg which means ‘place of Gold’. Guy, a young jazz musician, says for example: “Luck! You’ve sure got to have that to get a break in Goli. And I don’t get the breaks... I haven’t even got enough [money] for a second-hand pair of shoes...”. Fugard, *Township Plays*, 5.

⁹⁸ One of the characters, Guy, says the following to the new arrival, Tobias: “We’re meant to be dumb... Over here it is ‘Baas’ [the Afrikaans words for ‘boss’]. Do you understand? Just: yes baas, no baas, please baas, thank you baas ... even when he kicks you on the backside”. Fugard, ‘No-Good Friday,’ 13. See also the scenes on 14-20 (dealing with the abuse the character, Pinkie, faces at work as a ‘tea-boy’). In Scene 4 (43), Willie remarks: “How can we dream? When I was a child I used to lay awake at night... I’d say to myself, ‘You’re black’. But hell, it was so dark I couldn’t see my own hand. I couldn’t see my blackness, and I’d get to thinking that maybe colour wasn’t so important after all... and because I’d think that, I could dream a little. But there was always the next morning with its light and its truth [which made] the dream so stupid that I gave up dreaming”.

⁹⁹ When one of the characters asks why they do not report Shark, the gangster who had killed Tobias, to the police, Guy answers as follows: “Don’t you understand? We can forget about the police. They protect a fellow like Shark. You see they’re only interested in our passes. But a Kaffir laying a charge against a criminal ... that would be a joke. We are all criminals...” Fugard, ‘No-Good Friday,’ 34.

¹⁰⁰ Fugard, ‘No-Good Friday,’ 50-1.

¹⁰¹ Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard*, 9.

¹⁰² Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard*, 12.

¹⁰³ The Rehearsal Room theatre was built with the income Union Artists and Dorkay House generated with the highly successful township opera, *King Kong*. See Walder, ‘Introduction,’ xx.

explored the absurdities and tragic consequences of the racial classification system in South Africa, where even brothers could be classified differently. This last work, in particular, caused a great upheaval in South Africa and received media-coverage around the world, especially in view of the Sharpeville Massacre that occurred only a few months earlier, where the South African police force opened fire on thousands of black South Africans who were protesting against the pass laws, which resulted in the killing of at least 69 people.¹⁰⁴ The play was eventually banned by the government and Fugard's passport was revoked, after he had visited London to oversee a production of the play there. This, however, only made him more determined to write and produce works that would bear witness to, and actively protest against, the realities of apartheid South Africa.¹⁰⁵

Around the time that *The Blood Knot* came into being and was first performed at Dorkay House, Fugard decided to move back to his hometown, Port Elizabeth. Here, he met with a young group of actors from the local township, New Brighton, who had heard of his plays in Johannesburg and who wanted to work with him on similar productions. This led to the founding of the acting workshop, the *Serpent Players*,¹⁰⁶ which would include people such as Norman Ntshinga, Welcome Duru, Norman Ntshinga, and, most notably, Winston Ntshona and John Kani. Over the next few decades, this group would produce and perform “township versions of *Woyzeck*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Cure*, and *Antigone*”, and also create a number of provocative original productions, such as *The Coat* (1966), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), and *The Island* (1973), which would send ripples throughout South Africa and the world, and lead to the arrest and persecution of many of the group's members. Alongside his work with the *Serpent Players*, Fugard would also come to write and produce a number of plays on his own, while in Port Elizabeth, which would have similar consequences. Examples include the plays *Hello and Goodbye* (1965), *People are Living There* (1968), *Boesman and Lena* (1969), as well as *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972). Without exception, each one of these productions, in their own unique way, gave testimony to, grappled with, and protested against the socio-political realities of apartheid and called upon both black and white audience members, as actors in their own right, to resist the unjust *status quo*, and to

¹⁰⁴ Sharpeville could be seen as one of the defining moments in South Africa's modern history. It showed, as the actor, playwright and director Lewis Nkosi (one of Fugard's early collaborators) notes, that the South African government was prepared to go to whatever length to subdue black Africans, and that extra-parliamentary opposition was needed, also from the artistic community. See Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile* (London: Longmans, 1965), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*, 108; Sorgenfrei, ‘Art, politics, or business?’, 483.

¹⁰⁶ This name was the result of the group of actors being offered the opportunity to rehearse and perform their work in the old Port Elizabeth snake pit which was standing empty at the time. “Intrigued by the idea of performing in the pit, with the audience peering down into its oval, open space”, Walder writes, “they called themselves the Serpent Players”. See Walder, ‘Introduction,’ xxiv.

help bring about an alternative South Africa, in and through the performances of their daily lives. It is, then, interesting to note that, while Fugard, during this time, increasingly immersed himself in the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism and, in many ways, turned his back on the faith he was brought up in, by his devout ‘Calvinist’ mother, his plays continued to be saturated with biblical and Christian imagery (in continuity with someone such as Gibson Kente’s work, and, in fact, the whole black performative tradition that reaches back to the early missionary days in the country, as seen above). Fugard himself would later acknowledge the “Christian subtext” that was part and parcel of many of his works, and with the release of his 1994 work, *Playland*, theatre critic Jan Hermann would write that, given the play’s “obsessive biblical references ... you’d think that the author was a devout churchgoer”.¹⁰⁷ Fugard clearly realised, perhaps as a result of his friendship with John Kani,¹⁰⁸ that Christianity in South Africa is not only the religion of the oppressor, but also the religion of the oppressed, who find in it a different message, namely, one of liberation, freedom, and hope, which cannot but be part of, and reflected in, the theatre-struggle against apartheid.¹⁰⁹

Fugard would indeed then become one of the most prominent figures in South African protest theatre and, as could be expected, many were disappointed when he decided to move from Johannesburg back to Port Elizabeth in the early 1960’s. Fortunately, however, there were others who could take over the baton when he left Dorkay House, most notably Barney Simon, who would come to establish the Market Theatre a few blocks away from Eloff Street, and ultimately help to create and stage the play *Woza Albert!* with Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema.

5.4. Barney Simon and the Market Theatre

Barney Simon, the son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, grew up in Troyeville, a modest working-class suburb that was a stone-throw away from the Johannesburg inner city. As a child, he spent hours on end at the Regal Cinema in nearby Bezuidenhout Valley, or Bez Valley as it was known, where the *Jewish Workers Club*, in its attempt to provide “conviviality, companionship, and cultural reassurance for immigrant workers”, regularly staged Yiddish

¹⁰⁷ See Jan Herman’s article ‘Writing on the Wall: Athol Fugard Sees a Way Past Apartheid, in *Playland*,’ published in the *Los Angeles Times*, January, 27, 1994. See also Alan Shelley’s remarks on the biblical and Christian imagery in Fugard’s work in his book *Athol Fugard: His Plays, People and Politics* (Islington: Oberon Books, 2009), 66ff.

¹⁰⁸ For some insight into John Kani’s Christian convictions, and the way it informs and underlies his life (also then as actor), see his interview with Rolf Solberg in *Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, 234.

¹⁰⁹ See Shelley, *Athol Fugard*, 67

theatre productions.¹¹⁰ These productions, which came to play an all-important role in the Jewish community's social and, importantly, political life,¹¹¹ made a big impression on the young Simon, and before long he became completely "stage-struck", to quote Patt Schwartz.¹¹² After matriculating from Jeppe Boys' High School in the early fifties, he initially began studying Architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, while also being part of an amateur acting group called the *Dramateurs*; however, like Athol Fugard, he eventually decided to drop out of the course to pursue his real passion, which was the theatre. This led to him going to London, where he landed a job as a stagehand at Joan Littlewood's socialistic fringe theatre company, the *Theatre Workshop*, based at the derelict *Theatre Royal* in Stratford East. Littlewood believed that "the theatre should face up to the problems of its time", and that it could not "ignore the poverty and human suffering which increases every day".¹¹³ The *Theatre Workshop's* productions, besides being collaborative and experimental, were thus decidedly political and aimed at representing and addressing the lived-realities of those who were socially and economically marginalised.¹¹⁴ Inspired by Littlewood's vision, Simon decided to move back to South Africa to try and do similar work in his own context. "South Africa", he would later write, "was where I needed to be".¹¹⁵

Upon his return to South Africa, Barney Simon immediately found his way to Dorkay House and the nearby Bantu Men's Social Club, where the very first play he saw was Athol Fugard's *No-good Friday*, which, as noted above, focused on the Christ-figure Willie's "Friday night martyrdom".¹¹⁶ Of it he said: "it changed my life".¹¹⁷ He went on to introduce himself to Fugard, after a performance of his next play, *Nongogo*, and their initial conversation was nothing short

¹¹⁰ See Taffy Adler's article 'The Johannesburg Jewish Worker's Club, 1928-1948,' *The Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1, 'Special Issue on Urban Social History' (October, 1979): 70-92, in which he explores the important role this social group played in the cultural (and also later political) life of the thousands of Jewish immigrants who settled in Johannesburg in the 1920's, after escaping the oppressive conditions in countries such as Lithuania, Poland, and Latvia.

¹¹¹ See Adler, 'The Johannesburg Jewish Worker's Club, 1928-1948,' 80.

¹¹² Schwartz, *The Best of the Company: The Story of Johannesburg's Market Theatre*, 15.

¹¹³ These words are from a theatre manifesto that Littlewood and other drafted in 1936. In this manifesto, they go on to say that the theatre has always fulfilled this role in society; that it has always been political and concerned with the realities of ordinary people. They write: "To those who say that such affairs are not the concern of the theatre or that the theatre should confine itself to treading in the paths of 'beauty' and 'dignity', we would say: "Read Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Calderón, Moliere, Lope-de-Vega, Schiller and the rest". This manifesto can be found in Howard Goorney and Ewan MacColl, eds., *Agit-Prop to Theatre Workshop: Political Playscripts, 1930-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), ix.

¹¹⁴ See Nadine Holdsworth, *Joan Littlewood's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20-1; and D. Keith Peacock, *Changing Performance: Culture and Performance in the British Theatre since 1945* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 79-118.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 15.

¹¹⁶ Wertheim, *The Dramatic Art of Athol Fugard*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Abrahams and Fox, eds., *The World in an Orange*, 16.

of “electric”.¹¹⁸ Fugard subsequently invited Simon to become part of his African Theatre Workshop and to sit in “as a third eye” in the development of *The Blood Knot* at the newly-built Rehearsal Room theatre.¹¹⁹ He later also asked Simon to help with the actual staging of the play, where his experience as a stagehand in London proved to be very useful.¹²⁰ This involvement with *The Blood Knot* not only allowed Simon to work with and learn from Fugard, who was beginning to find his voice as a writer and director, but also to become acquainted with and befriend different members of the alternative and politically-minded theatre community at Dorkay House, many of whom came from and were involved in townships across the city. When Fugard thus decided to leave Johannesburg after *The Blood Knot* was first staged, Simon was well-positioned to step into his shoes and continue the work that he had begun.

With Fugard back in Port Elizabeth, Simon began working with a group of township actors at Dorkay House, who called themselves the *Phoenix Players*. He also later established his own theatre company called *Mirror One*. He chose this name as he believed, like Hans Urs von Balthasar, that the theatre serves as “a reflecting surface” in which we “find an image” of society at large and of ourselves, which helps us to better understand, and form ethical judgments about, the drama of existence and our role therein.¹²¹ The plays Simon staged at the Rehearsal Room, while working as a copy editor during the day, were mostly works by other local and international playwrights that were relevant to, and which challenged, the socio-political reality in the country. These productions included, for example, *Cayenne Pepper* by Diobaldi (which explores the dreadful realities of prison life), *The Death of Bessie Smith* by Edward Albee (which focuses on the death of the famous black blues singer, Bessie Smith, who was refused treatment at a ‘whites-only’ hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, after a car accident), as well as a musical called *Phiri* (an adaptation of Ben Johnson’s classic satire of greed and betrayal, *Volpone*, set in Soweto).¹²² Simon was also asked to produce and direct

¹¹⁸ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 15. See Fugard’s recollection of this first meeting in his tribute to Simon included in Abrahams and Fox, *The World in an Orange*, 21-3. Fugard writes: “[There] were the three of us [himself, his wife, Sheila, and Barney Simon] sitting on the floor of a Johannesburg flat [after a performance of Nongogo] talking excitedly about the theatre begging to be born in South Africa – a theatre that would be free and fearless... [Simon] immediately realised that his vision of a new South African theatre ... coincided with ours”.

¹¹⁹ Abrahams and Fox, *The World in an Orange*, 16.

¹²⁰ Fugard writes: “Barney was simply magnificent ... He was ushering the audience in and scrambling around for extra chairs and benches when our seventy-seater theatre ended up accommodating one hundred and twenty bodies. He was going to the aid of fainting ladies and elderly gentlemen when the heat and lack of fresh air overcome them... That experience revealed to me the essential Barney – a soul of extraordinary generosity and talent”. See Abrahams and Fox, *The World in an Orange*, 21.

¹²¹ Quoted in Abrahams and Fox, *The World in an Orange*, 16. See also ‘This Compost Heap of a Country: An Interview with Barney Simon,’ in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, eds. Davis and Fuchs, 225.

¹²² Abrahams and Fox, *The World in an Orange*, 16.

many of Athol Fugard's new plays, as they appeared. For Simon, who was fully committed to non-racialism, it was of the utmost importance that these productions had mixed-race casts and were played in front of mixed-race audiences. With the introduction of a number of new laws, such as the 1965 Publication and Entertainment Act, which aimed at segregating "any place of entertainment", it was, however, becoming difficult, if not impossible, to do so.¹²³ Productions were presented at unusual hours, and people were usually only invited by word-of-mouth. The police, however, found out about these 'illegal' performances and put a stop to them. The political subject matter of the plays was obviously also highly problematic, and many works, whether by Fugard or other local or international playwright, were censored or banned.¹²⁴ Over time, the situation reached breaking point, and the authorities ultimately decided to close down Dorkay House, bringing an end to an institution that was the heartbeat of Johannesburg's alternative artistic community in the 1950's and 1960's.

With the dissolution of Dorkay House, Barney Simon and his collaborators, such as David Phetoe, Corney Mabaso, Zakes Mofekeng, and Fats Dibeco, defiantly decided to take the productions that they were developing 'to the streets'. They began presenting spur-of-the-moment performances in parks, store-fronts, private homes, community centres, and church halls, especially in the townships.¹²⁵ Simon would also regularly rent the dining-rooms of student communes in Parktown and turn them into make-shift theatres.¹²⁶ He later recalled: "We just made theatre ... it was quite agile, a sort of guerrilla theatre, as you might say".¹²⁷ There is even an anecdote of them performing some of their productions in someone's back yard, so that political prisoners, who were currently under house arrest next door, could watch from across the fence.¹²⁸ Most of the plays that were staged around this time still came from

¹²³ Kavanah, *The Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, 51.

¹²⁴ For more on the South African government's censorship of books, artworks, motion pictures, plays and live performances (and its consequences, also then for the authors and artists involved) during apartheid, see Peter D. MacDonald's study *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). It's also worthwhile to revisit Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer's 1972 essay, 'Apartheid and Censorship', which was republished in *Index on Censorship* 23, no.3 (July/August, 1994): 151-2. In this essay Gordimer remarks: "Control of information is merely one of the functions of censorship; its ultimate purpose as a political weapon of apartheid is to bring about a situation where there is 'no communication' between South Africa and the world of ideas that might cause us to question our way of life here, and 'no communication' within our society between the sections of a people carved up into categories of colour and language... [A] whole generation of South Africans is growing up with areas of the world of ideas closed to them, and without any insight into the lives and aspirations of their fellow countrymen, black or white as the case may be, living on the other side of that net of legislation through which we may all only peer at each other dumbly".

¹²⁵ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 16.

¹²⁶ See 'Introduction,' in Barney Simon, *Born in the RSA: Four Workshopped Plays* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), xiii.

¹²⁷ Davis and Fuchs, eds., 'This Compost Heap of a Country: An Interview with Barney Simon,' *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, 225.

¹²⁸ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 16; Davis and Fuchs, eds. 'This Compost Heap of a Country,' 225.

outside South Africa, so as to bypass government censors,¹²⁹ but were chosen and adapted, so that they would speak to the current situation in the country. They, for example, performed works by Brecht, Becket, Camus, and Peter Weiss. As was the case with the *Serpent Players* in Port Elizabeth, Sophocles' *Antigone* also became an important part of their repertoire. Simon would later write that *Antigone* is a "play for our time", as it deals with an unjust political system, which, in the words of the character Antigone, "offends the laws of God and Heaven".¹³⁰

By the early 1970's, Simon began presenting theatre workshops in mission hospitals in Zululand and the Transkei, two 'Bantustans' or black 'homelands', equipping black nurses to use drama and song in health education and community development.¹³¹ Around this time, he also met, befriended, and founded a new theatre company with, another gifted theatre maker, Mannie Manim. Manim, who interestingly worked as a stage-hand on Athol Fugard's production, *No-good Friday*, at the Bantu Men's Social Society, when he was only fifteen years old,¹³² was the head of drama at the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) and managed the experimental Arena Theatre in Doornfontein in Pretoria. Convinced of the evil of apartheid, and strongly influenced by the words and works of someone such as Fugard,¹³³ he initially attempted to challenge the political *status quo* from 'within' by, for example, finding ways to stage multi-racial productions in front of multi-racial audiences at the Arena Theatre,

¹²⁹ The South African government allowed many of these playwrights' work to be performed, as they believed that their plays represented 'Western' culture and could therefore "fit into their European aspirations". Quite ironically, the "officially anti-communist South Africa was looking to [someone such as] Brecht to guide its way into the exclusive club of Western civilization". It is not known "if the cultural institutions in charge were aware of the subversive impact of Brecht's words ... or if they solely oversaw the political position of Brecht". See Lars Germann, *Bertolt Brecht's 'Threepenny Opera' and 'Love, Crime and Johannesburg' by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company: A Comparison* (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2008), 5-6; and also, Loren Kruger's *Post-imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially the chapter 'The Dis-illusion of Apartheid: Brecht and South Africa,' 215-280.

