

The Authority of the Saints: Drawing on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar

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Drawing on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Pauline Dimech

Foreword by Dominic Robinson

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To all the Saints

“We are slowly returning to the realization that those of the faithful who stand out by the way in which they live the Church’s faith, who used to be called ‘saints’ (whether they were canonized or not), are the people in whose hands lies the whole destiny of the Church of today and tomorrow and who will determine whether or not the Church will achieve recognition in the world. It is by no means necessary that such ‘saints’ as these should be exceptional individuals. Some have such a calling, but they are few and far between, and these are often only the spark that kindles a group, be it great or small, which does the work of spreading the new light that shone in its founder in the scattered places of the world . . . And such authentic Christianity will give the world a great deal more to worry about than the towering edifices of the hierarchy.”

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 95–96.

Foreword

It is a great pleasure and privilege to introduce this exciting book by Pauline Dimech. The subject of this work is a much under-researched and underestimated aspect of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s thought. As such it is to be welcomed as a significant contribution to contemporary studies of this important theological figure. In turn the research carried out is a springboard for reflection on wider issues surrounding our understanding of theology and church emerging from the ongoing interpretation of such a key figure in post-Vatican II theology. Balthasar’s legacy is surely being served well as this complex and seminal thinker has the fruits of his labour digested through diverse interpretations shaping our understanding of Catholic theology and the nature of the church herself in the post-Vatican II era. This book is part of that process of digestion, reception and continued debate. It is fitting then that this work started its life as a doctoral thesis at the Centre of Catholic Studies at the University of Durham.

Pauline Dimech has chosen a contentious topic which lies at the heart of the post-Vatican II debate. She has developed a convincing argument for the increased significance of the communion of the saints in Balthasar’s theology and shown how this impacts on theology as a whole. It is, she boldly argues, implicit in Balthasar’s thought that theological statements derive no small authority from those who in the Christian and Catholic tradition we regard as saints. If this is so—and that is surely the big question—this has an impact on how Balthasar, one of the seminal post conciliar giants of Catholic theology, understands how we do theology in the Catholic tradition.

Dimech proceeds to lay out carefully Balthasar’s understanding of the official and unofficial “*communio sanctorum*” and places this in the context of his ecclesiology and theological anthropology. This is the result of a survey of a wide range of secondary literature which draws out mainly implicit as well as explicit views on the weight Balthasar gives to certain “figures” regarded as authoritative. The wide-ranging scope here of both secondary and primary literature is impressive. The critique of the material is searching, taking in different strands of opinion on

Balthasar. The critique of Karen Kilby in particular, it must be said, is daring and provocative but it is balanced. As such it introduces an interesting and crucial debate on what Balthasar intended for his theology. Does this complex thinker fall foul at times of making sweeping “dogmatic” statements, as Kilby suggests? There may be a good argument for taking this view which, sadly, might in fact lead to an undervaluing of the contribution Balthasar has made or, worse, dismissing him as a valid bearer of post-Vatican II thought on theology and church. Or, as Dimech suggests, does he often legitimately present perspectives emerging from a radiating constellation of figures who patch together a tapestry of pictures of God and God’s dealings with humanity?

Here we can see how Dimech’s research raises questions on the wider horizon relating to the nature of Balthasar’s theology as a whole, and the impact it may have on contemporary theology. What is “dogma” for Balthasar? This is surely a key question to explore still further for scholars of Balthasar. What does he learn from aesthetics, from the medium of drama, from Ignatian spirituality? How does he marry a firm belief in revealed truth with a receptive paradigm of learning from the other, from the diversity of responses to God’s revelation as he shows his glory in encounter with humanity who are expressed in the broader constellations of discipleship in the church?

Dimech’s response to another important recent work on Balthasar, Lyra Pitstick’s *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Descent into Hell* is fascinating. Dimech shows how Pitstick, for all her searching and revolutionary work on the *Descent into Hell*, misses important points about the nature of the theological task as emerging from “figures” like Adrienne von Speyr as well as from the magisterium. Pitstick’s view is valid from the point of view of her full and careful research into the tradition on the *Descent* but Dimech has begun to ask questions about the nature of Balthasar’s statements. Is it permissible to mix the mystical with dogma? Or are these more eastern ways of doing theology to be avoided? This is again contentious and daring to argue but it is a fascinating suggestion to throw out to new scholars of Balthasar to debate. Not much has been written critically on this since the Pitstick–Oates debate ended when Edward Oakes sadly died in 2013. So it is timely.

Students of Balthasar, be they Catholic or not, in leadership positions in the church, in ministry, following the baptismal call of the faithful, will find this book challenging. Dimech’s work stirs up the pot already brewing through contemporary debates on Balthasar.

I am delighted then to introduce this engaging, provocative work on one of the seminal theologians of the post-Vatican II era and whom we are still trying to understand. This book daringly advances an important area of research in Balthasar studies which it is hoped will stimulate much more debate and discussion in the academy and church as a whole.

Dominic Robinson, SJ

Preface

As a Catholic, a Religious Educator, a Catechist, and a member of the Society of Christian Doctrine, the commemoration of the saints has always been a part of my life. As a member of the Society of Christian Doctrine, I also followed closely the process whereby the Founder of my Society—a Catholic priest by the name of Fr. George Preca (1880–1962)—was beatified in 2001 and then canonized in 2007. Since I have known and often spoken to people who knew Fr. Preca personally during his lifetime, and who were, literally, mesmerized by him, the influence of the saints—on other people and in the church—has always fascinated me. I would say that it has fascinated many

other theologians and philosophers besides myself. Max Scheler's "value persons," Nietzsche's "übermenschen," Hegel's "great men of history," Johann Baptiste Metz's "classics," can all be interpreted as attempts to understand why and how some have authority over the rest.

On the other hand, this book is also a product of my frustration with my own sinfulness and that of the church. History is full of examples of individuals who held positions of authority, which they would not have deserved either spiritually or morally. Their position put them at an advantage over the saints, who may not have held such positions, and whose life may even have been completely hidden from the world. My concern throughout has been pastoral as well as dogmatic. Not only do I ask whether and to what extent we may attribute authority to the saints but also how may we ensure that it is the saints and not the scoundrels whose influence persists and whose memory endures.

As a Catholic priest and theologian, and an ex-Jesuit, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) was also captivated by the saints and by their writings. Moreover, he personally knew, and collaborated closely with, the Swiss theologian and mystic Adrienne von Speyr (1902–1967), whom he met in 1940. All things considered, I became convinced that Balthasar would help me clarify the issues surrounding authority and particularly the authority of the saints. Although Balthasar did not develop a full-blown doctrine of the authority of the saints, I believe that his work can be used as a resource to navigate the way through such a doctrine, if theologians were to seriously seek to develop it. I have often asked myself whether the theme of the authority of the saints is one example where "popular religion" has progressed at a faster pace than the reflection upon it.¹ This book is an application of Balthasar's theology to a subject that has fascinated me personally for many years. I have also been propelled by it. Reading the lives of individual saints, I have been made uncomfortable by the complexity with which the status of the saints fluctuated, both within the community and vis-à-vis the church hierarchy. I have also been captivated by the fact that the devotion towards the saints oscillates so rapidly because of contemporary philosophical and theological trends, which have an impact both on the process leading to the canonization of the individual saint, but also on the perpetuation of the veneration, or of the esteem, towards that same saint. It is a subject which, it seems to me, Balthasar also struggled with. He strove to bring the Fathers of the church back to living memory, to promote a more accurate depiction of saints like Thérèse of Lisieux and of Elizabeth of the Trinity, to integrate Adrienne von Speyr within the church.