¹³⁰ See Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 45. *Antigone* (and the other two plays in Sophocles' Theban Cycle), resonated in a profound sense with the oppressed in South Africa, and many renditions of these works were staged during the apartheid years (by, for example, the *Serpent Players* and Barney Simon's theatre companies). A performance of *Antigone* was even presented by political prisoners on Robben Island. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela wrote the following about this production: "I had read some of the classic Greek plays in prison and found them enormously elevating. What I took out of them was that characters were measured by facing up to difficult situations... When *Antigone* was chosen as the play [for our amateur drama society's yearly offering at Christmas] I volunteered my services and was asked to play Creon. It was Antigone who symbolised our struggle; she was, in her own way, a freedom fighter, for she defied the law on the grounds that it was unjust". See Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Little Brown and Company, 1994), 541. In 1973, Athol Fugard, together with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, created a play called *The Island* which told this tale of Robben Island inmates staging a production of 'The Trial and Punishment of Antigone'.

¹³¹ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 16. See also the chapter 'Barney's work in Health Education' in Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 85-8.

¹³² See Mannie Manim, 'Thoughts on Theatre in South Africa,' in *Journeys of Discovery. National Arts Festival Winter School. A Collection of Lectures*, ed. Rosalie Breitenbach (Grahamstown: The 1820 Foundation, 1988), 1.

¹³³ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 16.

which had also been attempted at Dorkay House.¹³⁴ Faced with increasing opposition within the organisation, however, he eventually decided that it would be better to resign altogether, and, upon doing so, he immediately joined Simon in establishing what they called *The Company*. This would become a theatre group of like-minded writers, directors, and actors, who would explicitly use the stage as a ‘cultural weapon’ against the powers that be of the apartheid state.

At its inception, Simon and Manim’s *The Company* functioned in much the same way as Simon’s previous endeavour, *Mirror One*, had done. Productions were staged in the most unconventional of spaces and at the most unconventional of hours, and the multi-racial audience were mostly notified of performances by word-of-mouth. It was, once more, a form of ‘guerrilla theatre’ at its very best. While their approach was effective and drew much attention, they nonetheless realised that, in the long term, they would need a more permanent venue to rehearse and perform in. As they started looking for such a venue, and as they explored options such as “a brewery, several nightclubs, old barns, an abandoned cinema and [even] a synagogue”,¹³⁵ Manim received a tip-off that the old Indian Fruit Market, in an area called Newtown, was soon to be demolished by the Johannesburg municipality. He and Simon immediately enquired about the possibility of converting this beautiful old domed-building, which resembled “Shakespeare’s Globe”,¹³⁶ into a theatre, which the municipality miraculously agreed upon. Much to their own surprise, and that of the municipality, they also soon discovered that, as the newly-planned theatre stood in an industrial area and previously served as an market-place, where white clients could buy fruit and vegetables from Indian vendors, it was somehow zoned for multi-racial use, which would make it one of only two theatres in the

¹³⁴ Manim would later recall: We staged production “late at night... [we just] phoned people and said, ‘Tell your friends to come, you’ll get in, no booking. You’ve just got to come, and we’ll do the show... We [also] started a system of the first dress rehearsals being open to people of all races... [These] dress rehearsals became more and more popular... I don’t know whether Pretoria really knew what was going on, because we used to say, ‘No, no, no, we’re setting up and we need to do quite a lot of rehearsals’. So, there were all kinds of schemes going on.” See Mannie Manim’s essay, ‘Overseas They were Saying this Guy is Really Something,’ in *The World in an Orange*, eds. Abrahams and Fox, eds., 45-51 (here 46).

¹³⁵ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 19.

¹³⁶ Manim described his first visit to the old market as follows: “I came down with a carload of dark-suited, blue-tied city planners. We had to sit on one another’s laps... We walked in at the end of the trading day and all these guys were transformed into thespians. They all started jumping onto the raised dais in the middle where the boxes were stored. I ran up to the gallery ... and there were all these guys sprouting their school Shakespeare...”. Pat Schwartz continues: “The proportions were perfect, [t]he situation was perfect – at the crossroads of the city, the southwest corner, close to the motorway which would bring people in from the north and the south and would also be accessible to those without their own transport. The acoustics were perfect. The atmosphere was pure theatre. In the tradition of London’s Roundhouse which started life as a railway engine-shed or Paris’ Gare d’Orsay, this fruit market simply had to be reincarnated as an arts complex”. See Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 19-20.

country that would be open to people from all races.¹³⁷ “There’s no logic to it”, Simon exclaimed at the time, but we “are legal!”.¹³⁸ And so, the Market Theatre, which would indeed become the “theatre of the struggle”, was born.¹³⁹

Simon and Manim decided that the first production of the Market Theatre should be *The Seagull*, Anton Chekov’s classic portrait of “bourgeois delusion and tragedy”, which takes place just before, and some would say in anticipation of, the Russian revolution, and which, in its own time, challenged and undermined the Tsarist government’s autocratic control over art and people’s lives in general.¹⁴⁰ While converting the old produce market into a theatre and rehearsing for the play, tension was building in the nearby Soweto township, as the black youth expressed their discontent with the Bantu education system and the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in local schools. And with only five days to go before the opening performance, disaster struck: the police opened fire on almost 20 000 protesters, killing hundreds of young people – an event which, like the Sharpeville Massacre, shocked the world and, arguably, marked the beginning of the end of apartheid.¹⁴¹ Simon later recalled: “Terrifying – actors were climbing trees looking for branches to create curtain poles for *The*

¹³⁷ The only other multi-racial theatre in South Africa at the time was the Space Theatre in Cape Town, which was opened by the photographer, Brian Astbury (with the help of Athol Fugard) in 1972. As it was housed in an old warehouse in an area also zoned for multi-racial use, it managed to defy South Africa’s segregation laws for a few years, even though the authorities still did their absolute best to disrupt the theatre’s productions (by, for example, conducting raids and harassing actors and audience members on a regular basis). Faced with immense political and financial pressure, the theatre eventually closed down by the end of the 1970’s, but for the few years it was active it played a very important role in the alternative theatre scene in South Africa. Some of the important works that premiered at the Space Theatre were Fugard’s *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immortality Act*, Fugard and the Serpent Players’ *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, as well as Fatima Dike’s *The Sacrifice of Kreli* and *The First South African*. See Brian Astbury’s book *The Space / Die Ruimte / Indawo* (Cape Town: Moira and Azriel Fine, 1979), as well as his blog, *The Story of The Space / Die Ruimte / Indawo*,¹³⁷ Brian Astbury, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://theatreofsurvival.wordpress.com>.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 106.

¹³⁹ Sorgenfrei, ‘Art, Politics, or Business?’, 483.

¹⁴⁰ The Russian Cosmonaut, Vitali Sevastyanov, had the following to say about Chekhov (and a work such as *The Seagull*): Chekhov “portrayed the life of society in a way that left no doubts in the reader’s mind that such a life had to be changed. And he depicted individual lives so that every man could understand that only he himself was capable of changing his own life. Chekhov, of course, is not a ‘propagandist’ or an ‘activist’. Chekhov is not a political writer. Even so, he played an enormous role in preparing public opinion for the revolution”. Vitali Sevastyanov, ‘Tribute to Chekhov,’ *Soviet Literature* 1, (January 1980): 191. For more on how *The Seagull* (especially then as staged by Stanislavski at the end of the 19th century), exposed the socio-political realities of the time, and challenged the reigning theatre conventions and the restrictions imposed by the Tsarist government, see the chapter ‘Chekhov in Context’ in James N. Loehlin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Chekhov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17-33. See also Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 4, where *The Seagull* is described as a “piece of Russian critical realism” which “heralded the demise of” the Tsarist government.

¹⁴¹ Official reports stated that 176 young people died. It is estimated, however, that the real number of fatalities could be close to 700. See, for example, Godfrey Mwakikagile, *The African Liberation Struggle: Reflections* (Dar Es Salaam: New African Press, 2018), 555. In a poem dedicated to Hector Peterson (one of the ‘young martyrs’ who died on the 16 June 1976), Oswald Mtshali wrote the following: “... the demise of hallowed ideologies has begun / the battering ram of time and history is / pulverizing the edifice of vaunted granite / it creaks at the seams as it crumbles”. Quoted in Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 3.

Seagull's stage and helicopters were flying over on their way to the townships".¹⁴² Ultimately, the Market Theatre's first performance went ahead as scheduled, with Chekhov's work almost serving as an allegory of white South Africa on the eve of revolution and revolt.¹⁴³ Pat Schwartz writes:

June 1976 was not [necessarily] an auspicious time to embark upon a new theatrical venture. The country's black townships were in flames, lives were being lost daily and violence and fear was endemic. Drama for many South African's was a constant presence in the streets, they were not looking for it behind the footlights. Yet the spark which was struck in Johannesburg's Newtown on June 21, when the doors of a converted produce market opened to admit a theatre audience, was to have as a revolutionary effect on South Africa's theatrical world as the bullet fired by a policeman at a peaceful march of schoolchildren.¹⁴⁴

From this very first performance of *The Seagull*, the Market Theatre indeed became the epicentre of protest theatre in South Africa. Hundreds of "committed, brave, and honest" plays, by both international and, importantly, local playwrights, including Barney Simon himself,¹⁴⁵ would be staged over the next few politically-turbulent years. Most of these plays mirrored, gave witness to, and spoke out against the realities of apartheid South Africa, while often also offering a hopeful, alternative vision for the country, a dramatic 'solution' to the current situation, as Balthasar would say. The theatre complex itself also then became a symbol of non-racialism; a "beacon of hope beamed at a South African future of peace, justice, and racial harmony".¹⁴⁶ It was a "home for all" members of society, a "microcosm of an idyllic South Africa", where people could share experiences and be together, "without seeking permission and without pressure".¹⁴⁷ The Market Theatre, as Barney Simon would say, was a place where real "interaction between human beings" could occur; a place as "enriching and relevant as the

¹⁴² Quoted in Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 106.

¹⁴³ Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 13.

¹⁴⁵ Some of the works Barney Simon would write and produce during the early years of the Market Theatre, included the highly popular musical *Cincinnati – Scenes from City Life* (1979), which mirrored "life situations and human conditions [in Johannesburg] with piercing accuracy", as well as *Cold Stone Jug* (1980), *Call Me Women* (1980), and *Marico Moonshine and Manpower* (1981), to name but a few. See Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 95.

¹⁴⁶ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 10, and 92, where Martin Tsabethe is quoted as saying: "The Market is the only theatre ... that knows no colour, from the administrators, technical departments and actors down to the paying customers". See also 93 where Lucille Gillwald writes: "I think the most important thing that was achieved at the time was not only total integration in the theatre but attracting a totally integrated community... The really good part of it is there [was] no sense of forced integration. It [seemed] to be growing organically out of the needs of the people."

¹⁴⁷ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 93.

market ... it replaced”; an “oasis in a society of total chaos ... where people could talk together and ... could put on theatre that ... said things about South Africa”.¹⁴⁸

5.5. The Genesis of *Woza Albert!*

While all this activity was taking place at the Market Theatre in Newtown, Johannesburg, Gibson Kente was released from prison, and he once again began touring throughout the country, with new township musicals. His latest works, as mentioned above, were decidedly less political than the trio of plays that he produced in the mid-1970's. However, they still often led to run-ins with the authorities, both on account of the content of the plays and the fact that they were performed by an all-black cast, in a country where black people's every move was restricted. One play, in particular, that caused quite a bit of trouble was the popular *Mama and the Load* (1979), which again depicted the hardships of township life, while also carrying a strong, almost proselytising, Christian message, where the church served as the final refuge of the community. On one occasion, Kente attempted to take this production into the homeland, Bophuthatswana, but the cast members were refused entry by the police (and were even incarcerated for a short while). This led to a “heated argument” on the tour bus about the relationship between politics and Christianity, which played such an important role in this work.¹⁴⁹ “All sort of ideas were tossed around”, Schwartz writes, including “the question of what would happen if Jesus Christ, known in Sesotho as Morena, were to come back to earth in apartheid South Africa”.¹⁵⁰ Two cast members, who immediately became gripped by this specific question and its imaginative possibilities, were the young actor-musicians, Percy Mtwá, from Benoni on the Witwatersrand, and Mbongeni Ngema, from Umkumbane in Durban. For the next few months, as the tour went on, they continued to discuss this ‘Second Coming of Christ’, and, over time, decided to resign from *Mama and the Load*, so as to develop their own full-length play that would explore this idea. As Schwartz writes: “The scenario was irresistible, the opportunities for drama, humour, and pathos unlimited, and Mtwá and Ngema were ripe for a new project”.¹⁵¹

After settling in Soweto, Johannesburg, Mtwá and Ngema founded a new theatre company called the *Earth Players*, of which they were only two members, and commenced with the preparations for their envisioned play. They began studying the Gospel narratives and attended

¹⁴⁸ See Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 108; Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 30-31, 166; and Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Percy Mtwá, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, ‘Original Introduction, as Published in the First Edition,’ in Mtwá, Ngema and Simon, *Woza Albert!*, viii.

¹⁵⁰ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 99; Hauptfleisch, ‘Introduction,’ in *Woza Albert*, 17.

¹⁵¹ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 99

one church service after another, especially in the many African-initiated churches that were spread all over places like Soweto.¹⁵² They also studied the writings of theatre theorists, such as Stanislavski, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brook. From Stanislavski and Grotowski, they learned how to train their minds, bodies, and voices, so as to become, or to be “transformed” into, as Grotowski would say, the characters they needed to portray, without having to rely on, for example, props, costumes, lightning, or other theatre trappings.¹⁵³ Peter Brook helped them to understand that the theatre could both be a “holy place”, a sanctuary, where the “invisible is made visible”, as well as a place of transformation and even “revolution”.¹⁵⁴ As part of their research for the play, Mtwā and Ngema also spent many hours on the streets of Soweto, trying to understand the deeper complexities of the day-to-day lives of black South Africans in the townships, so that they could faithfully mirror and re-present these realities in their stage production.

When Mtwā and Ngema had come up with a number of rough sketches from which a play could be developed, they decided to approach Barney Simon at the Market Theatre to hear if he would be interested in working with them. At first, Simon was a bit uncomfortable about this request. The Black Consciousness Movement was gaining momentum at the time, and Simon felt that it would perhaps be better if the duo rather collaborated with a black playwright

¹⁵² See Mtwā, Ngema and Simon, ‘Original Introduction,’ viii.

¹⁵³ See Mtwā, Ngema and Simon, ‘Original Introduction,’ viii; Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 114. Hauptfleisch, ‘Introduction,’ 17-18. Konstantin Stanislavski, as mentioned in the previous chapters, developed a number of techniques and exercises (as part of his acting system) which helped the actor become ‘disponible’ to the ‘role’ he or she has been given by the playwright. The Stanislavskian method was, in many ways, further developed by the 20th century Polish theatre director and theorist, Jerzy Grotowski, who studied in Moscow under Yuri Zavadsky (one of Stanislavski’s mentees). In his seminal work, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1968]), Grotowski argued for a form of theatre which only relied on the actor’s body and voice (without making use of any other theatrical trappings), and privileged the “actor-spectator relationship of perpetual, direct, ‘live’ communion” (19). Like Stanislavski, Grotowski developed an extensive system of exercises (with regards to the “mental-physical-emotional processes” of acting), and especially focused on the ritual aspects of performance (see 133-224). For an introduction to Grotowski thought and method, see James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski* (London: Routledge, 2007). Mtwā had the following to say about Grotowski: “I met Andy Mabizela who was an actor who then became a stage manager. I borrowed the book [*Towards a Poor Theatre*] and studied it with Mbongeni. This book taught us how theatre can be simple. How it can exist without technological aids and huge sets. Grotowski was talking about the preparation of the actor, the training of the actors and exercises for actors. He also has exercises that are designed to remove physiological barriers, to remove obstacles, so that the soul, the spirit, is free to play. It is that book, in fact, that inspired the inception, the conception, of ‘Woza Albert!’.... I tell you, we studied that book until it was in tatters. Percy Mtwā, ‘We were like with Morena himself on that stage with Barney,’ in *The World in an Orange* eds. Abrahams and Fox, 195, 197-198.

¹⁵⁴ Mtwā, ‘We were like with Morena himself on that stage with Barney,’ 203. Peter Brook is one of the most celebrated theatre theorists, directors, and especially then interpreters of Shakespeare of the previous century and influenced a generation of theatre makers with his publication, *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996 [1968]). In this seminal work, he explores, *inter alia*, what he calls “Holy Theatre” or “The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible”, where the hidden realities of the drama of existence are made visible in and through the “happening” of the theatre (see 49-77). He also explores what he calls “Rough Theatre”, which is concerned with people’s lived realities, and often has a strong political (and even revolutionary) focus (see 78-119). For Brook both these ‘modes’ of theatre can and should come together in what he calls “Immediate Theatre” (120-175).

or director.¹⁵⁵ Mtwā and Ngema, who had spent much time at the Market Theatre and had seen many of Simon's works up until that point, were, however, adamant that they wanted to work with him.¹⁵⁶ A meeting was thus set up and after they performed some of their ideas to Simon, he could not but say 'Yes'.¹⁵⁷ "Percy and Mbongeni", Simon would later write, "were amongst the most extraordinary performers I had ever witnessed".¹⁵⁸

There was, however, also another small problem with regards to Simon's involvement. As he was of Jewish descent, he did not actually know too much about Christianity. While at school, he later wrote, he would usually "be sent out to play in the garden when the New Testament" was read, which meant that his knowledge of the Gospels was "hazy", to say the very least.¹⁵⁹ One day, however, earlier in their rehearsal period, Simon fell sick and had to stay in bed for a day or two, which gave him enough time to become acquainted with this biblical narrative on which Mtwā and Ngema's play was to be based. In Simon's own words:

One day I had 'flu and stayed in bed while Percy and Mbongeni stayed in the township... I invited the artist Bill Ainslie [a devout Christian who initially planned on becoming a priest before taking up art] to come over and he sat by my bedside and taught me the Gospel. We worked through the story, section for section, and evolved a structure of parallels between His story and ours.¹⁶⁰

As a theatre-maker, as well as a political activist, Barney Simon was deeply moved and inspired by this first, surprising encounter with the 'drama of the Christ-event' (and, as he said, the parallels between "His story and ours"), and when he returned to the Market Theatre after two days of being sick, he told Mtwā and Ngema – as Ngema himself recalls – that the play they

¹⁵⁵ See Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 118-119. Mtwā, 'We were like with Morena himself on that stage with Barney,' 195-6; Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Mbogēni Ngema later had the following to say about them choosing to work with a white playwright/director: "I just said, if someone is good, they're good, that's it. If we are fighting racism we can't be fighting ourselves along the colour lines. I defended Barney to the last because I believed in him. The white/black thing was never an issue for me. Even when I [today] direct I sometimes hear his voice. It's like somewhere he's around with me. Somewhere he's a guiding angel for me as a director". See Mbogēni Ngema, 'Working with Barney was a Revelation that Became Consistent with My Work up till This Day,' in *The World in an Orange*, 189-193.