Besides establishing Balthasar's involvement with the enterprise, what this book tries to do is establish the theological foundations upon which any authority of the saints would have to be based in theory, and possibly has implicitly been based in practice, using Balthasar's theology. The focus is on the theological anthropology (the existential), theological epistemology (the epistemological) and the theology of the church (the ecclesiological).

This book will not answer all the questions, but I hope that it will stimulate thought and motivate further research.

¹. Rahner, "The Relation between Theology and Popular Religion," 140–47.

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Abbreviations

TA1: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, I, Seeing the Form

TA2: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, II, Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles

TA3: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, III, Studies in Theological Style: Lay Styles

TA4: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, IV, The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity

TA5: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, V, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age

TA6: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, VI, Theology: The Old Covenant

TA7: The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, VII: Theology: The New Covenant

TD1: Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, I, Prologomena

TD2: Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God

TD3: Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, III, The Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ
Personae: The Person in Christ

TD4: Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, IV, The Dramatis Personae: The Action. Personae:
The Action

TD5: Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, V, The Last Act

TL1: Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory, I, Truth of the World

TL2: Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory, II, Truth of God

TL3: Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory, III, The Spirit of Truth

Chapter 1 The Problem of Sainly Authority

Introduction

My thesis is that Hans Urs von Balthasar manifests remarkable interest in the saints, expresses huge respect for the theology of each saint, and develops a generic theology of the saint, that is, a broad description of the inherent features, the characteristics, the essence of the saint, as well as provides an account of the features and the characteristics which are typical of the theology of the saints. Balthasar regards the life of the saints and their theology as crucial to the task of writing significant theology—not just his own, but also that of others—and to the task of building the church. He makes various remarkable connections, which in turn can serve to ground the authority of the saints in the eyes of others, particularly in the eyes of practicing theologians, but also in the eyes of the church. One such connection is that between theology and life, a link which Balthasar defends and validates in a particularly notable manner. It is clear that Balthasar attributes an authority to the saints (in the case of the link between theology and life, an existential authority) that is analogical to that of the Pope and the bishops.

Within a Catholic context, the term “Magisterium,” first introduced into papal declarations by Gregory XVI, has developed multiple meanings. It could refer to “the wide range of authoritative teaching activities of bishops, and, especially, popes.”¹ However, it often carries a more personalistic meaning, referring to those whose office puts them in a position of authority. In this case, the term would refer specifically to the person of the Pope and the bishops. However, the term “Magisterium” also has a more conceptual meaning. Here, it refers to the authority which lays down what is the authentic teaching of the church, without making a direct reference to the authority holders. This distinction is important, because it will allow me to speak of the authority of the saints as analogical to that of the Magisterium, or even to speak of the Magisterium of the saints.

A word must also be said about the word “authority.” Although the term, used within an ecclesiastical context, generally evokes images of prelates, judgments, verdicts, dogmas, and imprimaturs, the term authority here will signify more a kind of propelling quality. Victor Lee Austin, a priest and theologian in the Episcopal Church, has said that an authority always has “something to convey to us,” always has “a place to lead us toward,” always embodies “a sense of what the human good is” and always “exist[s] to help us flourish in [that human good].”² It is in this sense that we may speak of the saints as being authoritative.

My reading of Balthasar has convinced me that there is no reason why we should restrict the term “Magisterium” (that is the term which refers to the authority that lays down what is the authentic teaching of the church) to the Popes and the Bishops. There is no reason why we should not say that the saints too have authority, that they too are a Magisterium. Perhaps it should be stated that the saints, more than anyone else, lay down what the authentic teaching of the church is. This authority (which is manifested in the saints and which is attributed to the saints) has at least another two dimensions besides the existential. These are: the epistemological, and the ecclesiological. All three dimensions represent the different grounds for the authority of the saints, as well as the different settings in which the saints function authoritatively.

The study of the authority of the saints may seem unusable. Some may even consider it an unnecessary endeavour, because the saint’s authority is already recognized. The Catechism claims that “The saints are the light bearers of the *sensus fidei*.”³ The great majority would agree that they were outstanding witnesses of the *sensus fidei* in their own time and for all times, in their own place and for all places. Others would think such a theme provocative because authority has always been associated with the Magisterium, that is, with the official teaching authority, and not with the saints.⁴ The crux of the matter is that theology without the authority of the saints is simply unimaginable. So is the church per se. To conceive of a church that does not uphold the authority of the saints is a *contradictio in terminis*. The scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi

(1891–1976) once said that “[t]he curious thing is that we have no clear knowledge of what our presuppositions are and when we try to formulate them they appear quite unconvincing.”⁵ The issue becomes all the more clear when one asks the following questions, the first dealing specifically with Balthasar, and the second dealing with theology generally. What would Balthasar’s theology have been like, had Balthasar not trusted the saints? And, secondly, what would theology and the church be like if they rejected the authority of the saints? That would possibly be an *argumentum ad absurdum*. The fact is that the authority of the saints is presupposed, and yet, formulating this presupposition proves to be extremely awkward. This book is an exploration into the nature, the sources and the limits of the authority of the saints. Balthasar does not set out consciously intending to investigate the matter. Like other theologians, he seems to take the authority of the saints for granted. And yet, I use Balthasar’s theology of the saints to help me navigate through a theology of the authority of the saints. This means that there are times when I take it upon myself to articulate Balthasar’s thoughts, to flesh out Balthasar’s underlying views and concepts. There are times when Balthasar does shed more light on the issue of the authority of the saints. It is for this reason that I decided to use Balthasar as a guide and a resource as we reflect on the issue.

The saints and hagiography

Before we delve more deeply into Balthasar’s theology, in order to emphasize the importance of the theology of the saints in that context, we should say something about Balthasar as a hagiographer, or rather, about Balthasar’s non-typical hagiography. Traditionally, hagiography contained accounts of the discovery or relocation of relics, bulls of canonization, investigations held into the life of a candidate for canonization, legends associated with the saint, as well as descriptions of sermons, visions, and other extraordinary phenomena. The typical hagiographer would consider the saint as a thaumaturge, an “epitome of . . . ethical excellence,”⁶ a romantic hero, an excessive ascetic, someone who deserves to be admired for having withdrawn from the world, or for having performed strange deeds. Historians, particularly medievalists, and liturgists would typically focus on verification and authentication of the evidence. None of this is to be found in Balthasar’s explorations of the saints. Balthasar’s is certainly not a romantic hagiography. Neither is it a modern rationalist account that reduces truth-theory to verification.⁷ What concerns Balthasar is the theological content of hagiography. What concerns him is that the saints are “rich in suggestions that theologians only need to expand in order to bring out their lasting value,”⁸ and that “their sheer existence proves to be a theological manifestation that contains most fruitful and opportune doctrine” not only for theologians, but for “the whole Church,” and “for all Christians.”⁹ With Balthasar, the individual theologian, and the church as a whole, must look to the saints (even more than to the Pope and the Bishops). More specifically, the role of the theologian is to expand the suggestions of the saints (rather than to elucidate the documents of the members of the official Magisterium).