¹⁵⁷ See Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 118-119. Mtwā, 'We were like with Morena himself on that stage with Barney,' 195-6; Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100. Nobel Prize-winning author Nadine Gordimer sat in on this first meeting, and later described the occasion as follows in an obituary for Barney Simon: "I remember, decades ago, Barney Simon came by and asked if I would like to come with him to meet two young men who were keen to devise a play. They were Percy Mtwā and Mbogēni Ngema, and they had the germ of an idea in two out-of-works chatting in a graveyard where the great African National Congress leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Chief Albert Luthuli was buried". Nadine Gordimer, 'Obituary: Barney Simon,' in *The Independent* (July 4, 1995). For Ngema's recollection of this first meeting, see Ngema, 'Working with Barney,' 190.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

were working on should be “exactly like the New Testament”.¹⁶¹ Simon indeed recognised that the Gospel narrative not only lent itself to being performed on the theatre stage, but also, as Mtwana and Ngema had realised, while working with Gibson Kente on *Mama and the Load*, was highly relevant to the realities of apartheid South Africa (which made it rather bizarre that the government were using Christianity to justify their policies; something which is highlighted and explored in *Woza Albert!* itself, as will be seen below).¹⁶² In the next few months, while working on the play, it was of utmost importance for Simon that they continually revisit the biblical text itself, in their attempt to re-imagine how, on the one hand, the Christ-story would play out today, and, on the other hand, how black and white South Africans, respectively, would respond to Jesus’ words and deeds.¹⁶³ By a fascinating turn of events, it thus happened that in the middle of one of the darkest hours in South African history, two black township actors and a white theatre director and playwright, who self-identified as a secular Jew, became completely consumed with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Besides constantly revisiting the Christ-narrative, as recorded in the Gospels, Simon also encouraged Mtwana and Ngema to continue spending as much time as possible on the streets of Soweto and other parts of Johannesburg, the context in which this ‘second coming’ of Christ would take place, so that they could indeed accurately re-present the drama playing out in South Africa, on the theatre stage. For Simon, as always, the central task of the theatre was to hold a “mirror to society”,¹⁶⁴ and he thus urged Mtwana and Ngema to “speak the truth” about what they saw and experienced,¹⁶⁵ so that the horrid realities of apartheid (whether it be “the racial divide”, or “racist stereotyping”, or “labour issues”, or the “splitting up of families, or “forced removals”, or “poverty and homelessness”, or “police brutality”, or “political imprisonment”),¹⁶⁶ would be revealed for all to see. *Woza Albert!*, Simon maintained, should “reflect South Africa as people in the streets”; it should give “identity to what surrounds us”.¹⁶⁷ Dixon Malele, who worked as stage manager at the Market Theatre during this time, recalls: “Barney really wanted to expose the horrors of the grand regime at that time. Theatre was like a platform for him to do that. He didn’t pull his punches”.¹⁶⁸ Simon would thus send Mtwana and Ngema, in Ngema’s own words, “to go and watch people, to see people, and bring those people

¹⁶¹ See Ngema, ‘Working with Barney,’ 189.

¹⁶² See the sub-section titled ‘Apartheid and Religion’ in Hauptfleisch, ‘Introduction,’ 10ff.

¹⁶³ See Dixon Malele, ‘He was Sort of a Mother, You Know,’ in *The World in an Orange*, 205.

¹⁶⁴ Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 138.

¹⁶⁵ Malele, ‘He Was Sort of a Mother, You Know,’ 206.

¹⁶⁶ Hauptfleisch, ‘Introduction,’ 34.

¹⁶⁷ See Abrahams and Fox, eds., *The World in an Orange*, 182.

¹⁶⁸ Malele, ‘He was Sort of a Mother, You Know,’ 206.

to the theatre, to the rehearsal room”.¹⁶⁹ All of the different characters and scenarios in *Woza Albert!* would thus be based on, and reflect, real-life people and situations, with the action on the stage mirroring and pointing back towards the drama taking place outside of the theatre complex – and this is what made the play so relevant and striking when it was finally performed.¹⁷⁰ As Nadine Gordimer later wrote: *Woza Albert!* “showed the world outside what the statute-book version of apartheid was really like in terms of black people’s account of their own lives”.¹⁷¹

By deeply immersing themselves in the story of Christ, as recorded in the Bible, and by continuing to study the real-life realities of ordinary black South Africans, to such an extent that the bodies later turned “into mirrors” which reflected everything they saw and experienced in the townships and in the greater Johannesburg area,¹⁷² Mtwana and Ngema –with the help, encouragement, and creative input of Barney Simon – ultimately finished the play, after more than a year’s non-stop work, and performed it for the very first time on the 25th of March 1981 in front of fifty people in the Laager Room of the Market Theatre. The reason for this relatively small audience was, in Mannie Manim’s words, “to draw less attention from the censure type people”.¹⁷³ Soon, however, the word began to spread about *Woza Albert!* and reviews began to appear in the newspapers, which prompted Manim and Simon to move the play to the Market Theatre’s main auditorium, where it would be performed in front of thousands of black and white South Africans over the next few months, becoming “the biggest box office drawcard in the history of the Market Theatre”.¹⁷⁴ From the very first performance, as Temple Hauptfleish writes, “the response by the public and the critics alike was almost uniformly ecstatic”, with everyone agreeing that this “inspired and inspiring play” hailed “a new phase in South African theatre”.¹⁷⁵ While exposing and strongly speaking out against the horrendous realities of apartheid, with an intensity which rivalled that of any political or protest theatre in history, it offered a defiant and joyous message of hope that proclaimed, to the oppressors and oppressed alike, that hate, darkness, and death will not prevail, but will ultimately be overcome by love, light, and life.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ Ngema, ‘Working with Barney,’ 190.

¹⁷⁰ See Fuchs, *Playing the Market*, 118.

¹⁷¹ Gordimer, ‘Obituary: Barney Simon’.

¹⁷² Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa*, 175.

¹⁷³ Manim, ‘Overseas,’ 78.

¹⁷⁴ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

¹⁷⁵ Hauptfleish, ‘Introduction,’ 21.

¹⁷⁶ Hauptfleish, ‘Introduction,’ 21.

After the highly-successful opening in Johannesburg, the production visited many more cities and towns throughout South Africa, playing mostly in township venues, and it also embarked on an extensive international tour to the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States, and Australia, which the South African government, under great pressure from these countries, allowed.¹⁷⁷ *Woza Albert!* also made a big impression on overseas audiences, and Mtwana and Ngema's "unparalleled talent for mimicry" won over "just about everyone who came to see" the play.¹⁷⁸ Alan Wright, the theatre critic from *The Scotsman*, who had covered every production at the famous Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, since its inception in the 1960's, said, for example, that *Woza Albert!* was one of "the most remarkable" production he had ever seen, a sentiment that was also echoed by many other critics, including *The Telegraph*'s John Barber, during the play's West End run in 1983.¹⁷⁹ "Directly or indirectly", Schwartz writes, *Woza Albert!* would thus "change a lot of lives and profoundly influence the direction of black South African theatre, spawning dozens of derivative and more or less successful spinoffs".¹⁸⁰ It became a "bridge for indigenous theatre from the township to the world", and, as John Kani writes, it encouraged black artists all over "to dream", in a country where dreaming was completely out of the questions for black South Africans, as the character Willie remarked in Athol Fugard's *No-good Friday*.¹⁸¹ Above all, however, *Woza Albert!*, with its depiction of the inhumane struggles of the "African Everyman" and its brazen suggestion of where Jesus Christ's solidarity would lie in this horrid situation, offered a staunch challenge to the apartheid government, which echoed throughout the country and the world, and undoubtedly contributed to bringing about a new South Africa in 1994.¹⁸²

In this chapter, up to this point, I have given an overview of the long history of how this play, *Woza Albert!*, came into being. It is a history that stretches back to pre-colonial African theatre, with its rich story-telling tradition, and the gradual introduction and performance of biblical and Christian narrative, as missionaries set foot ashore on the African continent. It also includes the pioneering work by someone like Herbert Dhlomo in the 1930's, the township productions performed by Gibson Kente from the 1950's onwards, the political-turn in South African theatre (in which Athol Fugard played an important role), and the establishment of the Market Theatre by Barney Simon and Mannie Manim. *Woza Albert!* is indeed a culmination of all of

¹⁷⁷ For an extensive list of all the different national and international performances of *Woza Albert!* that were staged since 1981, see Hauptfleish, 'Introduction,' 22ff.

¹⁷⁸ Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 100.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 102.

¹⁸⁰ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 102.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 102; See, once more, Fugard, 'No-Good Friday,' 43, for the character Willie's quotation about 'hope'.

¹⁸² See Hauptfleish, 'Introduction,' 36.

these different developments. It is a synthesis of traditional African dramatic elements, the Christian faith, township theatre, and political protest – in exactly the way Herbert Dhlomo imagined would be the case one day, when he wrote about the future of African theatre in the first half of the 20th century, as discussed above. It is, then, on this note that we will turn to the text of *Woza Albert!* itself, before ending this chapter with a theological engagement with and reflection on the play, with the help of help of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as discussed over the previous two chapters.

5.6. *Woza Albert!*

Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, as mentioned above, were highly influenced by the theatre theorists, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook, with the result that *Woza Albert!*, in continuity with the ideas of these thinkers about the theatre, takes place on an almost completely bare stage, with the “minimum of costume and prop”.¹⁸³ According to the play’s introductory notes, there are only “two up-ended tea chests” standing side by side “about centre stage”, and “an old wooden plank, about ten foot long”, which is “suspended horizontally on an old rope”, from which the “ragged cloths” hang that the actors “will use for their transformations”.¹⁸⁴ The two actors, who, by themselves, will mimic and act-out all the different scenes and settings and perform all of the different roles, except for Morena, who is only physically portrayed in the very last scene, also have a small “elastic band” with a “squash ball painted pink” around their necks, which they will wear as a “clown’s nose” whenever “a white man” is depicted throughout the work.¹⁸⁵

The play itself, in the style of many of the early township plays performed by the likes of the *Lucky Stars* or, later, Gibson Kente, consists out of twenty-six short scenes, which can be divided into two distinct parts. In the first seventeen scenes, which arguably form ‘Act One’ of the play, the audience is presented with a number of striking snapshots of typical scenarios in apartheid South Africa as seen and experienced by Mtwa and Ngema, while they were doing research for *Woza Albert!* in Soweto and other parts of Johannesburg. In these scenes, the stage thus becomes a big reflecting mirror, which portrays, and points back towards, the drama of everyday life in South Africa, playing out outside of the theatre complex. The opening scene takes place in a lively jazz club, which undoubtedly would have reminded audience members of a place such as Dorkay House in the 1950’s and 1960’s, with the two actors depicting, and

¹⁸³ Percy Mtwa, Mbogeni Ngema and Barney Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, in *Contemporary African Plays*, eds. Martin Banham and Jane Plastow (London: Methuen Publishing Limited, 1999), 207-259 (here 208-9).

¹⁸⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 209.

¹⁸⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 209.

with their mouths making the sounds of, enthusiastic jazz musicians playing saxophone and electric guitar to an adoring audience. One moment they ‘are’ the musicians, and even act-out the instruments they are playing with their bodies, and the next moment they ‘become’ audience members, who are “applauding wildly”.¹⁸⁶ While they are alternating between making music and cheering, as part of the crowd, an alarm suddenly goes off, and one of the actors puts on a police hat, as well as his clown’s nose. Soon, the ‘newly arrived’ policeman starts interrogating the guitarist, asking him to show his passbook, the booklet that all black South Africans had to carry with them to indicate where they could work and live. The dialogue between the overly smug and patronising policeman and the nervous musician goes as follows:

Percy [as policeman]: You know you’re a black man, don’t you?

Mbongeni [as musician]: Yes, my boss.

Percy: ... and you live here in South Africa?

Mbongeni: Yes, my boss.

Percy: So, you know that you must always carry your pass?

Mbongeni: Yes, my boss.

Percy: Okay, now what happens if you don’t have your pass?

Mbongeni: I go to jail, my boss.

Percy: And what happens if your pass is not in order?

Mbongeni: I go to jail, my boss.

Percy: H-E-E-E-Y! Your pass!!!¹⁸⁷

After this last, forceful command, the musician reluctantly hands over his passbook to the policeman, who discovers that he has only been given permission to work at the “Kentucky Southern Fried” fast-food restaurant down the road in the daytime, and definitely not to play music at a jazz club at this time of night. He subsequently starts screaming at him and calls him a liar for suggesting that he is busy making an earnest living as a guitarist, before violently grabbing him by the collar, pulling him off from the stage, and throwing him in a police van. While this is happening, the policeman asks the terrified musician, “[D]o you know where you should go?”, and answers his own question by saying, “Back to the bush with the baboons. That’s where you belong”!¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 209.

¹⁸⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 209-10

¹⁸⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 211

This rather shocking opening scene is then followed up by a number of similar scenes – some taking place in a prison cell, where white prison guards humiliate and harass black prisoners;¹⁸⁹ some taking place at an old rubbish dump, where a character called Auntie Dudu, “an old woman, wearing a white dust-coat as a shawl”, is seen searching the garbage “for something to eat”;¹⁹⁰ some taking place at a township market, where a young meat vendor, who should definitely still be in school, is pestered about his mother by a migrant worker from the “Dube Hostel”;¹⁹¹ and some taking place at a makeshift, open-air barber stall, where people having their hair cut, talk about the death and destruction of “the Soweto Riots in 1976”.¹⁹² Throughout all of these scenes that portray the horrific realities of life under the apartheid system, the name of Jesus, or Morena, begins to be mentioned in various different ways. In the prison scenes, for example, one of the inmates sings a hymn with the following words: “Morena walks with me all the way / watching over me all the day / when the night time comes he’s there with me / watching over me, loving me”.¹⁹³ Another prisoner is also heard praying to Morena, thanking him for the food, even though, as another prisoner comments, the food is so horrible that it would not even be suitable for a dog.¹⁹⁴ There is even a short scene where a character on a ‘black-only’ train cart softly recites Morena’s Sermon on the Mount, saying “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.¹⁹⁵ Gradually, the audience also becomes aware of a rumour doing the rounds that this Morena will, in fact, soon be coming to South Africa, to liberate the oppressed; a rumour some of the characters are interviewed about by a reporter from “Black TV”, a fictional television network with the tagline, “The face of Black South Africa”.¹⁹⁶ At the rubbish dump, for example, Auntie Dudu tells the reporter that she hopes this rumour is true; for, if Morena returns, people will “be happy” for once, and there will be “food for everybody ... cabbages, tomatoes, chicken, hot-dogs, all the nice things white people eat”.¹⁹⁷ While being interviewed, the young meat-vendor

¹⁸⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 211-12. This was one of the more controversial scenes in the play. During their research, Mtwa and Ngema heard many shocking accounts of how black prisoners were regularly body-searched by white policemen. Barney Simon thus felt adamant that this reality should be depicted in the play, and that, for this scene, Mtwa and Ngema should pull their trousers down so that their bare bottoms are shown to the audience. Dixon Malele writes: “If you are arrested for anything, they book you in and then before they lock you up you have to go through an inspection. Maybe you have a stompie [a bud] of a cigarette hidden in your ass to smoke later, or whatever. It was called tauza. [Barney said]: ‘No, we have to keep this. It’s going to be in the play’”. See Malele, ‘He was Sort of a Mother,’ 206.

¹⁹⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 213.

¹⁹¹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 218-9. See Percy Mtwa’s comments about this specific scene in Mtwa ‘We Were Like Morena Himself on That Stage with Barney,’ 198.

¹⁹² Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 219-21.

¹⁹³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 212.

¹⁹⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 214.

¹⁹⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 215.

¹⁹⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 217.

¹⁹⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 219.

also excitedly talks about “the saviour’s” supposed return, saying that if Morena arrives, he might even be able to finally go back to school, to “Sub-A” (the first class in South Africa’s former school system).¹⁹⁸ There are some characters, however, like one of the prisoners and a “coal vender” in Scene Twelve, who laughs the rumour off as nonsense, while others, like one “fragile, toothless old man” who appears in Scene Thirteen, say that it does not really matter if Morena returns, because he will simply be killed by the apartheid government, which is an ominous forecast of what is to follow.¹⁹⁹

After a short, humorous scene, where the two actors imitate an enthusiastic and joyful crowd waiting at Jan Smuts Airport for Morena to come on a “jumbo jet from Jerusalem”,²⁰⁰ the action shifts to Albert Street in Johannesburg, where the city’s main Pass Office was located at the time. Here, we find another crowd of people; this time, however, they are desperately crying out for Morena to come and liberate them. They say: “Morena! Morena-a-a! Where are you? Come to Albert Street ... to the Pass Office! We need you here Morena ... this is the most terrible street in the whole of Johannesburg ... the street where Black men must come and stand and wait and wait and wait, just to get the permit to work in Johannesburg ... [And then have to] wait and wait and wait again, for the white bosses to come ... and give you work”.²⁰¹ Following these cries of despair, the audience is shown how two characters degrade themselves by trying to get the attention of a potential white employer driving past in his motorcar, by saying, for example: “Messenger boy, tea boy, my boss... I make nice tea for the Madam, my boss ... Very good education, my boss ... Standard Three [with] very good English, baba ... always smiling, my boss”.²⁰² While this scene is still taking place, everything suddenly freezes, as Morena himself makes his appearance out of the audience, which leads to the two actors joyously screaming out “Hosanna!!” and running up to embrace him, before pleading: “Take us to heaven, Morena, it’s terrible here”.²⁰³

The audience is then told how Morena embraces the people standing in the queue in front of the pass office. He also announces that they should throw away their pass books, and follow

¹⁹⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 219.

¹⁹⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 219. The analogy that the old man draws is quite interesting. He starts out by referring to the Afrikaner leader Piet Retief who was tricked by the Zulu chief (and later king) Dingane into leaving his guns outside the Zulu Kraal, and then says that the same will happen with Jesus and the Nationalist government. He remarks: “That is what will happen to Morena ... The Prime Minister will say, just leave your angels outside and the power of your father outside and come inside and enjoy the fruits of apartheid. And then, what will happen to Morena is what happened to Piet Retief when he got inside”. Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 223.

²⁰⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 226.

²⁰¹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 226.

²⁰² Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 227.