Let us, for a moment, delve into the concept of the saint as depicted by Balthasar, that is, explore who the saint is, and who the saints are in Balthasar’s view. If we were to take a segment of Balthasar’s work—let us say, that between the early fifties and the early seventies—we would be able to see that the perception, the hermeneutics of the saints, remains constant, even when different images are used or different emphases are made. The saint is always much more than a patron who offers protection and security, one who acts as a mediator between God and ourselves.¹⁰ In *Two Sisters* the saints are those who “lift” the world, by having God as their “fulcrum,” and prayer as their “lever.”¹¹ They are “a new type of conformity to Christ . . . a new illustration of how the Gospel is to be lived.”¹² In his *Das Betrachtende Gebet*, the saint is “an almost inexhaustible storehouse of light and love, providing strength and nourishment for centuries.”¹³ In *Theologie der Geschichte*, the saint is

a presentation to his own age of the message that heaven is sending to it, a man who is, here and

now, the right and relevant interpretation of the Gospel, who is given to this particular age as its way to approach to the perennial truth of Christ.¹⁴

In the first volume of the Aesthetics, the Christian saint is the one “who has made the deep-rooted act of faith and obedience to God’s inner light the norm of his whole existence,”¹⁵ the figure who is “characterized by the Christ form.”¹⁶ In his *Einfaltungen*, the saints are the ones who represent the glory of God’s justice and mercy. They are those who “let themselves be expropriated into Christ’s personified ‘justice of God’, to stand in the authority of Christ as his ‘ambassadors’ in the ‘ministry of reconciliation’.”¹⁷ In *Engagement with God*, the saints are individuals who are “specially chosen,”¹⁸ individuals “who tower above the rest.”¹⁹ In his essay on Matthias Claudius, the saints are depicted as more perceptive, more responsive, more alert, than the typical Christian. They are the ones who clarify things for the church. They are those who trust God “to perform the greatest work,” those who “sense falsehood.”²⁰ And so on, and so forth. These seemingly insignificant descriptions of the identity, the essence, the characteristics, the function of the saints are, in fact, very suggestive, on three levels. First of all, with Balthasar, the focus is on the saints’ message “from God to the Church,”²¹ rather than on the comfort which the saints provide to us when we become aware of their similarity to ourselves, or on their role as facilitators when there is something that we would like God to grant us, as with most spiritual writings about the saints. Secondly, Balthasar clearly attributes to the saints an eminence, an authority that the Magisterium has traditionally attributed to itself. He grounds the authority of the saints there, where the Magisterium is generally expected to be authoritative. Thirdly, it is clear that Balthasar intends to revive the familiarity with the “saints” as pedagogues and interpreters, presenting them as adept and skillful, as unique and exceptional guides. Interestingly, Balthasar does not depict the saints as perfect, or their theology as necessarily inerrant.²² “Even true saints often have faults.”²³ After all, as Austin has pointed out, authority may not always be right.²⁴ Rodney Howsare grants that, in Balthasar, even those saints who would generally be considered more important may be wrong sometimes.²⁵ John of the cross is criticized for his unrelenting reductionism, for discarding all forms and figures, for his attitude toward Christian art. Howsare himself identifies instances when Balthasar critiques the Church Fathers. Most specifically, Balthasar criticizes the Fathers for adopting the Christian message to the egress/regress metaphysics of the ancient philosophers and for over-emphasizing the ineffability of God.²⁶ Authority would naturally be lost if that individual holding it was generally wrong, or wrong in something that was considered substantial, but one would assume that this would not be the case with the more important saints whose theology is more cogent, and, possibly by virtue of that, more authoritative. Howsare has suggested that what Balthasar does is to discern between the “better” and the “weaker” moments of the saints. He attempts to identify the “better” moments when Christ “shines through” and to correct the “weaker” ones, when the Gospel is being obscured. Howsare’s is a fair assessment of what Balthasar does.²⁷ But one wonders whether the argument as a whole can be sustained. One would have to say that everybody has his better and weaker movements, but finding precise criteria to distinguish the two is not straightforward, and forgiving errors as simply moments of weakness is not always defensible. I would agree with Howsare that an essential part of Balthasar’s project requires the “retrieval of past Christian thought,” which will always involve a process of discernment.²⁸ It is very significant that, in Balthasar, this past thought is always closely coupled to its thinker. Balthasar goes beyond Blondel’s emphasis that tradition was a living reality, through which dogma developed.²⁹ On his part, Balthasar does not just think and analyze thoughts or examine the development of dogma, as if dogma could be disconnected from its human source. Balthasar would rather analyze the individuals who fabricated these thoughts. It is the thinkers whom he discerns, rather than the thoughts. In Balthasar, the theology of the saints (that is, the theology produced by saints) is not to be detached from the saints.

Which saints?

Yves Tourenne once said that “[o]ne way to enter into Balthasar’s thought process is to note the

proper names he cites, to compile an index, and to try to understand why certain names appear in certain passages or alongside certain other names.”³⁰ I am sure we would all agree that Balthasar’s theology was not fortuitous. Rather, it involved a whole process of discernment concerning which saints to use in a particular context. It is certainly necessary to evaluate this process of discernment if we are to understand Balthasar’s work. Aidan Nichols argues that Balthasar would have voluntarily chosen those saints who had a lot to contribute to the contemporary church.³¹ While agreeing with this sensible supposition, I feel that it is only partially accurate. I would say that Balthasar’s decisions were based on five criteria. First of all: there were the saints who were especially alluring to him personally, those whom he came to know spiritually, who most fascinated and inspired him in his own religious life, those who influenced him spiritually and theologically. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) would fall into this group. Secondly, there were the already established saints, whom all worthy theologians quoted, and whom everyone considered authoritative, like Augustine and Aquinas. Thirdly, there were those saints whose wisdom he had discovered, but who were no longer known to the Western world. According to him, the Fathers of the church—like Gregory and Maximus—would fall in this group. Ben Quash has identified what Balthasar admires in the Church Fathers: their mystical warmth, their rhetorical power, and so on.³² Fourthly, there were then the saints whose import was yet to be discovered. Thérèse of Lisieux would fall among this group. Balthasar believed that Thérèse could be presented as a paradigm, and he wanted to divulge her wisdom, and to make her theology known. I actually think that, if it were up to Balthasar, he would also include Adrienne in this fourth group. She was a saint and a mystic whose wisdom and import was yet to be discovered. Finally, there were those “saints” who were not generally recognized as holy, because they were associated more with philosophy and literature than with theology. These were those philosophical and literary figures whose work manifested the glory of the Lord, who had contributed to the philosophical and theological arena, even if their connection with the church may have been partially or totally invisible.

Needless to say, Balthasar makes innumerable references to saints throughout the whole of his work. He is especially attracted by the Fathers of the church, the contemplatives, and the productive theologians. In the Theo-Aesthetics, it is the constellation of Christ, or the fourfold tradition of archetypal experience in the church that takes precedence. In Balthasar, Christ is the archetype and the prototype par excellence. However, those who experienced Christ first hand are also designated as archetypes because of the universal significance of their experience. In terms of their theological fruitfulness, it is the four archetypal figures in the Gospels who are most favored: John and Peter in particular, but also Paul, and especially Mary.³³ According to him, it is Mary “who presents to us the highest paradigm of what is meant by the ‘art of God,’ and by ‘well-structured sanctity’.”³⁴ As Lucy Gardner has said, the “hermeneutic of theological-personal significance,” particularly where Mary is concerned, is indubitable.³⁵ In *The Office of Peter*, Balthasar also gives prominence to the “constellation” of Jesus, but he now widens the circle, including other figures besides the four archetypes: the Twelve, John the Baptist, Joseph, Mary Magdalen, Martha, Mary, Simon of Cyrene, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Judas Iscariot—whom no Christian would consider a saint—and the constellation in the Acts of the Apostles. For Balthasar, these saints were not just dead figures from history, narrative material for catechesis, or resources for dogmatic announcements. They were the chief sources for the theological enterprise, and the primary prototypes for the configuration of the church. Balthasar claims that all the members of the constellation were made “structural principles” of the church.³⁶

The monographs dealing with the individual saints: Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Elizabeth of the Trinity, written in the first two decades of his theological career, are an important part of Balthasar’s theological corpus. So were the anthologies and translations of select texts from Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine, which Balthasar provided in the early years. The list of saints mentioned by Balthasar is endless, covering not only

figures from the Scriptures and from the early Church Fathers, but also the medieval mystics (most of whom were never canonized), the founders of the mendicant orders, and the French mystics of the Grand Siécle. One finds in his work continuous references to “the Great Tradition of Western Theology.”³⁷ There are also a considerable number of women saints featuring alongside Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, the Curé of Ars, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, Francis Xavier, de Caussade, and Peter Canisius. Balthasar manifests remarkable sensitivity to the theology of the saints. His sensitivity to the wealth and the vibrancy of the theology of the saints is especially evident in the inter-saintly debate Balthasar creates in his book *Dare we Hope “That All Men be Saved?”*³⁸ Here, Balthasar brings forward the testimony of the mystics who indicate that “hope for all men is permitted” (Mechtild of Hackeborn, Juliana of Norwich, Angela of Foligno, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Adrienne von Speyr) against that of Augustine, Gregory the Great, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, John Henry Newman, and so on, who maintain that there are, de facto, humans who are or will be eternally damned.

Clearly, Balthasar’s preferred saints were theologians, saints who, however humble, left behind autobiographical reflections, letters, treatises, in short, a record of their insights documented in what would generally be considered authentically authored texts. He maintained that the saints live out what they know in a dramatic existence, and consequently become the best interpreters of theodrama.³⁹ Gregory of Nyssa is a case in point. Balthasar states that it is the contradictions one finds in him, and which create the drama, that makes him so effective.⁴⁰ The trilogy is testimony to the fact that the saints whom Balthasar selects are the ones whom he considers to have been strategic, having provided estimable aesthetic, dramatic or insightful interpretations of Christian existence and of Christian wisdom. Steffen Lösel has accused Balthasar of a “tendency to offer an elitist view of the Christian existence,” as well as that he has a “monastic (in the larger sense of the word) perspective.”⁴¹ This may be true. But then, as Balthasar himself remarked “[t]he vast majority of canonized saints have been members of religious orders or persons who shared by vow in the form of that life.” He states that “[o]nly in exceptional instances (Thomas More, Anna Maria Taigi) have married persons been canonized.”⁴² One may wish to explain this as an issue of politics on the part of the church authorities, or as a narrow interpretation of what holiness represents. Balthasar himself claims that the evangelical state “is normative for all states of life within the Church,” and that the evangelical state and the lay state are necessary complements.⁴³ This means that Balthasar never restricted sainthood to those in religious life.

The case of Adrienne von Speyr is more complicated. Not only are her insights considered by Balthasar to be as splendid as some of those associated with the major saints, Balthasar even relies on Adrienne when she claims that she experiences the saints and communicates with them, even when some of what she professes in this regard seems to be far-fetched. In addition, there is enough evidence that she is herself counted by Balthasar to be among the saints. We are not quite sure as to how much of Balthasar’s theology of the saints rests on the visions and transports which drew her into “the turba magna of the saints.”⁴⁴ What we know is that Balthasar transcribed many of her visions and mystical commentaries,⁴⁵ and that he claims his general indebtedness to her, stating that she was the source of much that is original in his theological reflections.⁴⁶ Considering that his treatment of the saints is significantly original, there is no reason to doubt that her theology concerning the saints was influential and even authoritative for him.

Adrienne’s case provides evidence that Balthasar does not feel constrained to use the more typical saints to initiate or enliven his arguments, or to substantiate his claims. He also uses individuals whom he deemed to be pertinent for Christian thought: philosophers, poets, novelists, and dramatists, and it sometimes seems as if these are as commendable and as reliable as the saints, and their theological contribution to be taken just as seriously.⁴⁷ He claims that the two criteria that assisted him in volumes II and III of his *Herrlichkeit* were “intrinsic excellence and historical efficacy.”⁴⁸ These two criteria are central. In Balthasar, any work that exhibits the qualities of “intrinsic excellence and historical efficacy,” whether from the fields of philosophy, drama, or

literature is worth preserving. But a more theological reason for valuing such work is that, in Balthasar, everyone—and, therefore, even the lay figure—is already involved in the christological drama, whether they like it or not. David S. Yeago's avowal is not too far-fetched in this regard: "[W]hat von Balthasar writes of the philosopher can be said equally well of the poet, the novelist, or the playwright."⁴⁹ And what does Balthasar write about the philosopher? In a nutshell, he says that the philosopher could also be a theologian. More precisely, he says,

Insofar as the philosopher knows nothing of revelation (of God's Word) and looks out on a cosmos that is noetically and ontically saturated with moments of the supernatural, he will also be, at the very least—without knowing it—a crypto-theologian. The outlook of his reason will not be the outlook of a *ratio pura* but of a reason that already stands within the teleology of faith or unbelief.⁵⁰

Balthasar often treats these philosophers, and literary figures, in the same way as he does the "saints," that is, as authoritative figures—though this happens only in selected contexts. It is also possible that he wants the term "saint" to be used more widely, so that it includes contemporary saints like Adrienne and early writers like Origen and Plotinus,⁵¹ who were never canonized, and the lay "theologians," whom he discusses in volume III of his *Theological Aesthetics*.⁵²