²⁰³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 229.

him to the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto, which they continue to do, as they joyously dance and sing the following telling words: “Morena says throw away your passes and follow him to Soweto / We are no longer pieces of paper, man, we are people / Let them know our faces as Morena knows our faces / With Morena we walk as one”.²⁰⁴ In the following scene, the joyous celebration initially continues and the “Regina Mundi Song”, with the refrain “We shall follow Morena, we shall follow him everywhere”, is sung; but then two unnamed characters suddenly appear, who, in continuity with the “fragile, toothless old man” from earlier, make the following prediction about what will happen next:

Mbongeni: Ja, madoda [people], hundreds of thousands will gather at the Regina Mundi Church in the heart of Soweto. And people will sing and dance. There will be bread for all. And once and for all, our people will be left in peace... And people will go to their beds... These will be days of joy. Auntie Dudu will find chicken legs in her rubbish bin, and whole cabbages... And amadoda – our men – will be offered work at the Pass Office [of all places!] ... The young meat-seller will wear a nice new uniform and go to school ... [But then] the government will begin to take courage again ... The police and the army will assemble from all parts of the country ... and one night, police dogs will move in, as they have done before. There will be shouts at night and banging on the door...

Percy: (*banging on a box*) Hey! Open up, it's the police! Maak die deur oop! Polisie! [Open up the door! Police!]

Mbogeni: (*ducking down by the boxes as if hiding besides a bed*) ... There will be sounds of police vans and the crying of women and their babies.

Percy: (*turns over on the boxes as an old woman waking in bed, starts crying and calling out in Zulu*) We Jabulani, hayio-bo-hey-hey-we-Nononza, akenivule bo nanka amaphoyisa eseihlasele, we Thoko akenivule bo [Hey, Jabulani, hey no, hey-hey, Nononza, open the door can't you hear the police are here. They've come to attack us.

Mbogeni: ... They'll start surrounding our homes at night. And some of our friends will be caught by stray bullets. There will be road-blocks at every entrance to Soweto, and Regina Mundi Church will be full of tear-gas smoke! Then life will go on as before (*He throws his arms up in the air in disgust, and cries out*).²⁰⁵

On this rather disheartening note, ‘Act One’ of the play comes to an end, and ‘Act Two’, which takes place from Scene Eighteen onwards, commences with the introduction of two new characters with the rather derogative nicknames, Zuluboy and Bobbejaan (Afrikaans for Baboon), who are working at a place called the “Coronation Brick Factory”.²⁰⁶ Just as in the

²⁰⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 228.

²⁰⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 231-2.

²⁰⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 232.

first part of the play, the audience is immediately confronted with the brutal realities of apartheid, with Zuluboy and Bobbejaan clearly being exploited by their white boss. They are overworked, underpaid, and have absolutely no rights to speak of. While alone, however, we hear Zuluboy tell Bobbejaan that things will soon be different, for “Morena, the Saviour, is coming”.²⁰⁷ Supposedly, Zuluboy was part of the crowd that met with Morena in Albert Street, and amidst the “singing and crying and laughing and dancing”, he called out, “Morena, come to Coronation Brickyard” – something he believed Morena would indeed do, so as to come multiply their bricks, just as he had done “ten-thousand years ago” when he turned “one loaf of brown bread” into a “whole bakery”, and one fish into “fried fish ... for everybody”.²⁰⁸ At first, Bobbejaan, like some of the characters in ‘Act One’ of the play, is not really interested in what Zuluboy has to say, and laughs at this idea that Morena, the Son of God, will be coming to Coronation Bricks, of all places. “Hey! Your talking nonsense”, Bobbejaan yells, “Morena? Here at Coronation Bricks? Start the machine. I’ll tell Baas Kom [the name they haven given to their white superior]”.²⁰⁹

While they are still talking, the actor who is playing Bobbejaan suddenly puts the pink squash ball on his nose, thereby becoming Baas Kom, and starts yelling at Zuluboy. He tells him that he overheard him speak about Morena’s supposed return, but that this rumour is clearly a lie, and that the Prime Minister of the country has announced that any black person “waiting for Morena” should be fired on the spot.²¹⁰ They should thus immediately stop talking about Morena, and start working on a new order of “ten thousand bricks” that needs to be done before the end of the day. When Zuluboy respectfully says that this is “too much work for two people”, Baas Kom threatens to fire him and send them back to the homelands, where he can “starve on [his own] bloody farm”.²¹¹ As Baas Kom storms off the stage, leaving Zuluboy, clearly mortified, behind, Morena makes his appearance. As Zuluboy sees Morena, he falls “to his knees” in absolute elation and invites him to “sit down” next to him.²¹² As Morena sits down, Bobbejaan also enters, and Zuluboy immediately introduces him to Morena, saying “Shake hands with the Son of God! Shake hands, Bobbejaan!”²¹³

What follows is one of the most moving scenes in the whole play, as Zuluboy starts to tell Morena about the hardships of working at Coronation Bricks, where they have to make

²⁰⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 233.

²⁰⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 233.

²⁰⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 234.

²¹⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 234-5.

²¹¹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 239.

²¹² Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 240.

²¹³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 241.

thousands of bricks to build houses for other people, even though they themselves live in “tin” shacks like “sardine” fishes.²¹⁴ “The bricks go to make a big house, six rooms for two people ... a white man and his wife!”, Zuluboy says, and then adds: “Our fingers are breaking Morena ... Is nie goed kanjalo man [that’s not good like that, man]”.²¹⁵ Gradually, the conversation turns to lighter matters, as Zuluboy offers Morena a packet of salt and vinegar chips and enquires about the food and drinks they enjoy up in heaven. He, for example, wants to know if Morena has heard about this wonderful invention called Coco-Cola that humans drink here on earth.²¹⁶

While they are still talking and sharing a meal of chips and Coca-Cola, the actor playing Bobbejaan leaves the stage, and a few seconds later shows up again as Baas Kom, with the pink squash ball on his nose. He starts shouting at Zuluboy and asks him why he is not working. He also wants to know who this person is, who is sitting with him. When Zuluboy answers that it is, in fact, Morena, the “big man from heaven”, Baas Kom becomes even more furious, screams out a few profanities and accuses Morena of being a “communist”, “terrorist”, and “agitator”, who is making “trouble with his kaffirs”, before running home to call the police.²¹⁷ When his phone does not want to work, he calls Bobbejaan over, and asks him to go to the police station and report what is going on. If he does so, he tells Bobbejaan, he will give him a big raise when all of this is done. Like Judas in the Gospels, Bobbejaan agrees to betray his friend Zuluboy, as well as Morena, and runs off to the police station. Shortly hereafter, the police show up, and arrest Zuluboy and Morena on the spot. At first, Zuluboy pulls out a knobkerrie, a traditional African weapon, and attacks the policemen, but Morena, as in the Gospels, immediately stops him, saying that when “a man hits this cheek, you give them the other”, and “forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”.²¹⁸ As they drag the two of them off the stage, Zuluboy screams out: “Aikhona Morena! [No Morena!]. They know! They know!”²¹⁹

In the next scene, the audience learns that Zuluboy has escaped, but that Morena had been incarcerated and is being held on the 10th floor of the infamous detention centre, John Vorster Square. A policeman, who was part of “Operation Coronation”, tells his commanding officer how proud he is that they could capture this “communist troublemaker” posing as Jesus Christ,

²¹⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 241.

²¹⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 242.

²¹⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 242.

²¹⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 243.

²¹⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 245.

²¹⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 245.

especially given the presence of “one mad Zulu” who was armed with a “branch of a tree”, as he refers to the knobkerrie.²²⁰ However, while he is still speaking of his act of patriotic heroism, a sudden commotion erupts, as Morena supposedly starts to fly down from the 10th Floor of the prison towards freedom, in the arms of the angel Gabriel. This miracle of Morena escaping from John Vorster Square, with the help of an angel, puts the South African government in a tight spot, for this is clearly then not an imposter, but indeed Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself, whom they, as the ‘good and faithful’ white Christian community, also worship. They thus decide, as we learn from a conversation between two unidentified passengers on a train, to welcome and embrace their ‘honoured’ visitor from heaven, and to take him around the country so that he can see that South Africa is not such a bad place. They go on to visit the Kruger National Park, so that Morena “can lie down with a leopard and a lamb”, as well as the gold mines of the Witwatersrand, so that he can see how the “mine workers dance on a Sunday evening before the week starts”.²²¹ They even have a meal at the famous “Panorama Wimpy Bar” on the 50th Floor of the Carlton Centre, the tallest building on the African continent.²²² Lastly, they visit the luxurious casino resort in one of the homelands called “Sun City – the Las Vegas of South Africa”, where they try to win Morena over with the resort’s “good-time girls” and the “gambling machines”.²²³ Yet, all of this is in vain, we learn, for when asked what he thinks about this wonderful place, a deeply saddened Morena replies in the following scathing monologue:

Mbogeni [as one of the passengers in the train, reciting Morena’s words]: What place is this? This place where old people weep over the graves of children? How has it happened? How has it been permitted? I’ve passed people with burning mouths. People buying water in a rusty piece of tin, and besides them, I see people swimming in a lake that they have made from water that is here! I pass people who sit in dust and beg for work that will buy them bread. And on the other side, I see people who are living in gold and glass and whose rubbish bins are loaded with food for a thousand mouths. I see families torn apart, I see mothers without sons, children without fathers, and wives who have no men! Where are all the men? ... [C]ome to me, you who are divided from your families. Let us go to the cities where your husbands work. We will find houses where you can live together, and we will talk with those whom you fear! What country is this?

²²⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 246.

²²¹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 248.

²²² Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 248.

²²³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 248.

This speech is then too much for the apartheid authorities, and, as we learn from a television broadcast involving the Prime Minister of the time, PW Botha, Morena is taken into custody again and this time sent off to Robben Island, the same place where Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were being held. At this point, there is a short blackout, and as the lights go on again, we find, as part of Scene Twenty-two, one of the actors squatting “on a box, wrapped in a prisoner’s blanket”.²²⁴ This prisoner, we soon learn, is in the cell next to Morena, from where he tries to communicate with him. In what can be considered as another important monologue in the play, the prisoner utters the following words, which points out the discrepancies between the apartheid system and the liberating message of the Gospel:

Mbogeni [as prisoner]: (knocking) Cell number six! Morena! (knocking) Cell number six! Bad luck, hey! I hear they got you again. They tell me you’re in solitary confinement just like us. From Sun City to Robben Island! (Laughs ruefully) ... Morena, I sit here just like you with this one light bulb and only the Bible to read! Ja! And the New Testament tells me about you, and your family, and your thoughts. But why do they give us your book to read? Morena? They must be bladdy mad, Morena. This book only proves how mad they are. Listen (knocking). Cell number six! For people like us, to be locked here like this is just rubbish. So, what do you want here? What does your father know? What does he say? Come on Morena, man! (Knocking) Cell number six! You’ve got all the power! How can you let these things happen? ... Morena, I must tell you, now that I’ve gone into your book, I really like you, Morena. But ... [h]ow long must we wait for you to do something?²²⁵

In the next scene, we meet two of Robben Island’s prison guards, with army hats on their heads, and pink noses on their faces, complaining about “how everything has been upside down” since they brought Morena here.²²⁶ All the international news outlets, which are run, they remark, by a bunch of “bladdy communists”, want to do a story about South Africa’s imprisonment of the Son of God, leading to one embarrassing interview after another. “I wish they would have kept him in John Vorster Square or Pretoria Central”, one of the guards says, to which the other quickly replies: “Come on... You know what happened at John Vorster Square. Gabriel got him out of there in ten seconds flat! Only Robben Island has got the right kind of AA missiles”.²²⁷ He goes on to explain that the term AA missiles refers to “Anti-Angel missiles”, missiles that will shoot down any angel, even the great Gabriel himself.²²⁸ He then proudly

²²⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 250.

²²⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 251.

²²⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

²²⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

²²⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

proclaims, “He’ll never get away from Robben Island!”²²⁹ However, as he utters these last words, his fellow prison guard suddenly points into the distance and screams out in absolute horror. For, as the audience soon learns, while “birds are flying” and “swimmers are swimming”, and the “waves are waving”, as on any other day in this “beautiful” setting, Morena is calmly crossing the bay, on foot, from Robben Island to Cape Town.²³⁰ He can, after all, walk on water, which is something that the South African government clearly forgot.

For a moment or two, we hear how onlookers express awe and wonder about what is taking place, with someone even calling it the “the miracle of the decade”;²³¹ but then, all hell breaks loose, as a military helicopter is instructed to “blow him up” by dropping a gigantic bomb on his head, while a torpedo is also fired off from the shore.²³² According to the stage directions, the two actors depict what happens next, in the following way: “*They watch. The bombs fall. A moment of silence and then a terrible explosion. They separate, come together detonating each other. Light reduces to a stark overhead shaft*”.²³³ As this happens, the two actors scream out, “Momeeeee! Anti-i-i-i-eee! He-e-e-e-l-l-p!”²³⁴, after which the whole theatre goes dark.²³⁴

In Scene Twenty-five, the penultimate scene of the play, the audience learns, by means of a television news report, that the bomb and torpedo had indeed succeeded in killing Morena, and that the explosion had also “completely destroyed Cape Town and its famous Table Mountain”, which, according to the news anchor, points to the fact that nuclear weapons were used – a comment that is a clear jab at South Africa’s controversial nuclear program, which was still alive and active in the 1980’s.²³⁵ Morena is thus dead, but as is the case in the Gospels, this is not the end of the drama. The final scene, Scene Twenty-six, takes place in a graveyard, where we find Zuluboy, from earlier in the play, now working as a gardener and grave digger, while hiding from the police. As he walks across the stage, weeding the flowerbeds in the graveyard, he suddenly stumbles across a figure who is seemingly resting on one of the graves. He immediately starts scolding him, saying: “Hey! Hey! Hey! This is not a park bench. It’s a tombstone. This is a cemetery, it’s not Joubert Park”.²³⁶ The figure, clearly amused, apologises, and then goes on to ask Zuluboy if he perhaps knows where he can find the gravestone of a man called Lazarus, for he has something that he needs to do. At first, Zuluboy is a bit confused

²²⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

²³⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

²³¹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 252.

²³² Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 253-4.

²³³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 254.

²³⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 254.

²³⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 254-5.

²³⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 255.

about what is going on, but after looking into the eyes of the person standing in front of him, he realizes that it is Morena. He immediately asks how this is possible, since they killed the Morena he once knew. This is, in fact, “his tombstone”, he remarks, to which Morena then replies, with a smile on his face: “Oh no Baba. Have you forgotten, I will always come back after three days, bombs or no bombs”.²³⁷ Absolutely elated, Zuluboy asks Morena what will happen next, and Morena says that he would, indeed, also like to raise others from the dead, just as he himself had been raised. Zuluboy consequently asks him if he could perhaps start out by raising the struggle heroes, who had died while fighting against apartheid. And as the music starts to play, and Zuluboy and Morena start to dance together, the following transpires:

Mbogeni [as Zuluboy]: (*[pointing] to a corner of the audience*) Morena! Here’s ... Albert Luthuli – the Father of our Nation! Raise him Morena!

Percy [as Morena]: Woza Albert! [Rise up Albert!]

Mbogeni: (*falls over, stunned and then ecstatic*)

Both: (*singing*) Yamemeza inkosi yethu / Yathi ma thambo hlanganani / Oyawa vusa amaqhawe amnyama / Wathi kuwo [Our Lord is calling / He’s calling for the bones of the dead to join together / He’s raising up the black heroes / He calls to them] ...

Mbogeni: Morena! Robert Sobukwe! He taught us Black Power! Raise him!

Percy: Woza Robert!

Mbogeni: (*ecstatic*) Hau Manaliso! Manaliso! (*they dance on*).

Both: (*singing*) Yamemeza inkosi yethu / Yathi ma thambo hlanganani / Oyawa vusa amaqhawe amnyama / Wathi kuwo [Our Lord is calling / He’s calling for the bones of the dead to join together / He’s raising up the black heroes / He calls to them] ...

Mbogeni: Lilian Ngoyi! She taught our mothers about freedom. Raise her!

Percy: Woza Lilian!

Mbogeni: (*spins with joy*) Hey Lilian, uya mbona uMorena? Uvuswe uMorena. [Hey Lilian, do you see Morena? It’s Morena who raised you]. (*they dance on*).

Both: (*singing*) Yamemeza inkosi yethu / Yathi ma thambo hlanganani / Oyawa vusa amaqhawe amnyama / Wathi kuwo [Our Lord is calling / He’s calling for the bones of the dead to join together / He’s raising up the black heroes / He calls to them] ...

Mbogeni: Steve Biko! The hero of our children! Please Morena – please raise him.

Percy: Woza Steve!

Mbogeni: Steve! Steve! Uyangikhumbula ngikulaIndela e King William’s Town? [Steve, do you remember me, following you in King William’s Town?].

²³⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 256.

Both: (*dancing*) Woza Bram Fischer! ... Woza Ruth First! ... Woza Griffith Mxenge ...
Woza Hector Peterson ... (*The stop, arms raised triumphantly*). WOZA ALBERT!²³⁸

As these last words, “*Woza Albert!*”, are joyously called out with both actor’s arms “raised triumphantly”, a blackout occurs and the curtain drops, bringing the play to an end.

5.7. *Woza Albert!* and Balthasar’s Theological Dramatic Theory

If there is one central theme that comes to the fore in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, it is that the Good News of Jesus Christ of Nazareth involves an event, an act, something that is done in, and for, the world. From the very first pages of the first volume of *Theo-drama*, Balthasar announces that the beautiful form of Christ, as discussed in his aesthetics, is not a static image, icon, or artwork that is “crystallised in immobile perfection”,²³⁹ but a dynamic and embodied performance on the world stage. Balthasar holds that, as we perceive the *forma Christi*, in all its radiant glory and splendour, we discover, perhaps to our surprise, a drama or stage play, as Chesterton once remarked.²⁴⁰ He believes that this drama reveals, for all to see, who the triune God is, and brings about liberation and redemption for a world drenched in sin and death, with the result that it can, and should, be seen as the drama of all dramas, as the “summit of both the *questions posed by* and the *response to* all human dramatic explorations”, as Ben Quash writes.²⁴¹ It is important to emphasise that, for Balthasar, this performance of Christ does not impede or bring an end to other dramatic activity on either the world stage or the theatre stage, but that it, in fact, opens up a myriad of new dramatic possibilities as it asks to be re-enacted in different forms and contexts, and imbues other dramatic performances with new meaning.

This conviction that the Christ-drama brings forth a myriad of new dramatic possibilities, is initially expressed in one of the opening sections of the first volume of *Theo-drama*, wherein Balthasar responds to Hegel’s argument that the Christ-event both causes and signals the end of the age of art, in general, and the age of the theatre, in particular. In his reply to Hegel – a reply which, by his own account, can be seen as a résumé of his theological dramatic theory as a whole – Balthasar contends that the relationship between the ‘absolute drama’ of Christ and other dramas in world history should not be construed in a univocal sense, marked by absolute identity, where the Christ-drama subsumes other dramatic expressions, nor, for that matter, in

²³⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 257-9.

²³⁹ Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 49; Murphy, *Form of Beauty*, 146.

²⁴⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 190; Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 281-2.

²⁴¹ Quash, *Hans Urs Balthasar’s ‘Theatre of the World’*, 28.

an equivocal sense, marked by absolute difference, where the Christ-drama bares no relation to, and is therefore irrelevant for, that which happens on both the world stage and the theatre stage. In Balthasar's view, the relationship should rather be understood in an analogical sense, where there is a participatory similarity-amidst-dissimilarity, or continuity-amidst-discontinuity, between Christ's dramatic actions in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, and humanity's dramatic actions before and after this all-determining event. Seen in this manner, Christ's unique performance can instigate, ground, in-form, and direct new dramatic expressions that are particular to their own contexts, yet still point back towards, share in, and serve as further analogical articulations of the drama of the Word-made-flesh. Balthasar argues that this is exactly what had happened throughout history. Even though theologians, church leaders, and church councils regularly condemned and opposed the reality of the theatre and the profession of the actor, the Christ-drama nevertheless came to be re-performed – in the day-to-day lives of ordinary individuals who are following in Jesus' footsteps, yes, but also, surprisingly, on theatre stages, both inside and outside the Church, in almost every corner of the earth. Whenever and wherever Christ's dramatic actions on the world stage were recalled, through the reading of the Gospels or the celebration of the Eucharist, new dramatic representations of this drama of all dramas came into existence. Examples include the early passion plays, the medieval mystery and morality plays, the *auto sacramentales* of Calderón and Lope de Vega, the dramas of Shakespeare, and, closer to our own time, the works of writers like Paul Claudel and Reinhold Schneider.

It could, therefore, be argued that Hans Urs von Balthasar would probably not have been too surprised to hear that, after a long history of in-forming and being incorporated into dramatic performances on the African continent in the most diverse ways, whether in early tribal plays, or in township dramas, or in the protest works of someone like Athol Fugard, the Christ-drama also instigated and provided the building blocks for a Market Theatre production that came into existence during the heyday of the apartheid years. The fact that theatre-makers such as Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, and later also Barney Simon, not only recognised the dramatic potential of the Gospel narratives, but somehow felt compelled, and perhaps even called, to re-stage the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the context of South Africa in the early 1980's, would most likely have seemed quite natural and fitting to Balthasar. For, according to him, this is precisely what the Christ-drama *does*. It is a drama that gives rise to further dramas; a performance that brings forth new performances, not only on the world stage, but also on the theatre stage. In view of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, the play *Woza Albert!* is not an exception, or an anomaly, as some theatre-goers and critics may have thought when the play

was first staged, but rather a revealing example of how the Christ-drama, as the drama of all dramas, can induce, and be analogically transposed into, new dramatic forms, as part of what Balthasar describes as the “inexhaustible multiplication” of Christ’s “once-and-for-all” performance throughout history.²⁴²

While Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory principally focuses on this drama of the Christ-event and can be described as being thoroughly Christocentric (and, one could even say, Christomorphic, as it looks at how the form/performance of Christ in-forms and trans-forms all other forms/performances in history),²⁴³ the first two volumes of *Theo-drama* include reflections on the dramas that we, as human beings, partake in on earth, whether on the world stage and/or on the theatre stage. As seen in Chapter Three, Balthasar is particularly interested in the relationship between the drama of human existence and the dramas being performed in the theatre, a relationship that can, once more, be construed in an analogical manner. This preliminary investigation into ‘worldly dramas’, which serves as the foundation for his subsequent reflection on the drama of the Christ-event, from especially the third volume of *Theo-drama* onwards, already in itself offers some helpful insights that can be used to reflect on, and engage with, Mtwa, Ngema, and Simon’s production and the socio-political context in which it came into being.

Balthasar claims, for example, that one of the great benefits of the stage is that it gives us words and imagery with which to describe something of our personal and communal lives on earth. The theatre, he remarks, is the supreme ‘symbol of the world’. This, indeed, seems to be the case with a production such as *Woza Albert!*. By presenting the realities of apartheid on stage, *Woza Albert!* prompts audience members to see and understand what is busy transpiring outside of the theatre complex as a real-life drama, or tragedy, that is constituted by, and takes on a particular form as a result of, the actions (or inactions) of free human beings, who are all actors on the South African stage. It is interesting to note that during the latter part of the 20th century, people often spoke of the “drama of apartheid”, or the “drama of the struggle against apartheid”.²⁴⁴ The testimonies that were delivered during the South African Truth and

²⁴² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume II*, 270.

²⁴³ See Lee Barrett, ‘Von Balthasar and Protestant Aesthetics: A Mutually Corrective Conversation,’ in *Theological Aesthetics after Von Balthasar*, 105; Christopher W. Steck, *The Ethical Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001). Cf. also Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 137, where he also speaks of his own theology as being “Christomorphic”.

²⁴⁴ See, for example, Anne Fuchs, ‘Playing out the Drama of Apartheid,’ *Third World Book Review* 2, no. 2-3 (1986): 85-91. Dikgang Moseneke, ‘A Journey from the Heart of Apartheid Darkness Towards a Just Society: Salient Features of the Budding Constitutionalism and Jurisprudence of South Africa,’ *Thirty-Second Annual Senator Philip A. Hart Memorial Lecture*, Georgetown University Law Center, April 4, 2012, 11. Crow, ‘A Truly Living Moment’, 23.

Reconciliation Committee meetings were also regularly framed in dramatic terms.²⁴⁵ This clearly shows how the theatre, and a work such as *Woza Albert!* (which dramatised the realities of apartheid), provided the language and imagery for individuals and communities to help articulate and describe their lived experiences under the apartheid regime. By depicting the realities of apartheid South Africa as a stage play, audience members were also then reminded of the fact that they, too, are part of the performance taking place outside the theatre complex and that there is no escape from this drama. Each person sitting in the auditorium, Barney Simon remarked, “was born into”, and thus formed part of, the “insane” drama taking place in South Africa, something which a play like *Woza Albert!* highlights in a very vivid manner.²⁴⁶ While the Market Theatre did not have the words ‘All the world acts a play’ inscribed on its doors, as was the case with Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, part of its mission certainly was to help audience members realise that ‘all South Africa’ is engaged in a drama, and that every audience member’s actions on the South African stage mattered.²⁴⁷

For Balthasar, the theatre does, however, not only have value because it gives us language, with which to describe our personal and communal lives on earth, but because it also serves as a lens through which this drama of existence can be viewed and examined. According to him, as mentioned in the third chapter, one of the most effective ways to study and attempt to make sense of the drama playing on the world stage is through the action that transpires on the theatre stage. The theatre, he writes, illuminates our existence; it casts a spotlight on the intricacies of everyday life on earth. The image that Balthasar continuously returns to in this regard is that of the mirror. For him, a central task of the theatre is to hold a mirror up to society, so that audience members, as actors on the world stage, can see and come to new insights about the drama of everyday life, as well as their own role therein. In Balthasar’s opinion, all artistic creations, including works of theatre, should reflect, and point back towards the real world, and cannot merely exist for ‘art’s sake’. This is a view that has also been held by generations of African theatre-makers, from Essau Mthethwa, to Herbert Dhlomo, to Gibson Kente, to Athol Fugard. Similarly, it stood central to the thought and work of Barney Simon, Percy Mtwa, and Mbongeni Ngema. Simon’s initial theatre company, as mentioned, was called *Mirror One*, since he believed that the theatre stage should function as “a reflecting surface” in which we

²⁴⁵ See, for example, Catherine M. Cole, *Performing South Africa’s Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), and Yvette Hutchington, *South African Performance and Archives in Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), especially 22-53 (the chapter ‘Dramatising the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’). The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also been the focus of actual theatre productions. See, for example, William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company’s *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998).

²⁴⁶ Quoted in Abrahams and Fox, eds., *The World in an Orange*, 248.

²⁴⁷ See Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 83, for the full text of this speech.

“find an image” of society at large and of ourselves.²⁴⁸ And the very first thing Mtwā and Ngema did when they started working on their envisioned play, besides studying the biblical text, was to carefully examine the lives of ordinary people in Soweto and other parts of Johannesburg, so that they could accurately re-present the lived experiences of black South Africans on stage. When Barney Simon agreed to become part of the production, he also strongly encouraged them to continue spending as much time as possible in everyday situations, so that they, through the words and actions that they perform, could tell the truth about what was really happening in the country.

When viewing *Woza Albert!* through the lens of Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, one is indeed struck by the powerful manner in which the “aesthetic illusion” of the stage continuously re-presents and offers a revelation about “concrete reality”, exactly as Balthasar suggests can and should be the case.²⁴⁹ As has previously been shown, the first half of *Woza Albert!* is almost completely devoted to presenting audience members with snapshots of the horrendous realities that most South African were subjected to under the apartheid system. The disturbing scenes in the jazz club, or in the police cells, or at the rubbish dump, or in the township market, or at the open-air barber stall, while fictional, reveal, and point back towards, similar scenarios that were playing out on a day-to-day basis outside the four walls of the theatre complex, as seen and experienced by Mtwā and Ngema. The same could be said about the second half of *Woza Albert!*, which is set, for the most part, at the Coronation Brick Factory. While the scenes in which the two black workers are exploited and abused by their white employer, ‘Baas Kom’, were conceived for the purpose of the play, they evidently mirror and shine “a ray of light on” the actual state of affairs at many, if not most, workplaces in South Africa.²⁵⁰ Attending a performance of *Woza Albert!* was thus not a way to escape from the real world, but a way to become even more immersed in it, as one was confronted with a brutally honest image of how things truly were in South Africa. This forced many white South Africans, indoctrinated by the propaganda machine of the apartheid government, to let go of their often wilful ignorance about the socio-political realities in the country, while showing black South Africans, who had been stripped of their voices for centuries, that their plight was not being ignored. As Adrienne Sichel wrote in an article in *The Star* newspaper in 1984: *Woza Albert!*

²⁴⁸ Abrahams and Fox, eds., *The World in an Orange*, 16.

²⁴⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 267.

²⁵⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 10, 18.

“reflects South Africa as people in the streets. It [gives] an identity to what surrounds us. To the shadows. I think it uplifts people in despair and informs people who are ignorant”.²⁵¹

According to Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, this analogical mediation between the drama on stage and the drama of real life, as described above, principally takes place in and through the embodied performance of the actor. While Balthasar undoubtedly believes that both the playwright and the director/producer have an essential role to play in the creation and performance of any dramatic work, he is nonetheless convinced that everything in the theatre ultimately hinges on what the actor does on stage. The playwright’s script, he writes, is just “*potentially* drama” and solely “becomes *actual* through the actor”.²⁵² For him, the performance should, in fact, be seen as the real “work of art”; that which “makes things present” and establishes the analogical relationship between the theatre stage and the world stage.²⁵³ The actor, he writes, ‘is’ the bond “between the ‘reality of life’ and the ‘aesthetic reality’ of the stage; his or her ‘disguise’ (*Ver-stellung* in German) brings forth the ‘presentation’ (*Vor-stellung* in German) of reality”.²⁵⁴ This is, then, why Balthasar argues that the training, or formation, of the actor is so important, and someone like Stanislavski’s acting exercises, which engage every part of the actor’s existence, both physical and spiritual, so as to make him or her *disponible* to his or her role, should be regarded as indispensable. When investigating the history of drama and the theatre in South Africa, as has been briefly done in this chapter, it can be seen that, also here, the emphasis has largely been on the actor and his or her performance. Despite the fact that, from at least the 19th century onwards, original theatre scripts were being composed, also in African languages, theatre on the African continent, as Mbogeni Ngema writes, has, for the most part, focused on the performative side of things; on the “action and emotion” that fill theatre stages by means of the roles that are enacted in front of, and sometimes even in collaboration with, the audience.²⁵⁵

This emphasis on the actual performance of the actor, which features so strongly in Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory and has always been part of the African theatre tradition, can also be recognised in the play *Woza Albert!*. *Woza Albert!* initially came into existence through an organic workshop process involving Mtwana, Ngema, and later also Simon, in which the different scenes were first improvised, before they were written down. With *Woza Albert!*, the action thus preceded the text, and when viewing the production and also reading the script, it becomes

²⁵¹ Quoted in Abrahams and Fox, eds., *The World in an Orange*, 184.

²⁵² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 281

²⁵³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 281-2.

²⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 261.

²⁵⁵ Mbogeni, ‘Working with Barney,’ 190. See also Walder, ‘Introduction,’ x.

evident that, while the dialogue is well-written and certainly has a technical mastery to it, as Barney Simon himself stressed,²⁵⁶ everything is reliant on the physical performance of the two actors, who, without any theatre trappings, transform themselves into all the different characters in the work – from, for example, the jazz musicians and their instruments, to the policemen, to the prisoners and prison guards, to Auntie Dudu, to Bobbejaan and Zuluboy, to Baas Kom, to PW Botha, and, in the very last scene, to Morena. It is for this reason that Mtwana and Ngema, in preparation for the play, studied the acting techniques of Stanislavski and those who followed in his footsteps, including Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski, which allowed them to create “vivid, multi-peopled images”, in and through which audience members could recognise themselves and the world in which they live, as if they were looking into a mirror.²⁵⁷ *Woza Albert!* is indeed then a revealing example of how the embodied performances of skilful and well-trained actors can create an analogical connection between the theatre stage and the world stage, so that audience members can see and gain insight into the drama of life, and their own role therein, as Balthasar suggests in his theological dramatic theory.

For Balthasar, one of the main reasons why the drama of existence is then mirrored on the theatre stage, in and through the embodied performance of the actor, is so that the audience members can be confronted with, reflect on, and form judgements about, the ethical state of the world in which they live. According to him, the theatre, by providing an image of what ‘is’ and sometimes of what ‘could be’, as a possible ‘solution’ to the present reality, brings to the surface and illuminates the ethical dimensions of the play of life. In seeing a theatre production, he writes, the audience is continually encouraged to decide “whether, in this particular course of events, the right thing has been done or not”, with the result that the stage ultimately becomes “a tribunal”, a place that asks for deliberation and decision-making.²⁵⁸ And since the theatre reminds every spectator that they, too, form part of this drama that is being mirrored on the stage, it often happens, Balthasar writes, that the onlooker’s personal “personal sense of ought” is challenged.²⁵⁹ The theatre, he argues, can very well focus the audience members’ attention on their own ethical duties and responsibilities in the world, and can even bring about a change of heart and, importantly, conduct. It is for this reason that he declares that stage drama is concerned with “change”, whether it is the “change of man himself or of his environment”.²⁶⁰ This ability of stage drama to shed light on the ethical dimensions of the drama of existence,

²⁵⁶ See Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 120.

²⁵⁷ See Schwartz, *The Best of the Company*, 102.

²⁵⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 452, 461.

²⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 266.

²⁶⁰ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 413.

so that audience members can critically reflect on, and form judgements about, the *status quo*, and even commit towards changing the way things currently are, is obviously all-important for anti-apartheid protest theatre. As Athol Fugard's character, Lavrenti, remarks in the play *The Coat*: "You want to use the theatre? For what? ... some of us say to understand the world we live in, but we also boast a few idealists who think that theatre might have something to do with changing it".²⁶¹ This was certainly true of Athol Fugard, and John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, and Norman Ntshinga, and Welcome Duru, and Maishe Maponya, as well as of Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon. They certainly did not produce and perform theatre productions merely to better understand the realities of apartheid South Africa, but to help bring about real transformation in people's lives, as well as and in the country at large.

When viewing *Woza Albert!*, one is continually challenged by the ethically compromised realities of apartheid South Africa. In seeing a policeman violently interrogate and apprehend an innocent jazz musician because his passbook was not in order, or inmates, who were most likely wrongfully imprisoned, harassed and humiliated by prison guards, or an old woman searching for something to eat in a rubbish dump, or a young boy unable to receive an education because he has to work, or labourers from the homelands demeaning themselves to try and win the favour of potential employers in the city, or two factory workers being physically exploited, screamed at, and insulted by their boss, one cannot but ask oneself if what is happening on the theatre stage and, in effect, outside the auditorium, can in any way be justified or tolerated. All of these situations, which, while being fictional, reflect the daily realities of life in South Africa, appeal to the humanity of the audience, and ask the onlooker to make a definite judgment about what is transpiring on the stage, a judgement concerning what is right and wrong, and good and evil, in the world. It also asks of audience members to rethink their own roles in the drama of South Africa, which, as Balthasar argues, can lead to a new sense of 'calling' to live and act differently, and to take part in what he calls the 'struggle for the good'.

When recognising, through a production such as *Woza Albert!*, that things are not as they should be, and that change on the world stage, and in one's own life, is necessary, it can subsequently be asked: What could and should be done to help bring about this needed transformation? And, is real change, in fact, possible? Can human beings, even if they wanted to, really live and act differently, given our tendency to seek only our own good, instead of working for the good of all? It is obviously one thing to acknowledge that what is happening on the theatre stage, and thus on the world stage, is wrong, and quite another thing to step out

²⁶¹ Fugard, 'The Coat', in *Township Plays*, ed. Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123.

of the auditorium, and to enact the change that is required, especially if one's own safety, wellbeing, and comfort may be jeopardised in the process. These are questions that Balthasar grapples with in his theological dramatic theory and they are also highly relevant to a protest play, such as *Woza Albert!*, where audience members, especially in the opening scenes, are challenged to oppose and speak out against these realities in their own lives. As was seen in Chapter Three, it is amidst questions such as these that Balthasar goes on to introduce the protagonist of his theological dramatic theory – a character whose words and actions on the world stage are solely focused on bringing about the good in and for others; whose role/mission in life is one and the same thing as his inner-most being; someone who, in and through his performance in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, shows the world how to live, and, in doing so, brings about liberation and redemption, especially for the poor and oppressed. This character is indeed Jesus Christ of Nazareth, or Morena, as he is called in Sesotho; a character who, before long, also makes his appearance in *Woza Albert!*.