Diagram 01. The *Communio Sanctorum*

Because of what at first sight seems like a lack of clarity on Balthasar's part, I have become ever more convinced that Balthasar's ecclesiology is best described as a series of concentric circles: the church is the middle circle, the *communio sanctorum* (all of humanity) is in the outer circle, whereas the *Communio Sanctorum* (in capital letters, referring to the saints in the narrow sense) is in the inner circle. Here, Balthasar's scheme is marked by a dialectic between the maximalist and the minimalist position: the saints in the narrow sense, and the saints in the wide sense. Furthermore, it seems to me that, in the order of redemption, Balthasar takes an inclusivist approach. He wants to emphasize the inclusiveness of salvation (as opposed to exclusivism and pluralism). In this way, according to Balthasar, Ishmael, Esau, the Pharaoh, and Israel, could be saved alongside, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the church. According to him, there is already an element of sanctification in the order of creation, as a consequence of the incarnation. Balthasar thus takes an inclusivist approach where the order of creation is concerned: human nature is graced. The same goes for the order of redemption. We do know that, throughout the centuries, the question has often arisen as to whether it is in the action of "justificatio," or that of "deificatio" that we are reconstituted. With Augustine, and with Barth, "deificatio" is contained in "justificatio."⁵³ Balthasar fluctuates between associating sanctification with the order of creation and associating it with the order of redemption. At times, deification is a higher form of reconstitution, a higher form of "justification," so to speak, limited to the few. Balthasar also fluctuates between an inclusivist and an exclusivist position. There are times when, speaking of the order of creation and of the order of redemption, Balthasar seems more disposed to include all of humanity in the "deification" process. Both where creation and where redemption is concerned, Balthasar takes an inclusivist approach: everyone is made holy. However, Balthasar's position is not as well-defined where sanctification is treated as a trait that is over and above the order of creation or of redemption. Here, his position is more exclusivist.

In the earlier work—in the early 50s—Balthasar restricts sanctification to membership within the church. He claims that the church is the only place where the subjective sanctity of the members can be realized,⁵⁴ and therefore asserts that no subjective sanctity is possible outside the church. A few years later, in *A Theology of History*, he narrows it down even more. *Sentire cum Spiritu Sancto* (what I will translate as holiness) requires a closeness to the church: a "thinking with the

Church, and hence the thinking of the Church.”⁵⁵ Writing about objective and subjective holiness, Balthasar claims that the model of authentic sanctification must be sought not simply in the church, but in the heart of the church. It

must be sought where it really exists: namely, not in the average views of the mass of sinners that populates the Church, but rather where, according to the Church’s prayer, the *forma Christi* best comes to prevail and best becomes impressed on the form of the Church—in Mary, in the saints, in all those who have consciously made their own form to wane so as to yield the primacy in themselves to the form of the Church.⁵⁶

For Balthasar it is possible to have philosophers and literary figures being part of the *Communio Sanctorum* (in the inner circle). I have already stated that Balthasar sometimes treats these philosophers and literary figures in the same way as he does the “saints,” that is, as authoritative figures whose theological contribution is authentic. Certainly, in treating them as members of the *communio sanctorum* (the outer circle), Balthasar wants to establish that *sentire Spiritus Sancti* (the thinking of the Holy Spirit (my Italics) is wider than the *sentire ecclesiae* (the thinking of the church), and is the foundation for the thinking with the church. This unity he sees between the order of creation and the order of redemption will allow him to include individuals whom he believes to be an “intimation of Christ,” and “a highway for the divine” within the inner circle. However, Balthasar’s awareness of the distinction (though never the separation) between the order of redemption and the order of sanctification will not allow him to automatically include individuals like Socrates, Buddha, and Lao Tzu, although he believes them to be an “intimation of Christ,” and “a highway for the divine,” among the saints.⁵⁷ His category of the “saints” (in the narrow sense) does not include every man whose doctrine describes a beneficial and effective way of salvation for an individual. But neither does Balthasar rule out the possibility of having someone from “outside” the ecclesial circle become authoritative on the inside: it is possible for “the keenest discernment of spirits” to have us include more unusual specimens into the category.⁵⁸

We would have to say, here, that Karl Rahner’s concept of the “anonymous Christian” can arise even among the saints. We do know that Balthasar did not approve of the Rahnerian concept of anonymous Christianity.⁵⁹ Balthasar attacked Rahner for blurring the distinction between men and women’s apprehension of the divine and divine revelation. For Balthasar, the spiritual dynamism is not inherent or natural. In spite of his criticism of Rahner (1904–1984), Balthasar was not willing to dismiss the possibility—even if he does not approve of the terminology—of having a non-Christian expressing the essence of Christianity and appealing to other Christians. Balthasar probably disapproved of Rahner simply because he found the notions of *Fides Implicita* and of *Baptismus in Voto* to be sufficient.⁶⁰ Balthasar claimed that to dismiss the possibility of having God becoming “visible in one privileged existent” is either to fall “below the level of (‘natural’) religion or [to dissolve] that possibility in a scholastic, rationalistic manner.”⁶¹ Therefore, he saw the possibility of having non-Christians manifesting God’s attributes, but also insisted that “this borderline case of natural religion demands from Christians the keenest discernment of spirits.” He stated that this discernment presupposes, besides its “No”, also “a possible Yes.”⁶² This is in agreement with a whole series of other theologians (Augustine, some of the Fathers and Henri de Lubac himself).⁶³ It is also in keeping with common (popular) practice. Few would question the continuing influence, and even holiness, of individuals such as Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) and even Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948); although these individuals do not fit into the conservative definition of the saint, and may never receive official recognition by the church hierarchy. My conviction is that it is Balthasar’s sacramental theology of revelation which allows him to acknowledge the possibility that “God’s true light” also falls “upon figures of the human imagination (myths) and speculation (philosophies), and that this light can lead through them and their partial truth to the God of revelation.”⁶⁴ This would explain Balthasar’s own respect, not only for the saint and theologian, but also for philosophers and literary figures like Georges Bernanos, Charles Péguy, and Paul Claudel. Péguy’s influence is especially pervasive. De Lubac (1896–1991)

had already identified the sacramental order of reality as that which draws humanity to a deeper participation in divine life.⁶⁵ In this regard, Balthasar is following his lead. Also on account of his sacramental theology of revelation, not only does the *communio sanctorum* in Balthasar's theology include writers and poets, philosophers and mystics, ancients and moderns, and Christians of all denominations,⁶⁶ but Balthasar seems to consider the poetry, drama, and fiction of these literary figures, as authentic lay theology. In his *Aesthetics*, Balthasar states quite clearly that, "anything which reflects, mediates, and helps us to perceive . . . beauty becomes legitimate theological material."⁶⁷ Balthasar seems to be saying that the theology of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), Charles Péguy (1873–1914), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Georg von Hardenberg, better known as Novalis (1772–1801), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Paul Claudel (1868–1955), Georges Bernanos (1888–1948) could be as pertinent as that of Thomas, if it sheds light on God's glory. For Balthasar, not only does Christian existence (in what seems like an automatic manner) lead to authentic theology, but authentic theology proceeds (in what seems like an automatic manner) from authentic Christian existence. Moreover, Balthasar is also implying that cultivation of the capacity to perceive artistic beauty and to express it is analogous to the contemplative discipline of the saints and their theology. The vocations of the Christian poets, dramatists and writers serve the *communio sanctorum* through artistic representation. As Nichols puts it, "[i]n the genealogy of theological beauty, the poets belong to the legitimate line for they are its witness."⁶⁸