As was mentioned in Chapter Four, Balthasar's account of the redemptive drama of the Christ-event in the last three volumes of *Theo-drama* can not only be seen as the highpoint of his theological dramatic theory, but also, in the words of Edward Oakes, as the "culmination and capstone" of his entire life's work, where "all the themes of his theology converge and are fused into a synthesis of remarkable creativity and originality".²⁶² In an attempt to develop an extensive dramatic Christology by making use of the "poetic category of 'mission'",²⁶³ he sets out to reflect on, and give an exposition of, what he regards as the three distinct-yet-united 'syllables' of all-determining performance of the Word-made-flesh on the world stage, namely, his public life and ministry, his death, and his resurrection in glory. To do so, he, as literary scholar, continually draws on the dramatic witness of the Gospel accounts, which he describes as the "libretto of God's saving drama",²⁶⁴ the very same Gospel accounts that Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Ngema studied while working on ideas for their envisioned play, and which Barney Simon read for the very first time during that fateful two days when he was sick in bed. As was the case with the preliminary investigations into the 'worldly dramas' that we, as human beings, partake in, Balthasar's dramatic Christology, wherein Jesus' life is seen and presented as the definitive stage play in history, is also highly relevant for, and can be used as a lens through which to view, the anti-apartheid protest work, *Woza Albert!*, as will be seen in what follows.

²⁶² Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 230-1.

²⁶³ Riches, 'Afterword,' 192.

²⁶⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22.

In his treatment of the first ‘syllable’ of Christ’s performance on the world stage, that is, his life and ministry, Balthasar focuses on how Jesus’ words and deeds herald the coming kingdom of God. This kingdom, he argues, stands against, challenges, and subverts all earthly kingdoms and empires, by giving preference to, uplifting, and affirming the God-given dignity of those who are without any worldly esteem and power, and are being treated unjustly by the rich and mighty. The kingdom that Christ inaugurates, Balthasar holds, is not a kingdom of power, but of powerlessness; not a kingdom of pride, but of humility; not a kingdom of self-glorification, but of self-surrender and kenosis; not a kingdom of violence, coercion, and oppression, but of peace, justice and love. It is a kingdom where those who are first are last, and those who are last are first. According to Balthasar, the way in which Christ inaugurates and, importantly, embodies and performs this new kingdom on the world stage, is by recognising, drawing close to, and standing “with his whole being behind the least”,²⁶⁵ whether it is the poor, the hungry, or the persecuted. Instead of siding with the “so-called important”, Christ was born in a manger in Bethlehem (a city out of which no good could supposedly come), grew up in the house of a poor, common carpenter, and from the beginning of his public ministry, entered into solidarity with the lowliest of this world, with those who “suffer, hunger, and thirst”, and are abused and neglected by the ‘powers that be’.²⁶⁶ In doing so, Balthasar argues, Christ takes their burden of hunger, tears, and oppression “superabundantly” upon himself, and asserts, once and for all, that their lives matter to, and are safeguarded by, God.²⁶⁷ For Balthasar, the performance of Christ’s life and ministry is thus marked by a kenotic descent into the “darkness of this world”, where he encounters, identifies with, blesses, and, already in the here and now, “lifts the poor from the dust and mire”.²⁶⁸ Christ indeed plumbs “all the depths of the human lot”, so as to become one with, and bring about “rescue and hope” for, the “little ones” on the world stage.²⁶⁹

Given the way in which Morena is portrayed in *Woza Albert!*, it is evident that, in studying the Gospel texts, Mtwana, Ngema, and Simon had also recognised, and were drawn to, this aspect of Jesus’ life and ministry. Simon himself affirmed that, early in the conceptualisation process of the play, they agreed, after a “strong debate”, that Morena cannot be depicted as some or other exalted saviour-figure who is far removed from the everyday realities of South Africa, but should be shown as an ordinary human being of flesh and blood, who lives, eats, and, very importantly, “dances with” the poorest in the South African society.²⁷⁰ What clearly made the

²⁶⁵ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 446.

²⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447; *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277-78.

²⁶⁷ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 446.

²⁶⁸ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 13.

²⁶⁹ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 14-5; *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

²⁷⁰ See Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 119.

Christ-drama, as recalled in the Gospels, so appealing and relevant to Mtwa, Ngema, and Simon was the fact that this Jesus-character, as Balthasar emphasises, did not side with those responsible for upholding the oppressive kingdoms of this world, but deliberately identified with, and could be found among, the poor and the marginalized, those described by Balthasar as the “so-called unimportant”.²⁷¹ When viewing the play *Woza Albert!* through the lens of Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, one is then continually struck by the social locality of Morena; by where, and with whom, Morena is to be found. Even before making his physical appearance in the play, we see how he is latently part of the various scenes, mirroring the horrific realities of apartheid, as different characters utter his name amidst, and in response to, the situations they find themselves in. In these scenes, there is, in the words of Graham Ward, a “speaking of Christ” taking place, which makes Morena present in, for example, the prison cell, and the rubbish dump, and the make-shift barber stall that are depicted on stage.²⁷² A particularly poignant moment is where one prisoner quietly sings that Morena walks with him, watches over him, and loves him, every moment of the day. These words speak of the way he experiences Christ’s consoling presence *in* this dreadful situation. For this inmate, Morena is not far away, but *with him* behind the prison bars. This nearness of Christ to those who are oppressed and being held captive by the ‘powers that be,’ becomes all the more evident when the character Morena makes his appearance in Scene Sixteen of the play.

It is interesting to note that the rumour being spread at the beginning of *Woza Albert!* says that Morena will arrive in a “jumbo jet from Jerusalem” at Jan Smuts International, South Africa’s largest and most important airport at the time.²⁷³ And in Scene Fifteen we indeed find a large crowd of (presumably white) South Africans waiting for him at the arrival terminal. However, in the end, Morena does not make his appearance at this “place of power and privilege”,²⁷⁴ but rather, unexpectedly, appears at the Pass Office in Albert Street, the “most terrible street in the whole of Johannesburg”.²⁷⁵ Here, Morena walks straight towards, and takes a stand with, the sorrow-stricken crowd who are trying to find work in the city. Moreover, he tells them to throw away their passbooks, and invites them to walk *with* him, not to one or other eminent Dutch Reformed Church building in the white suburbs, but to the Regina Mundi Church in the Soweto township. This prompts the crowd to start singing the following words, which offer valuable insight into what Morena’s presence and solidarity means, and *does*, for them: “We are no

²⁷¹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

²⁷² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 127.

²⁷³ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 226.

²⁷⁴ See Nicole Oke, Christo C. Sonn and Alison M Baker, eds., *Places of Privilege: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Identities, Change and Resistance* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018), especially 1-13 (the introductory chapter).

²⁷⁵ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 226.

longer pieces of paper, man, we are people / Let them know our faces as Morena knows our faces / With Morena we walk as one".²⁷⁶ In the light of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, it can thus be argued that, in seeing them, and walking with them, and becoming one with them, Morena brings about restoration and challenges and subverts the dehumanising effects of the apartheid system, as the value of the crowd outside the Pass Office, is no longer being determined by the colour of their skin, or by the inscriptions in their passbooks, or by the decrees of the racist government, but simply by the fact that they are human beings who are recognised, loved, and called by the Son of God himself.

Christ's bodily solidarity with the poor and oppressed, which, according to Balthasar, lifts up the 'little ones' and turns the kingdoms of this world on their heads, can also be recognised in the second half of the play, where Morena arrives at the Coronation Brickyard, the workplace of Bobbejaan and Zuluboy. It is worth noting that, when Zuluboy announces that Morena will be joining them shortly at this horrid site, Bobbejaan laughingly responds by saying that he is "talking nonsense".²⁷⁷ Why would the Son of God come "to Coronation Bricks?", he asks.²⁷⁸ However, before long, Morena indeed makes his appearance at the terrible factory, for, as Balthasar shows in his theological dramatic theory, this is exactly where the Christ of the Gospels would be found. And instead of, say, joining Baas Kom in his offices, he comes to sit with Zuluboy and Bobbejaan in the dirt, where he starts listening to their words of grief with the utmost compassion. As they talk, it can be seen how the conversation gradually becomes lighter and more joyful, and the scene ultimately culminates with them sharing a 'meal', consisting of potato crisps and cola, that was bought at the tuck-shop around the corner. Here, once more, it is thus seen how Morena identifies with, and gives himself to, those who are suffering in this life. While these two characters are treated in the worst possible way by their white superior, Morena sees them, listens to them, and eats with them, as fellow human beings. In doing so, he affirms their God-given dignity and brings about a defiant joy, especially in Zuluboy's life. According to Balthasar, Christ emptied himself and descended into the world as a slave, so that those who are enslaved in this life, may be called blessed,²⁷⁹ which is exactly what we see in this scene when it is viewed in the light of his theological dramatic theory.

In Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, the second 'syllable' of the Word-made-flesh's performance on the world stage is his suffering and death on the cross. According to Balthasar,

²⁷⁶ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 228.

²⁷⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 234.

²⁷⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 234.

²⁷⁹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447.

Christ's words and actions, which bring what is truly human into view, and challenge and relativize the authority of all earthly kingdoms, not only evoke awe and wonder, but also elicit the violent wrath of the power-hungry rulers of this world, who find the "provocation" of his life intolerable.²⁸⁰ Right "from the outset", Balthasar writes, the Christ-drama thus moves in a definite direction, namely, "towards passion and death".²⁸¹ This death, he holds, is both the consequence of Christ's life, as well as the end to which it has always been ordered, so that he can conquer the "deadliness of death from within".²⁸² For Balthasar, Christ is brought to the cross because he walked the earth, and he walked the earth, so that he could eventually be brought to the cross.²⁸³

When it comes to the question of what the death of Jesus actually means for, and what it does in, world history, it can be seen in Chapter Four that, while Balthasar emphasises the fact that the cross transcends and defies all human conceptions, and that we cannot ever hope to give a conclusive answer in this regard, he nonetheless points to two 'contemporary' soteriological approaches, which, to his mind, offer some helpful insight into the ineffable mystery of Calvary. The first of these approaches is that of 'representation', which speaks of how Christ, as the definitive scapegoat of the world, takes all human sin, and the darkness of death that it brings forth, upon himself, so that it can be brought into the light and life of the triune existence, where it is "overtaken and encompassed by" God's love and mercy.²⁸⁴ The second approach that Balthasar refers to, which is especially important for our discussion here, is that of 'solidarity', where it is professed that Christ did not only die 'for us', or 'in our place', but also 'with us'; that his death was not merely to "blot out the sins of humanity, but in order to experience [humanity's] suffering".²⁸⁵ Here, it could thus be said that, as Christ was tortured by the Roman soldiers, was hung on the cross, cried out in anguish, drew his last breath, and even descended into the realm of the dead, he 'was', and evermore 'is', with all those who suffer the same fate throughout history. This means, according to Balthasar, that the "most cruel tortures, prisons, concentration camps and whatever other horrors there may be", stand in "close proximity to the cross, to that utter night, interrupted only by the unfathomable cry of 'Why?'"²⁸⁶

²⁸⁰ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 447, 450, 454-5.

²⁸¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 247.

²⁸² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 492

²⁸³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 233; *Credo*, 48.

²⁸⁴ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 349-50.

²⁸⁵ Balthasar, *New Elucidations*, 15.

²⁸⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 501.

When viewed through the lens of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, it is seen that, from early on in *Woza Albert!*, there is also a deep awareness of the inevitability of Morena's death; of the fact that the drama of his life cannot but "end tragically", as Balthasar would say.²⁸⁷ Already before he makes his actual appearance in the play, the "fragile, toothless old man" in Scene Thirteen announces that, if Morena arrives in South Africa, he will certainly be killed by the apartheid government, just like Piet Retief was once killed by the Zulu king, Dingane, on what came to be known as 'Moordkoppie' (Murder Hill) in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, after Morena makes his appearance at the Pass Office in Albert Street and invites the crowd to walk with him to the Regina Mundi Church, the two characters in Scene Seventeen assert that the apartheid government will not tolerate his message, but will strike back and brutally murder him and his followers. "There will be road-block at every entrance in Soweto", they remark, and "Regina Mundi Church will be full of tear-gas".²⁸⁸ In the second half of the play, these ominous predictions actually become a reality, as Morena, while at the Coronation Brick Yard, is arrested by the security police, sent to prison, and ultimately killed, not on a cross, but through a supposed nuclear bomb that is dropped on his head.

Balthasar's assertion that Jesus' words and deeds, and especially his "solidarity with the poor (in every form)", provoke and enrage the rulers of this world, and ultimately lead to his demise,²⁸⁹ is seen in the way Baas Kom reacts to Morena's arrival at Coronation Bricks. When Baas Kom becomes aware of the fact that Morena is sitting with, conversing with, and eating with Bobbejaan and Zuluboy, he starts shouting out profanities, and accuses Morena of being a "communist", "terrorist", and "agitator", who is "making trouble with his kaffirs".²⁹⁰ He also bribes Bobbejaan to call the security police, so that they can arrest Morena, a deed which speaks of his absolute disgust with Morena's presence and actions. It is noteworthy that, upon receiving news about Morena's whereabouts, the authorities immediately send what could be regarded as a small army to apprehend him. Clearly, as Balthasar helps us to see, the only way in which the 'worldly powers' can respond to the drama of Morena's life and message is through violence. Morena is thus captured and locked up in John Vorster Square, a detention centre described by the anti-apartheid activist, Barbara Hogan, as "the iconic institution of the apartheid years, of the reign of the security police, of the reign of the mad forces".²⁹¹ That

²⁸⁷ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 435.

²⁸⁸ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 231-2.

²⁸⁹ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 138; Walatka, *Balthasar and the Option for the Poor*, 122.

²⁹⁰ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 243.

²⁹¹ See the entry under 'Detention without trial in John Vorster Square' in the *South African History Archives (SAHA)*, last accessed November 1, 2018, <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/detention-without-trial-in-john-vorster-square/gQ-1o9MM>.

Morena is held in this “horrible place”,²⁹² where so many of the government’s ‘enemies’ were imprisoned without trial, tortured, and even killed, as was the case with Ahmed Timol and at least 73 other political activists, is telling, and speaks of what Balthasar would describe as Morena’s solidarity with those who, at the time, were suffering the same fate, on a day-to-day basis.

As has been seen above, John Vorster Square could not, however, bring an end to Morena’s mission on earth and, before long, he flies down from the 10th floor in the arms of the angel Gabriel; a provocative image that clearly alludes to, and protests against, the fact that many anti-apartheid activists, including Timol himself, lost their lives by falling from this very 10th floor, in instances of murder that were masked as suicides.²⁹³ Following this ‘miracle’, the South African government briefly attempts to appease Morena, but after his scathing speech at Sun City in which he condemns the horrific realities of apartheid, and invites those who are poor and hungry, and those who have been separated from their families, as a result of the immoral laws of the country, to “come to” him,²⁹⁴ they again violently incarcerate him, and send him off to the most notorious of South Africa prisons, namely, Robben Island. In his essay, ‘The Beatitudes and Human Rights’, Balthasar states that “where true humanism is proclaimed and human rights are truly championed ... persecution starts”, which is exactly what happens in this scene.²⁹⁵ As Morena speaks up for the poor and the oppressed, he enrages the ‘powers that be’, who can only but respond through brutal force.

Following Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, Morena’s imprisonment on Robben Island again then speaks of his solidarity with those who are suffering under, and being persecuted by, the apartheid government.²⁹⁶ The fact that the prisoner in Scene Twenty-two mentions that Morena, as the Son of God, is being held in “solitary confinement just like” them, and that they, in turn, are being treated “just like” him,²⁹⁷ emphasises Morena’s closeness to the other Robben Island inmates. According to Balthasar, Christ “will not surrender” his abiding

²⁹² See Raymond Suttner’s book *Inside Apartheid’s Prison* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2017), especially 23-29 and 80-115.

²⁹³ Interestingly, on 12 October 2017 (almost 46 years after the incident), the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria ruled that Timol had not jumped from the 10th building of John Vorster Square (as the police reports indicated at the time), but had been “pushed to his death”, a verdict which officially confirmed what most South African’s always knew. See Siphso Mabena, ‘Court Rules Timol was Pushed to His Death,’ *TimesLive*, October 12, 2017, accessed 1 November 2018, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-12-court-rules-timol-was-pushed-to-his-death/>.

²⁹⁴ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 249.

²⁹⁵ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume V*, 451-452.

²⁹⁶ See Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277-78.

²⁹⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 250-1.

solidarity with humanity, and wants “to share” in every aspect of our “destiny”,²⁹⁸ and here we indeed find Morena sharing in the horrific fate of people like Robert Sobukwe, Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Govin Mbeki, Tokyo Sexwale, and numerous other anti-apartheid activists who were imprisoned on this former leper colony off the coast of Cape Town.²⁹⁹ If one visits Robben Island today, one can see a mural of Jesus Christ that was painted, by an unknown prisoner, on the inside of one of the prison walls – an ‘artwork’ that clearly aimed to say that Christ was also present in this prison cell, which would have been both a consoling thought for the prisoners themselves, and a major indictment against the apartheid authorities, who were busy implementing apartheid in the name of Christianity. This is, arguably, also the purpose of this scene in *Woza Albert!*, namely, to show that Morena is imprisoned with, and suffering alongside, those on Robben Island. As in the Gospels, however, Morena’s identity with the poor, oppressed, and imprisoned does not end with his incarceration. His solidarity stretches even further than this, and, as the audience learns, comes to include what Balthasar calls the “loneliness and forsakenness” of death itself.³⁰⁰ Following the prison scene, we find Morena walking on the ocean surface from Robben Island to Cape Town, which provokes the authorities to drop a deadly bomb on his head. In view of Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, this bomb, just like Jesus’ cross, can be regarded as the last attempt of the authorities to refute the “provocation” of Morena’s life.³⁰¹ The only way for the rich and mighty to counter the claim that Jesus makes, according to Balthasar’s thought, is “by killing off the Claimer”, which is almost certainly what happens in this in this rather terrifying scene.³⁰²

When it comes to the question of the meaning and function of Morena’s death, in the context of *Woza Albert!*, it is clear that the second soteriological approach mentioned by Balthasar, namely, that of ‘solidarity’, is of immediate relevance here. In view of the ideas offered by him in his theological dramatic theory, as well as in a work like *Mysterium Paschale*, it can be argued that Morena, just like Jesus in the Gospels, does not only live and suffer ‘with’ those who are poor, oppressed, and imprisoned, as seen throughout the play, but also dies ‘with’ them; that his solidarity reaches down to the “abyss of death”, as Balthasar would say.³⁰³ While Morena’s death is obviously unusual, as it exaggeratedly involves a nuclear bomb, a weapon fortunately never used by the South African government, it does not stand apart from, or over against, other killings that were carried out by authorities at the time. According to Ben Quash,

²⁹⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 348; *Heart of the World*, 133.