While agreeing that, within Balthasar's scheme, everything and everyone seems to have theological import because—through Christ's humanity—everything and everyone has become sacramental, the question then becomes, are we then to discard the distinction between the theological and the non-theological and between the Christian saint and the non-Christian saint? Are we to consider everyone on a par? Balthasar hints at a reply to this matter in his essay on "Martyrdom and Mission." In this essay, Balthasar asserts that the martyrs whom the "crowd" venerates could very well "be called Scholl or Stauffenberg just as well as Delp or Bonhoeffer or Kolbe." Balthasar is arguing that, from the outside, Christian martyrdom "is perceived as," looks like, human martyrdom. However, there is an important difference. The two differ in the "motive" that triggers the martyrdom.⁶⁹ This is precisely what St Augustine had said: "Not the injury, but the cause makes martyrs."⁷⁰ Thus, whereas Balthasar would attribute an instructive character to all martyrdom, the two martyrdoms are different in essence. We could find the terminology of sacramentality helpful in attempting to explain the difference between the two. We use the word "sacramental" both adjectivally, referring to the authentic sacrament, and nominally, referring to an object, a gesture, or a rite which resembles the sacrament but is not instrumental in bestowing grace. Human martyrdom could be compared to the latter, and Christian martyrdom to the former. We could use the same terminology to clarify the issue of authority where the saints are concerned. In all dimensions—the existential, epistemological, and ecclesiological—the "motive" is an important element to consider where the authority of the saints is concerned, that is, it is their motive which appeals to their devotees, which makes the memory of the life and works of the saints worth conserving, which enables the authoritativeness of the doings and sayings of the saints to function authoritatively. In the meantime, it is very clear that Balthasar's theology of the saints is anthropocentric, not in the sense that it is not Christocentric, but in the sense that it respects the ascending movement of man. As a consequence, in spite of the fact that his concept of sacramentality extends to all of creation, the saints are limited to humankind. Holiness is not attributed to other creatures. Moreover, whenever his theology deals with the saints, it is restricted to what (we would presume) would be a small group of humans, or rather, that it does not extend to the whole of humanity.

A word should be said about the terms we are using. As we know, there is a vagueness concerning the meaning of the term "saints." What postmodernity has deconstructed is really the narrow concept of the saint as pious, devoted and one-dimensional. The deconstruction of the very

concept is significant because it allows for the multi-dimensionality of the individual saint. It is clear that, even within this deconstructive approach, there is a pressing demand for clarifying the terminology, particularly in view of the French Postmodern literary sense of the term “saint,” which though using the term “saints,” often canonizes the scoundrels.⁷¹ In short, here, the saints often include the not so saintly, and this does not help. Nowhere does Balthasar contrast his own theology concerning the saints with postmodern representations of sainthood, but the dissimilarity between the two is enough to beg description. First of all, postmodern saints are taken from a context which is different to that of the “real” saints. The Postmodern saints are generally taken from literary texts (e.g. Henry James’s *The Wings of the Dove* or Jean Genet’s *Our Lady of the Flowers*), from writings which deconstructed literary texts. They are more often than not fictitious figures. At other times, the saints are taken from the musical scene, from the film industry—actors or movie characters—from the world of politics, or even from everyday life.⁷² Balthasar’s saints are generally taken from the Scriptures and from the Catholic tradition, they are historical figures—often theologians of some importance—and they all play an important part in his theology. Having said that, Balthasar expresses deep appreciation for the work of literary figures such as Bernanos and Claudel whose work includes saintly figures, and he does utilize, an apocryphal young girl saint (Cordula) in his “The Moment of Christian Witness.”⁷³ Balthasar does not seem to mind using non-historical figures, but he will not confuse the saint with the scoundrel, or the good with the holy. As with John Henry Newman, Balthasar would grant that the cultivated intellect can form the ethical character apart from the religious principle, but the beau ideal of the world is not to be confused with holiness.⁷⁴

Moreover, within the postmodern scheme of things, because otherness and difference is critical,⁷⁵ practically anyone who offers an alternative vision for the world, could conveniently be promoted to sainthood. For Balthasar, originality—or even shockingly scandalous behaviour or thought—is far from enough. Neither is one’s importance to be measured by the radical challenge he or she generates in the spectators. Balthasar prefers to emphasize and explore that which grounds the saint, rather than to focus on the outrageousness of that which can be perceived, or on the adulation of the one who perceives. This is in contrast to that which we observe in celebrity culture, and this has consequences on the issue of authoritativeness. Referring to Philip Rieff, Victor Lee Austin has said that the “amoral (thus shallow and false) charisma of what is called ‘celebrity culture’” reflects “[o]ur culture’s inability to understand authority.”⁷⁶ A comparison of Balthasar’s concept of the saint to that of postmodernity would only be useful if it could ultimately be used as a corrective to it.

The function of the saints in Balthasar’s theology

Before we can insist on a theology concerning the authority of the saints, we ought to establish the place of the saints within the Balthasarian corpus, as well as ascertain that, in Balthasar’s view, the life of the saints and their theology are crucial to the task of writing significant theology and of building the church. We have already pointed out that the saints are an inspiration to Balthasar’s own spiritual journey as a Christian. But he is particularly fascinated by saints as a theologian. He wishes to be guided by the “vision, this way of looking at things and this way of thinking common to the saints.”⁷⁷ He wishes his own theology of the saints (i.e. concerning the saints) to be based on the theology of the saints (i.e. belonging to the saints). In *The Office of Peter*, Balthasar states that the word “saint,” like the term “holy” (heilig), is an analogical concept, and adds that one cannot speak of all “saints” in a univocal sense.⁷⁸ This may seem to denounce the very idea which I am working with here, namely, of a generic “theology of the saints” (concerning the saints). However, despite what Balthasar said here, it is possible to accumulate a body of knowledge which provides an overall view of what Balthasar claims about the saints in general. As a matter of fact, scholars persist in writing about Balthasar’s theology of the saints or in making a reference to such a theology. It is also possible to speak about the totality of their theology, that is, of the theology of the saints (that is, which belongs to the saints) as a whole, rather than as individual parts

unearthed at different historical moments, and, likewise, it is possible to refer to Balthasar's portrayal of the theology which belongs to the saints as a group, or more precisely, as a community. While granting that the "character of the saints' view of the world" may be "temporally conditioned," Balthasar asserts that "[o]ne must be careful not to discard as outmoded things which from century to century [the saints] have experienced again and again."⁷⁹

Needless to say, the saints have various functions in Balthasar's work. They stimulate, revitalize, debate, serve as models of reflection and creativity, synthesize.⁸⁰ As David Moss puts it, Balthasar advocates and promotes, endorses and recommends the saints "as a resource for investigation and employment."⁸¹ At this stage, it would be best to explore Balthasar's use of the saints in his own theology, to point out how and why he uses them, what it is that they allow him to see, how they help him theologize, and the various ways in which the saints function as authorities of both content and form (in the sense of method).⁸² What I would like to argue is, firstly, that Balthasar manifests remarkable sensibility to the theology of each saint and of saints overall. Secondly, that the theology of the saints—in both senses distinguished above—is integral to Balthasar's theology, and that, thirdly, in Balthasar's case, if one were to discard all references to the saints or to their work, very little of substance would remain.