²⁹⁹ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, ‘Woza Albert!’, 251.

³⁰⁰ Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 277.

³⁰¹ Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272; and also, Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 188, 195, 231-2.

³⁰² See Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272.

³⁰³ See Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 161-8.

Balthasar understands Jesus' cries of dereliction at the moment of his death as being in "sympathetic relationship" with all similar cries throughout history, and the same is arguably true of Morena's cries in *Woza Albert!*, which in itself echoes Jesus' original cry on Calvary.³⁰⁴ These cries do "not diminish all the particular cries of particular human beings", but sound "in solidarity with them", also, then, in protest against the injustices of the day, as Quash emphasises.³⁰⁵ In accordance with Balthasar, it could therefore be said that, as the bomb drops and the torpedoes are fired off, Morena 'is' with every victim of the Sharpeville Massacre, or the Soweto Uprisings (which occurred only days before the Market Theatre opened its doors), or the assassinations that were carried out by Eugene de Kock's death squads, or the many other undisclosed killings that occurred on a daily basis, especially in the townships.³⁰⁶ Just as these people really suffered and died, Morena also really suffers and dies. The Word really "goes silent", as Balthasar would say, and what "it was about his life that made it revelation breaks off".³⁰⁷ This is emphasised by the immensity of the explosion, which completely obliterates the Cape Peninsula, including Table Mountain.

An interesting question that can then be raised is whether the other 'contemporary' soteriological approach that Balthasar refers to, namely that of 'representation', is also applicable to *Woza Albert!*? In an attempt to answer this question, it can be said that Balthasar himself would probably not have been overly comfortable with speaking of the death of Jesus without any reference to the vicarious nature thereof, even in the context of a play such as this one. While Balthasar emphasises Jesus' solidarity with humanity during his 'hour of darkness', he also strongly affirms the atoning quality of the cross, not least to counter any exclusively political interpretations of the Triduum. For Balthasar, it is of crucial importance to affirm that, while Christ suffers and dies 'with us', He also suffers and dies 'for us', or 'in our place', so as to take the reality of sin, suffering, and death upon himself, in order that these realities can be brought into, and be transformed by, the love and mercy of the triune God. Given the specific focus of Mtwa, Ngema, and Simon's play, it is unlikely that they would have had *such* an interpretation in mind, which is much more confessional in nature. Yet, for Balthasar, one of the most intriguing aspects of the Christ-drama, especially as performed on theatre stage throughout the ages, is that nobody can really control and restrict its message, reception, and impact. One could therefore wager to say that, at a time in South Africa's history when

³⁰⁴ Quash, 'Hans Urs Balthasar's "Theatre of the World"', 28-9.

³⁰⁵ Quash, 'Hans Urs Balthasar's "Theatre of the World"', 28-9.

³⁰⁶ See, for example, the investigative journalist Jacques Pauw's book, *Into the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2017).

³⁰⁷ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 50; *The Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 82, 90, 143, 234; *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV*, 401; and *Christian Meditation*, 39-47.

everyone, both perpetrators and victims in the apartheid system, were being confronted with the moral corruption and, in the words of Graham Ward, “lostness” of the human condition, on a daily basis,³⁰⁸ it might just have happened that some audience members would have seen and understood Morena’s death in the play *Woza Albert!* as a ‘representational’ act, in which he takes upon himself, and even bring amends for, the sins and iniquities of the people of this country, from the ‘Baas Koms’, to the ‘Bobbejaans’, to the ‘PW Bothas’, to the prison guards at John Vorster Square, to the migrant workers at ‘Dube Hostel’, to everyone sitting in the audience.

The third and final ‘syllable’ of Jesus’ dramatic existence in Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory is his resurrection, which Balthasar calls the “radiant side of the cross”.³⁰⁹ The drama of the Christ-event does not end with suffering and death, but, as the Gospels announce, with an empty grave. Just as Jesus’ life culminated in death, so his death culminates in life. According to Balthasar, the ‘great reversal’ of the resurrection is the “proof” that the “claims” Jesus made were true and that the actions he performed were, and evermore will be, God’s decisive will for humanity.³¹⁰ It is, as was said in Chapter Four, a divine “validation” of the “provocation” of Jesus’ life (and the lives of those who follow in his footsteps).³¹¹ The resurrection also then affirms, Balthasar argues, that suffering and death will not have the final say in the world, but that it will be overcome by, and be transformed into, life, not only definitively at the moment of Christ’s *parousia*, but also provisionally, in the here and now. In the resurrection, Balthasar writes, we see how the “universal, radical annihilator” is “annihilated”, how humanity’s chief enemy, namely death, is destroyed.³¹² Human finitude is veritably swallowed up in victory, so that we can proclaim, with Paul, “Where, O death, is your sting!”³¹³ This makes the resurrection, in his view, the “all-controlling turning point” in history; a “revolution” that becomes operative “wherever sin and death reign in the world”.³¹⁴ This is

³⁰⁸ See Ward, *How the Light Gets in*, 34, 147-55, 240-5, 317, etc. Ward writes, for example: “We cannot undertake a journey of faith ... without first recognising how profoundly we are lost. Recognizing that doesn’t take much research: open a newspaper, download the news, take a walk round the centre of any city in the early hours of a Sunday morning, watch TV dramas like the British series *Shameless* (2004-2013) or the American series *The Wire* (2002 – 2008) or films like Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist* (2009) or Uwa Boll’s *Darfur* (2009). No, we don’t need to look far to see how profoundly lost we are” (148-9). He also then quotes and discusses at length the following passage from Anselm’s *Prologium*: “O wretched lot of man, when he hath lost that for which he was made! O hard and terrible fate! Alas, what has he lost, and what has he found? What has departed and what remains? He has lost the blessedness for which he was made, and has found the misery for which he was not made. That has departed without which nothing is happy. And that remains which, in itself, is only miserable” (241).

³⁰⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 238.

³¹⁰ Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272; Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume VII*, 115-29, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 450.

³¹¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 362; Oakes, ‘Envoi,’ 272, and also, Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, 188, 195, 231-2.

³¹² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487; Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 44.

³¹³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 487; Balthasar, *Heart of the World*, 44.

³¹⁴ Balthasar, *Credo*, 53; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 363.

obviously not to say that the reality of sin, suffering, and death are now to be forgotten, ignored, or brushed aside. Christ's resurrection, Balthasar emphasises, does not speak of life without death, but rather of life emerging *out of* death, of life *overcoming* death. It is resurrection "not beyond death, but in death".³¹⁵ In the face of death and destruction, the resurrection brings forth a joyful, defiant, and even stubborn "hope against hope", which says that things can and will be different, even when it seems highly unlikely.³¹⁶

As can be seen above, the play *Woza Albert!* also does not end with Morena's death. While he is certainly killed by the government's violent attack, as the news anchor in the penultimate scene affirms, this is not the end of the play; the curtain is not brought down yet. In Scene Twenty-six, the final scene of the play, Zuluboy from Coronation Bricks now works as a grave digger and gardener at a graveyard near Joubert Park in Johannesburg. And it is here, while weeding the flowerbeds, that he once more encounters his friend Morena, or rather, as Balthasar would perhaps interpret this scene, where his friend Morena once more encounters him. When Zuluboy asks, in absolute shock and amazement, how this is possible, as they had "killed him!", Morena answers by uttering one of the play's most memorable lines: "Oh no Baba. Have you forgotten? I will always come back after three days, bombs or no bombs".³¹⁷ Just like Jesus in the Gospels, Morena has thus been raised from the dead. Although his gravestone is still there, as Zuluboy points out, he is no longer buried beneath it. In and through him, death, in Balthasar's words, has been turned into life, which causes Zuluboy to cry out in absolute elation, and which, night after night, led to similar reactions from the audience. Barney Simon also often spoke about how this scene, in particular, moved him, and caused every hair on his head to stand "on end".³¹⁸

Following Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, it can be said that Morena's resurrection in the last scene of *Woza Albert!* serves, firstly, as a "validation" of the "provocation" of his life and mission.³¹⁹ The fact that his grave is empty and he has been raised from the dead, vindicates his performance throughout the play, and signifies to the audience that his words and deeds can be considered good, true, and even expressive of the very will of God. This would have consoled and emboldened those who were also, like Morena, standing up against the injustices of apartheid, while sending a clear message of condemnation to the apartheid government and its supporters. Morena's resurrection can, secondly, also be seen as a hopeful assertion that the

³¹⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 399.

³¹⁶ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Love Alone*; 83, and also, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*, 96.

³¹⁷ Mtwa, Ngema and Simon, 'Woza Albert!', 256.

³¹⁸ Benson, *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon*, 119.

³¹⁹ Oakes, 'Envoi,' 272.

suffering and death, which mark life in South Africa, will not have the decisive say in the drama of this country, but will finally be overcome by, and transformed into, light, life, and love. This is emphasised by the way in which Morena, after his own resurrection, goes on to raise others who have also died, while taking part in the struggle against apartheid, including Robert Sobukwe, Lilian Ngoyi, Steve Biko, and, of course, Albert Luthuli. As is the case with Jesus' resurrection, as interpreted by Balthasar, this final scene of the play does not ignore, deny, or trivialise the suffering, death, and destruction people were still facing on a daily basis. It is important to note that the resurrections Morena performs, and the joyful singing and dancing that follows, take place *within* the graveyard. Like the Gospels, it thus speaks of life emerging *out of* death, of life *in the face of* death – and thus also of victory *in the face of* defeat, of justice *in the face of* injustice, of peace *in the face of* conflict, and of love *in the face of* hate. It is often told how the struggle stalwart and former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, danced and sang with defiant joy at funerals during the apartheid years. With these actions, the Archbishop was not turning his back on the horrific realities around him, or disregarding the seriousness of death, but physically embodying a 'hope against hope', as Balthasar would argue, which said that the "powers of injustice, of oppression, of exploitation" will not be victorious in this country, but that goodness, justice, and life will ultimately prevail.³²⁰ This is, arguably, also the message of this final scene in *Woza Albert!*, when viewed through the lens of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory.

With the help of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, it can thus be seen how all three 'syllables' of the Word-made-flesh's performance in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, are re-articulated in and through the play *Woza Albert!*. Just like Jesus Christ in the Gospels, the character Morena lives a kenotic life of solidarity and servitude which uplifts the poor and oppressed, and challenges the kingdoms of this world; suffers and dies at the hands of the 'powers that be', in solidarity 'with', and perhaps even 'on behalf of', all those facing the same fate; and is raised again in glory, in an act that vindicates his message, and shows that death and destruction will not have the final say in this world. As was shown towards the end of Chapter Four, Hans Urs von Balthasar is, however, not only interested in Christ's performance on the world stage, but also in the response that this performance of all performances beckons. According to him, every encounter with the drama of the Christ-event, in whichever form it occurs, brings forth a "personal commission" to re-enact the *missio Christi* through the drama of one's own existence.³²¹ The Christ-drama, he holds, is indeed an invitation to "an entirely

³²⁰ Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu uttered these words at the funeral of Steve Biko in 1977. See John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorized Biography of Desmond Tutu* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 164.

³²¹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 51; *Christian State of Life*, 10.

new, dramatic way of life”.³²² This a life that is grounded in and that emulates “the archetypal personality of Christ”, and is thus marked by “a loving readiness” to serve, and enter into solidarity with, the ‘other’, so as to help bring about God’s goodness in and for the world.³²³ To heed this ‘call of Christ’, Balthasar notes, will inevitably provoke and enrage the ‘powers that be’, and even lead to the darkness of suffering and death, as was also the case in Christ’s own life. Yet, when this happens, those following in Christ’s footsteps can know that Christ suffers and dies ‘with us’, and that the Christian life does not only speak of “life into death”, but also of “life out of death”.³²⁴ For Balthasar, this promise of the resurrection gives rise to a hope that can and should, already in the here and now, be embodied and performed, especially “in places where, humanly speaking, and from the point of view of this world, no further hope remains, or where no involvement seems worth the trouble”.³²⁵

It can then be argued that, as a re-enactment of the drama of the Christ-event (in all three parts), *Woza Albert!* is also not a “self-sufficient armchair-drama”,³²⁶ as Balthasar would say, but a performance that “requires a self-involving response of engaged action from” the audience, to use Aidan Nichol’s words.³²⁷ Throughout the work, as seen above, onlookers are continuously confronted with, and challenged by, a specific way of living in, amidst, and in response to, the horrific realities of apartheid, which is personified and embodied by Morena and which asks to be imitated and re-performed outside the theatre complex. Balthasar would say that, in seeing how Morena sides with the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed, how he recognises and affirms all people’s God-given dignity, how he speaks out against the evils and injustices of the apartheid state, and how he enacts an alternative reality, in the face of opposition from the authorities, audience members are called, encouraged, and perhaps even empowered, to live and act likewise in their own day-to-day lives, as actors on the South African stage. According to Balthasar, the stage is a ‘tribunal’, a place of deliberation and decision-making, and, in the wake of Morena’s performance, every audience member has to decide whether to assent to, or distance themselves “critically” from, his embodied message.³²⁸ This decision has profound implications for one’s life, especially in a context such as apartheid. If one chooses to live like Morena did, the chances are good that suffering and death will follow, as is the case in the proto-drama of Jesus Christ and is also seen in the play *Woza Albert!* itself. Jesus’ actions

³²² Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 406, 420; *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 527.

³²³ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 406, 420; *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 527.

³²⁴ Balthasar, *Life out of Death*, 54; *Christian State of Life*, 220.

³²⁵ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 63; *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 363; *Theo-Drama, Volume V*, 333; *Explorations in Theology, Volume I*, 109.

³²⁶ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume I*, 22.

³²⁷ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 12.

³²⁸ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume III*, 534-4.

brought him to the cross and Morena's actions prompted the apartheid authorities to drop a deadly bomb on his head. Following in their footsteps, and re-performing the dramas of their lives, can thus only "end tragically", in Balthasar's words.³²⁹ The Good News of the Gospels, and that of *Woza Albert!*, is, however, that just as Jesus/Morena "will always come back after three days, bombs or no bombs", so the powers of death and destruction will not have the final say in the drama of our lives, and the drama of South Africa, and the drama of world history at large. To quote Archbishop Tutu: "The texture of our universe is one where there is no question at all that good and laughter and justice will [ultimately] prevail".³³⁰ Therefore, the play *Woza Albert!* suggests, South Africans can, even amidst suffering and death, live and perform the hope of resurrection that is so vividly depicted during the final scene, as the music plays and everyone is invited to dance with Morena on stage. And this is indeed what countless people continued to do when they walked out of the Market Theatre during the apartheid years, while police sirens were sounding in the distance.

5.8. Conclusion

In this fifth chapter, we returned to the topic of South African protest theatre, as initially discussed in the introduction of the dissertation, with the intention of ultimately exploring and examining the play *Woza Albert!*, using Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, so as to see how a theological reading of the play, informed by Balthasar's thought, would possibly look. During the first part of the chapter we explored the history of drama and theatre in (southern) Africa, from pre-colonial times until the second half of the 20th century, in an attempt to better understand the performative traditions and influences that shaped the works of political theatre that were emerging by the 1970's and 1980's. Next, we looked at how the Market Theatre came into being, and how two township-actors, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, conceived the idea of developing a play about Jesus Christ's arrival in apartheid South Africa; an idea that was further developed and turned into a full-length production, with the help of Barney Simon. This was then followed by a discussion of the plot of *Woza Albert!*, before Balthasar's theological dramatic theory was finally used as a lens through which to view and examine the play. This enabled us to see *Woza Albert!* as an analogical re-articulation of the drama of the Christ-event, which not only presented audience members during the apartheid years with a vision of how to live, but also brought about solace, hope, and new life during one of the darkest hours of South Africa's history.

³²⁹ Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Volume IV*, 264, 452, 461.

³³⁰ See Alex Perry, 'The Laughing Bishop,' *Time* 176 (October 11, 2010): 42.

– 6 –

Conclusion

“... it is only as ... a real and available practice, that the Christian evangel (and, in particular, the claim that Christ crucified has been raised from the dead) has any meaning at all; only if the form of Christ can be lived out ... is the confession of the church true; only if Christ can be practiced, is Jesus Lord... it is this presence, within time, of an eschatological and divine peace, really incarnate in the person of Jesus and forever imparted to the body of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, that remains the very essence of the church’s evangelical appeal to the world at large, and of the salvation it proclaims ...”

David Bentley Hart¹

“When we serve the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed, we are not just following a general principle of compassion, but are giving a fresh dramatic performance of the script of Jesus’ life.”

Ben Myers²

“... Christian existence is first and foremost an activity – a performance, if you will ...”

Stanley Hauerwas³

6.1. An Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation began with an account of my first exposure to South African anti-apartheid protest theatre, while I was still at school, and related how the Market Theatre in Newtown, Johannesburg, came to play a significant role in my life, even after moving to Stellenbosch to study theology. I described how, towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I saw the production *Woza Albert!* for the first time, and how this protest play, with its imaginative re-staging of the Christ-narrative, in the context of apartheid South Africa, not only made a lasting impression on me, but left me, as a theology student, with a number of pressing questions. I wondered, for example, whether the field of theology could potentially engage with this provocative theatre piece, and what such an engagement, if it was possible, would look like. Next, I mentioned how, during the writing of my master’s thesis, I became better acquainted with the ‘culturally engaged’ systematic theology of Graham Ward, as well as with the thought of the 20th century Catholic thinker, Hans Urs von Balthasar, a theologian who, despite the hostility of the Christian Church towards the dramatic arts, throughout the ages, developed a theological dramatic theory, wherein he engages with, and constructs a theology on account of,

¹ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, xv

² Myers, *The Apostles’ Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 44.