To begin with, the saints function as a means for animating, enlivening and invigorating Balthasar's own theology. They are situated within his theological discourse, making his writing more vivid and exciting. Already in the early stages of his theological career, he had claimed "that few things are so likely to vitalize and rejuvenate theology, and therefore the whole of Christian life, as a blood transfusion from hagiography."⁸³ Balthasar puts this principle into practice in his own theology, so that the saints are intimately connected with Balthasar's method of doing theology, acting as a means of rejuvenation and revitalisation, but also as a resource. The records of the real-life events and sayings, the letters, the autobiographical descriptions and the reflections, act as Balthasar's primary resource. Balthasar is not concerned with biographical exactness as most hagiographers would be, but with the account of the theological meaning of the message which the saint himself or herself embodies, or which is embodied in the text produced by the saint. In a way, Balthasar's method is similar to that of medieval theology, particularly Aquinas's, where one had to reconcile the authorities.⁸⁴ But, whereas, in medieval theology, it is reason that takes precedence, it is the rational mind which brings the different authorities to bear on that particular question, with Balthasar, the ideas are never detached from their source, and it is the saints, not the ideas that are being reconciled to each other.⁸⁵

More importantly, Balthasar is not concerned with establishing the importance of individual saints, as much as with emphasizing the importance of individual saints for the whole of the tradition. The theological and the ecclesial communion are always a priority. In *The Office of Peter*, Balthasar insists on the "mitmenschlichen Konstellation," that is, the communal nature of our identity. He maintains that "[a]ll men are interrelated in a human constellation," and "[o]ne sole human being would be a contradiction in terms, inconceivable even in the abstract, because to be human means to be with others."⁸⁶ Balthasar also emphasized that, in order "to be able to function meaningfully, the individual must find his particular place in the social body."⁸⁷ These two perspectives are reflected in his theology of the saints. Balthasar emphasizes that the "massive achievements" of the saints must not be rejected, but that one should see saints "alongside" each other, and in "relationship to the others, both past and future."⁸⁸ For example, according to von Balthasar, Pascal's theology of the poor makes up for the less socially conscious mysticism of John of the Cross.⁸⁹ An isolated saint does not really seem right to him. Saints are always part of the *communio sanctorum*.⁹⁰ Quite early on, Balthasar warns against allowing "the subjective limitations of one person's experience" to be taken "as the measure for the objective truths of revelation."⁹¹ Saints have to be placed within the context of a constellation, an ecclesial or a religious community, in order to be understood. The method which Balthasar employs is precisely that of listening to the saints as they shed light on theological matters, and as they share their own

particular contribution with the rest of the community. While appreciating the contribution of each one of the saints, Balthasar does not commit himself to any of them, and recommends that other theologians do the same,⁹² that is, appreciate each one only for what it gives to the rest. Despite the Vatican's publicity in the encyclicals *Aeterni Patris* of 1879 and the *Studiorum Duce* of 1923,⁹³ Balthasar upholds that one need not commit oneself to the view that Augustine is the "Father of the West," or to the view that Aquinas is "the unsurpassable climax of theology."⁹⁴ These expressions must have sounded scandalous at the time when they were stated, but, clearly, Augustine and Aquinas are only two among the many saints and scholars whom Balthasar commends. The reason is not that their contribution is no longer relevant, but that, according to him, even Augustine and Aquinas can only be comprehended within the context of a community consisting of other saints. In this regard, Balthasar shows himself to be typically post-liberal. As with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model of religion, the intratextual intelligibility of the individual saints rests on the wider comprehension of the community of saints,⁹⁵ rather than on the extraordinariness of the sole individual saint. This has implications not just on the amount of authority which is attributed to the particular saint but also on the prolongation over time of such authoritativeness.

Significantly, Balthasar defines tradition in psychological terms: as a "consciousness" and a "memory," but his model of tradition is, above all, personalistic, one which emphasizes the value of persons, rather than of the contents of tradition or the processes involved in its transmission. Here individual persons "succeed in keeping the 'sacred deposit' alive and intact in an incredibly diverse panoply of situations."⁹⁶ This model of tradition, complemented by a doctrine of mission, makes Balthasar especially sensitive to the theology of the saints not as a static reality in one historical moment, but as an actuality that is constantly on the move throughout the ages. For example, in Balthasar, Maximus the Confessor's task "was to carry the spirit of the Areopagite into the heart of [scholastic theology's] academic distinctions . . . it was to strike mystical and spiritual sparks out of the rough scholastic lint" which one associates with scholasticism.⁹⁷ In Balthasar's work, "[t]here are connections and dialogues to be had" between saints wherever you look.⁹⁸ According to him, Origenist spirituality made its way into the Eastern tradition, through Maximus, and it found a home in the West, thanks to Jerome, Ambrose, and Cassian.⁹⁹ Maximus is heir to both the Cappadocians and the school of Alexandria (Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius and Origen.¹⁰⁰ Dialogue with Plato, with Greek tragedy and "with Asian metaphysical ways" becomes possible only through Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328). The idea of "man never measuring up," held by Blessed John of Ruysbroeck (c.1293–1381), will continue in the Idealists and Neo-Kantians.¹⁰¹ And so on and so forth. Balthasar is always on the lookout to point out these synchronic and diachronic connections. The authoritativeness of the saints comes mostly from the role which they play within the historical tradition, a role which surpasses their life-span. As Nussberger puts it, "Balthasar's project never sees the end of this movement between multiple encounters with epochs and figures in the tradition and contextual understanding of these meetings."¹⁰² In Balthasar, each and every individual saint is a juncture, an instant, where other theologies come together. Every great thinker is at the confluence of diverse tendencies. Aquinas, he says, is "the fruit of the meeting between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism," and Kant benefitted from the conflict between Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716) and David Hume (1711–1776).¹⁰³ Balthasar describes how saints point to each other, complement each other and, so to speak, create each other. For example, according to him, Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity should not be weighed "against each other," but they ought to be allowed to "confront" each other.¹⁰⁴ Balthasar claims that the motive behind this confrontation of the saints is definitive. It is not done out of "a snobbish liberal pose, but out of responsibility to the Church." Balthasar even feels duty bound to facilitate this process by taking "hold once again of material that had been lost" and by making "the central results of that dialogue [his] own."¹⁰⁵ In agreement with Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), Balthasar believes that, as soon as the work of "the great minds" is "surpassed" it is "already misunderstood."¹⁰⁶ For this reason, his in-depth exploration of the saints is almost compulsive. Moreover, in his theology, the saints themselves function as a means of approving or

disapproving “corrections” that were made to tradition over the centuries. Balthasar may use one saint to defend and clarify another saint’s theology, to express approval when some forgotten element within tradition has been restored, or disapproval when something significant has been ignored, or to endorse saints or traditions whose credibility had been put into question. Does Balthasar have a right to do this? The answer is “yes,” if we see Balthasar as part and parcel of this tradition, which is how he sees himself. It seems to me that Balthasar does not do what he does out of conceit, but out of a conviction (was this pretentiousness?) that his clarification of their position, and his defense or criticism of them could validate the saints once again, or rectify things, and thus be of service to theology and ecclesiology as a whole. Likewise, because of the personalistic model of tradition, it is possible to have saints promoting other saints who represent specific theological traditions. Balthasar points out that Maximus designates Gregory of Nyssa as “the Universal Doctor,” that Gregory was confirmed “Father of the Fathers” by Nicaea II, and that Scotus Erigena quoted Gregory more than he quoted Augustine.¹⁰⁷ In all of this, I believe that Balthasar transcends the level of doctrinal polemics. He uses Maximus to project a view of the Christian truth not as an “anti-heresy,” but as “a synthetic whole.”¹⁰⁸ This synthetic method is something which he admires in the saints, and it is clear that this is one of the characteristics which he attributes to all the saints whom he admires. It is a method which he also attempts in his own theology.