³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Non-Violence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 76.

the world of theatre. It was noted that Ward's 'culturally engaged' approach to theology served as an encouragement to subject *Woza Albert!* to theological scrutiny, while Balthasar's theological dramatic theory offered a lens through which *Woza Albert!* could be viewed and examined. In the light of these introductory remarks, the research question of this dissertation was formulated as follows: *How would a theological reading of the anti-apartheid protest play, Woza Albert!, informed by Balthasar's theological dramatic theory, potentially look?* I indicated that, in order to answer this question, I would also conduct an investigation into the nature and task of theology; look at Graham Ward's notion of a 'culturally engaged' systematic theology; introduce Hans Urs von Balthasar as a 'culturally engaged' systematic theologian; give an exposition of Balthasar's theological dramatic theory and his understanding of the drama of the Christ-event (as espoused in his five-volume work *Theo-drama*); and that I would explore the history of theatre in (southern) Africa, from pre-colonial times to the present day. And this is, indeed, what I have attempted to do over the last four chapters.

In response to the questions concerning the scope and focus of theology that were raised in the introductory chapter, Chapter Two set out to investigate more closely what theology could and should study, as a kind of prolegomenon for the rest of the dissertation. I began by considering certain early conceptions of the nature and task of theology, and focused particularly on the views of Thomas Aquinas, the 13th century Doctor of the Church, as expressed in the opening sections of his *Summa Theologiae*. With his analogical understanding of the relationship between God and the world, and his strong emphasis on the bodily incarnation of Christ, Aquinas argued that the discipline of theology, or sacred doctrine, as he refers to it, should study God and all things in relation to God, and that it should also learn from, and enter in constant conversation with, the other sciences that are tasked with the study of creaturely reality. It was then suggested that this comprehensive and holistic understanding of theology did not necessarily maintain its dominance in the years following Aquinas' death, as God and the world, as well as theology and the other sciences, were increasingly set against one another, with the dawning of the modern age. Next, I briefly examined certain genealogical accounts that have attempted to explain why this fateful separation between the transcendent and the immanent realms took place, before turning to the theological thought and method of Graham Ward – a thinker who is interested in how theology can overcome and move beyond the dualisms of modernity. I subsequently gave an exposition of Ward's 'culturally engaged' systematic theology, which strongly relies on the logic of analogy, emphasises the radicality of the incarnation, and presents Christian theology as something that should be lived or performed in the world. This theological approach was then used as a key to introduce the life and work

of Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of Ward's main theological influences. It was shown that Balthasar also sought to overcome and move beyond any dualist understanding of the relationship between God and creation, and between theology and the other sciences, and, under the guidance of thinkers such as Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac, set out to develop a theology that would, while investigating the reality of God, speak to, and engage with, this-worldly phenomena, such as the theatre.

In Chapter Three, I began my investigation into Balthasar's theological dramatic theory by focusing on the first two volumes of *Theo-drama*. I looked at how Balthasar's work in theological dramatics flows forth from, and builds on, his work in theological aesthetics, and how it attempts to augment, unify, and bring to fulfilment, a number of contemporary theological trends, including that of 'Orthopraxy', 'Dialogue', and 'Political Theology'. This was then followed by an account of Balthasar's response to Hegel's view that the dawn of Christianity brought forth the end of drama, a response in which he demonstrates how the drama of the Christ-event can be re-performed in different forms and contexts, and instigate new dramatic expressions. An account was also given of Balthasar's investigation into Christianity's hostility towards the theatre, from the patristic era onwards. Here, it became evident that, for Balthasar, there are no valid reasons why Christianity and the theatre should be regarded as opposing realities, especially given the highly dramatic nature of the Christ-event, which, as he points out, has inspired dramatic activity in and outside the Church in almost every age, despite Christianity's antagonism towards the stage. Next, the attention shifted to Balthasar's exploration of the analogical relationship between the theatre stage and the world stage, where it was shown how, in Balthasar's view, the theatre provides us with language and imagery to describe our lives on earth, while serving as a mirror that reflects, points back towards, and offers insight into, the drama of real life that is taking place outside the theatre auditorium. According to Balthasar, this analogical relationship between the theatre stage and the world stage transpires in, and through, the embodied performance of the actor, and has the ability to place an ethical demand on the lives of audience members. Towards the end of the chapter, I examined Balthasar's understanding of the freedom of humanity, as actors on the world stage, and noted how, according to him, there is only one actor, throughout history, whose assigned role/mission and innermost being coincides completely, namely, that of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Chapter Four examined Balthasar's dramatic Christology, as developed in the last three volumes of *Theo-drama* and other corresponding writings. I mentioned that, for Balthasar, the drama of the Christ-event is indeed the all-defining drama in world history, which definitively

reveals God's goodness in, and for, the world, and which brings about liberation and restoration for a sinful and suffering humanity, while in-forming and giving new meaning to other dramatic activity, on both the world stage and the theatre stage. After highlighting certain defining aspects of his Christological thought, such as the importance that he assigns to Jesus' sense of mission, I commenced with an extensive investigation into his understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, which he describes as the three distinct-yet-united 'syllables' of the Word-made-flesh, as expressed on the world stage. Here, it was shown how, according to Balthasar, Jesus lives a life of kenotic sacrifice and solidarity that uplifts the poor and oppressed; dies 'for us' and 'with us' at the hands of the powerful; and is raised again in glory, in an act that vindicates his performance on earth, and evermore affirms that sin, suffering, and death will not have the final say in the drama of this life. Following this exposition of Balthasar's understanding of the three-fold drama of the Christ-event, I considered the dramatic response that he believes this performance of Jesus beckons, a response involving a dynamic re-enactment of the *missio Christi*, on both the world stage and the theatre stage. Towards the end of the chapter, I investigated the socio-political dimensions, shortcomings, and possibilities of Balthasar's thought, and suggested that, even though he expressed some anxieties about Liberation Theology, he never wavered in his belief that the drama of the Christ-event, as well as the drama of the Christian life, are deeply concerned with the plight of the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed – something that becomes particularly evident when reading his sermons.

Following the discussion on Balthasar's theodramatic project, Chapter Five again focused on theatre in (southern) Africa, with the aim of ultimately presenting a reading of *Woza Albert!*, informed by Balthasar's thought. I began by exploring the rich performative traditions on the African continent, which stretch back tens of thousands of years, before showing how religious and other writings from the Western world came to be reappropriated, dramatized, and performed by native communities, after missionaries and imperial settlers began setting foot on African soil. I then discussed the important role that drama and the theatre played in urban black communities by the beginning of the 20th century, and examined some of the writings of Herbert Dhlomo, a prolific black playwright and essayist who was active in the 1920's and 1930's. This was followed by an account of how the Bantu Dramatic Society was established, and how an old factory, called Dorkay House, was transformed into a hub of alternative dramatic activity by the 1950's. I subsequently investigated the work of two playwrights associated with Dorkay House, namely Gibson Kente, who is often seen as the father of township drama, and Athol Fugard, a playwright and actor who became one of the most influential

figures in political and protest theatre in South Africa (and the world). This led to the introduction of Barney Simon, who, with his theatre company, *Mirror One*, staged ‘guerrilla’ performances of politically-defiant theatre works all over Johannesburg, after Dorkay House was closed by the authorities, and who ultimately, together with Mannie Manim, established the Market Theatre in 1976. The focus then shifted to the fascinating narrative of how the production, *Woza Albert!*, came into being. The story was told of how, while on tour with Gibson Kente, Mbogeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa first came up with the idea of Jesus Christ returning to apartheid South Africa and how they eventually turned this idea into a fully-fledged anti-apartheid protest play, with the help and encouragement of Barney Simon, who, as a secular Jew, became completely captivated by the Christ-drama, as told in the Gospels. This was followed by an exposition of the plot of *Woza Albert!*, before I finally presented a reading of the play, informed by Balthasar’s thought.

As mentioned above, the research question of this dissertation asked how a theological reading of *Woza Albert!*, informed by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, would potentially look. This is a question that could only be answered in a performative manner. Any attempt at an answer needed to be ‘staged’, which is indeed what I attempted to do towards the end of Chapter Five. Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory and *Woza Albert!* were brought into conversation with one another, which allowed us to see how this Market Theatre play, as first performed by Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Ngema in the early 1980’s, enabled audience members to verbalise and better understand the realities of the drama of apartheid South Africa, and their own role therein, while also presenting them with a ‘form’ of how to live and act amidst, and in response to, this horrific situation. This was done by re-staging the drama of the Christ-event; a drama which, according to Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, asks to be re-performed, and continually gives rise to new dramatic expressions, on both the world stage and the theatre stage (as arguably also happened in this instance). Balthasar’s distinctive understanding of the three-fold performance of Christ, as advanced in his theological dramatic theory, was subsequently used to give a certain interpretation of the character Morena’s life, death, and resurrection in *Woza Albert!*. This interpretation especially highlighted Morena’s kenotic solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and the way in which his death and resurrection, ‘for us’ and ‘with us’, brings forth a defiant ‘hope against hope’, which says that darkness and death will not have the final say in this drama of this life, but will ultimately be overcome by, and turned into, light and life. Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory also then helped us to see that, just like the performance of Jesus in the Gospels, the performance of Morena in *Woza Albert!*, beckons audience members to re-perform the Christ-drama through

their own lives, so as to help bring about God's goodness in and for the world. While the production, *Woza Albert!*, has been interpreted in many different ways, since it was first performed in 1981, and will continue to be interpreted in many different ways, as it is re-performed in new and different contexts in the future, this dissertation has attempted to show what one particular reading of this important work of protest theatre might look like. In doing so, a contribution has hopefully been made to the ongoing reception-process of this play, as well as to Balthasar scholarship, and the larger field of Theology and the Arts.

6.2. For Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places

In conclusion, I would like to return, once more, to Gerard Manley Hopkins' sonnet, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, the epigraph of this dissertation. Although this poem is undated, it is generally assumed that it was written in Hopkins' highly "productive summer of 1877",⁴ eleven years after he first converted to Catholicism, and, as Balthasar writes, "offered himself to the God who addressed him personally, the God of the Cross and the God of this fearful world, and with himself offered his love of beauty and his art".⁵ During this time, Hopkins was nearing the end of his theological training at the Jesuit College, St. Bueno's, which is situated in what Balthasar refers to as "the blessed Welsh countryside",⁶ and was soon to be ordained as priest. It is interesting to note that, while Hopkins was an eager poet during his undergraduate studies at Balliol College, Oxford, he gave up poetry, and burned all of his previous poetic compositions, when he entered the Society of Jesus in 1868, since he was concerned that poetry would "interfere with [his] state and [his] vocation", as he mentioned in a letter to his friend, Robert Bridges, at the time.⁷ For the first seven years of his training as a Jesuit, Hopkins thus did not compose any verses, with the exception of a few short lines on St. Winifred, the Welsh Saint.⁸ All of this changed, however, in the winter of 1875/1876, when the Rector of St. Bueno's, Fr. James Jones, asked him to write a poem in commemoration of the lives that were lost when the German steamship, the *Deutschland*, was wrecked in the Thames estuary, while transporting immigrants and religious refugees, including five Franciscan nuns, from Bremen to Canada. This, then, was the encouragement that Hopkins needed to finally take up poetry

⁴ Justus George Lawler, *Hopkins Re-Constructed: Life, Poetry, and the Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 214.

⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 369.

⁶ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 372.

⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Letter of Hopkins to Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 23. In a journal entry in the spring of 1868, Hopkins refers to this burning of the poetry of his youth as "the massacre of the innocents". See Bernard Bergonzi, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1977), 23.

⁸ Gerald Roberts, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 57.

again, and he assiduously began working on what Balthasar calls his “great shipwreck poem”,⁹ an ode of thirty-five stanzas, in ‘sprung rhythm’, which not only gives a poignant account of the ruin of the *Deutschland* and the ‘martyrdom’ of the nuns, but also, in the light of this tragic occurrence, considers the “spiritual state of England”, which was a matter of perennial concern for Hopkins.¹⁰

It soon proved that this poem, ‘The Wreck of the *Deutschland*’, was not an “isolated outburst”,¹¹ and in the following year, 1877, Hopkins, now fully committed to both his “religious and artistic vocation”,¹² composed some of his most well-known and beloved sonnets, such as *God's Grandeur*, *The Starlight Night*, *Spring*, *The Windhover*, *Pied Beauty*, *Hurrahing in Harvest*, *The Lantern Out of Doors*, and also, in all likelihood, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*. Balthasar writes that in these works of “sacramental poetry”, it became clear that, henceforth, “the priest, the theologian and the poet in Hopkins” could not be separated and that, “despite all the obvious tensions, any attempt to find inner contradictions in him” would be “hopeless, a radical misunderstanding even”.¹³ Hopkins’ poetry certainly did not stand over against, or apart from, his religious life, but gave vivid expression to, and served as a testimony of, his deepest theological convictions.¹⁴ According to Balthasar, it was, in fact, for the “sake of his theological vision, that Hopkins began again, as a religious, to write poetry”.¹⁵ In contrast to the “sterile” Neo-Scholasticism that often marked his theological training (just as it would also mark Balthasar’s, a few decades later),¹⁶ Hopkins’ theological vision was radically *sacramental* and *incarnational*. He saw “all natures and selves” as being “fashioned and determined for Christ”, with Christ being “their ultimate inscape and instress”, that is, their archetypal “form”, and the “deep, unique act, which establishes them, holds them together and holds them in tension”.¹⁷ Hopkins believed that everything existed *in* Christ, *through* Christ, and *for* Christ, and that, in order for human beings to fully become themselves, and to discover their unique vocation in the world,¹⁸ they thus had to surrender, “in love”, to “this archetype”, by ascending to him in their “life and work”.¹⁹ It is, then, on account of this “theology of the human being, transformed into Christ”, that Hopkins composed his sonnet, *As Kingfishers*

⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 359.

¹⁰ Bergonzi, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 82.

¹¹ Bergonzi, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 88.

¹² Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 358.

¹³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 358, 390ff.

¹⁴ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 383.

¹⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 383.

¹⁶ Angus Easson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Routledge, 2011), 97.

¹⁷ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 390, 365-6.

¹⁸ Stephen McInerney, *The Enclosure of an Open Mystery: Sacrament and Incarnation in the Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins, David Jones and Les Murray* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 52, 64, 73.

¹⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 390-1, 398.

Catch Fire, wherein he declares that Christ “plays in ten thousand places”, through the lives of those who, like him, act justly, “keep grace”, and keep all their “goings graces”.²⁰

According to someone like the ethicist and theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, this sonnet by Hopkins, and especially the line, “Christ plays in ten thousand places”, which, as seen above, is deeply grounded in, and springs forth from, his incarnational and sacramental theology, asks two things of its readers. The first, is the recognition that Christ, who *is* justice himself, is indeed playing in ten thousand places on earth. The second, is to become part of the action, to play “with Christ” in these places, to perform his truth, in and through the drama of one’s own life.²¹ At the end of this dissertation, it can be said that this is also what Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as well as the play, *Woza Albert!*, when viewed through the lens of Balthasar’s thought, ask of us. In reading Balthasar’s work, and seeing a production of *Woza Albert!*, with its re-performance of the Christ-narrative in apartheid South Africa, we are called to recognise that the liberating and life-giving drama of the Christ-event, in the words of David Bentley Hart,²² is “repeated endlessly ... in boundless variety”, throughout history.²³ Indeed, Christ does not only ‘play’ in first century, Roman-occupied Palestine, but in countless other contexts, on both the world stage and, importantly, on the theatre stage, whether it is Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, or Simon’s Market Theatre, in Newtown, Johannesburg. The “universal significance” of Jesus’ message, as Schillebeeckx reminds us, is “actualized” in different circumstances;²⁴ the Word, as Graham Ward asserts, “is continually given”.²⁵ With reference to Hopkins poetry, Balthasar notes that part of our “duty”, as Christians, is indeed to learn to see and interpret “all the forms of God’s revelation in Christ throughout the universe”,²⁶ even in the most unexpected of places, which indeed what his theological dramatic theory, as well as *Woza Albert!*, urge and enable us to do.

In recognising the truth that Christ “plays on ‘ten thousand’ stages”,²⁷ as highlighted by Hopkins, we are also, then, beckoned to become co-actors with Christ on the world stage, and to re-enact the liberating drama of his existence, in and through the particular drama of our

²⁰ Maria R. Lichtmann, *The Contemplative Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 187.

²¹ See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Character of Virtue: Letters to a Godchild* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 100-107.

²² See, for example, Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 29.

²³ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 339.

²⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in our Western Culture: Mysticism, Ethics and Politics* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 40.

²⁵ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 130.

²⁶ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume III*, 358, 390ff.

²⁷ Easson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 97.

own lives, by the grace of God. The “pattern of Christ”, David Bentley Hart writes, is something that is “handed over and entrusted” to us.²⁸ Our labour, Graham Ward affirms, “is nothing less than the performance of Christ”.²⁹ We are called, after Mary, to be “bearers of the Word of God”;³⁰ to participate in the “circulation of the Logos”;³¹ “to echo, albeit in [our] own fashion, the actions seen in and expressed by ... the Lord”.³² The “Christian way”, in the words of Kevin Vanhoozer, is comprised of “speech and acts, on behalf of Jesus’ truth and life”.³³ It is an “imitative performance” that occurs “in and through the Word and brings forth further amplifications of the Word”.³⁴ This is indeed, then, the invitation that is also offered by Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, as well as *Woza Albert!*, when viewed through the lens of Balthasar’s thought. In seeing how Christ acts in different contexts throughout history, and, in particular, how he acts on the Market Theatre stage in the setting of apartheid, we, as onlookers, are encouraged to imaginatively reappropriate the “shape of Christ’s life”, and “to express it anew”, as Hart would say.³⁵

In South Africa, the horrific system of apartheid is fortunately no more. Our country is, however, still marred by the evils of the past, and it also suffers because of new evils that have transpired as a result of humanity’s sinful actions. In response to this reality, there is an urgency for the drama of Christ, the drama of Morena, to be re-performed. This re-performance might very well lead to more suffering and death, and even require of us, as Ward writes, to “descend into hell”, for this is where the hungry, the poor, the persecuted, and the oppressed find themselves on a daily basis.³⁶ Yet, “in the silence, and in the face of death”, we can know that there is one “who has gone before us”,³⁷ one who turns death into life, and sorrow into joy, and who triumphantly shouts out, in and amidst the darkest of hours: “Woza Albert!”

²⁸ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 340.

²⁹ Graham Ward, ‘Performing Christ: The Theological Vocation of the Lay Person,’ in *Ecclesiology* 9 (2013): 334.

³⁰ Ward, ‘Performing Christ,’ 323.

³¹ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 216.

³² Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 216.

³³ Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 15.

³⁴ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 217.

³⁵ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 339.

³⁶ Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 320.

³⁷ See Graham Ward, *Shall All Be Well? Reflections for Holy Week* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2015), 28; Ward, *How the Light Gets In*, 320.

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