To recapitulate: It should by now be clear that how and why Balthasar uses the theology of the saints—in both senses distinguished above—is integral to Balthasar’s theology, and that the Balthasarian corpus would be reduced to a skeleton, if all references to the saints or to their work were removed. It is also clear that Balthasar theologizes through the saints. Balthasar’s use of the saints to theologize could be interpreted as a dishonest endeavour. This is because his choice of saints is selective. He uses those saints who can act as advocates, as apologists for his own theology. He uses them as the authority which not only assists his theological enterprise but authorizes his venture. But, in fact, Balthasar often gives valid reasons for eliminating the saints whose position he rejects. In using the saints in the way he does, he applies the synthetic method which he admires so much in the saints themselves.

By insisting on Balthasar’s sensibility to the saints, I am not stating that Balthasar is alone in emphasizing the saints in his theological enterprise. Nicholas M. Healy confirms that Scripture and tradition provide us with these “debate partners” with whom “we can engage” and from whom we can learn.¹⁰⁹ But Balthasar is unique, at least among contemporary theologians, in theologizing through the saints. What could be seen as a flaw is in fact an asset. Balthasar’s project was to depict and to promote a model of theology as a “collaborative enterprise,” to use Rowan Williams’ expression,¹¹⁰ and an image of the church as a “colloquium” or “conversational community,” to use Francis Sullivan’s.¹¹¹ Although the latter terms are not Balthasar’s, Balthasar held that “our need for one another as debate partners . . . our need for genuine others who can challenge us and thereby help us to receive and embody truth more adequately” unifies us “in our diverse activities.”¹¹² Not only is it possible, but also necessary for us to have “a genuine intellectual dialogue . . . with an earlier author.”¹¹³ Here, Balthasar adopts the theme from dialogical philosophy, where *communio* involves letting the other be other. Furthermore, whereas Modernism is characterized by a break with the past, and therefore, by a break with authority, Balthasar seeks to have the saints function as links to previous “concrete and unique situation[s]” in the past, in order to create connections with the past. In Balthasar’s theology, the saints inform the present.¹¹⁴ Thus, writing about his study of the Greek Fathers: Gregory, Origen, and Maximus, Balthasar states that

[w]e should like rather to penetrate right to those vital wellsprings of their spirit, right to that fundamental and hidden intuition that directs every expression of their thought and that reveals to us one of the great possibilities of attitude and approach that theology has adopted in a concrete and unique situation. ¹¹⁵

Balthasar does not just—effortlessly—transfer chunks of past history into the present and pretend that that was sufficient. According to him, the rejuvenation of the thought of the Fathers requires “a total critique.”¹¹⁶ The implication is that even if the thought may not provide much “support to the task of the theologian today,” yet it is important that the church keeps the memory alive,¹¹⁷ even if it does so by critiquing it, because only then will the whole of the theological substance be grasped. Balthasar’s theological approach is thus evidently pro-dramatic, enabling him to highlight the interactions—even the disagreements—between the saints within tradition over time. The dramatic method enables him to embrace theological differences which he would otherwise not have been able to embrace. In fact, there is a proliferation of drama on account of the saints. In Balthasar, truth is “symphonic,” and, to the extent that our views “contain truth partially,” we are contributing “to the living organism of unity,” when we contribute our own share.¹¹⁸ On account of his dramatic concept of truth, Balthasar can explain “contradictions” away, as possibly being “the simple and necessary expression” of a dramatic vision, or as “[t]he outlines of a system of thought that is in progress.”¹¹⁹ Through this “dramatic” perspective, not only is Balthasar able to explain away the contradictions pertaining to individual saints, but also those pertaining to tradition. Balthasar harbours the hope that “these contradistinctions” may one day “be harmonized and diminished in a ‘synthetic’ outlook that embraces all the winding, sinuous turns of thought that have been traversed.”¹²⁰ For the time being, however, “the form of theology must. . . remain unconcluded, because only the Kyrios has the full vision of the final form of revelation.”¹²¹

It is only on account of Balthasar’s model of theology as a collaborative enterprise, involving discernment, of his model of the church as a colloquium or conversational community, and of his model of the structure of the truth as dramatic, that Balthasar is able to pose “modern questions” which are “set by the peculiar situation of French and German Catholic theology in the mid-twentieth century” to saints long-departed.¹²² As Howsare has stated, the concerns which Balthasar has are typically modern: “individuality, difference, personhood, historicity, event, freedom.”¹²³ There are clear examples where the saints function as an instrument in Balthasar’s hands in order to elucidate these modern philosophical and theological issues. The saints act as a medium which provides new insights on familiar material, providing a different standpoint on the subject under discussion. Two examples of this should suffice. Let us first take the example of freedom: Balthasar was very much aware that the “one great anxiety” of the Modernists was “to find a way of conciliation between the authority of the Church and the liberty of believers.”¹²⁴ Balthasar therefore uses the saints to try and reconcile the two. His proposal in this regard will be a much more active form of Eckhart’s and of Heidegger’s “Gelassenheit.”¹²⁵ A second example would be that of “modern evolutionism,” which Balthasar describes in *Engagement with God*. Balthasar uses the saints to argue that a world based on the principles of the “aggressiveness of the strong and the destruction of the weak,” on “exploitation” and “suppression” is “quite unacceptable for us Christians.”¹²⁶ In contrast, Balthasar uses the saints to emphasize the paradox that the greatest power is to be found in powerlessness.

To recapitulate: we have so far argued that, in Balthasar’s theology, the saints stimulate, revitalize theology. They synthesize, clarify misunderstandings, elucidate specific theological issues, and so on. We have not as yet answered the question concerning the authority of the saints but we have been exploring Balthasar’s use of the saints as an authoritative source of knowledge and language. Patrick Sherry once said that the task of theology is not simply to use the saints to teach people the meaning of “theory laden theological terms.” Its task is rather to be able to create a theological language using the saints’ lives.¹²⁷ Balthasar’s sensitivity to the theology of the saints has made available to him a whole miscellanea of theological terms. The saints function as an authority for him both where theological content and where theological language is concerned.

Sometimes, perhaps too often, the saints function as validation for Balthasar’s own theological positions. In this sense, they are the authority to which he refers when his arguments are not yet

sufficiently convincing. Howsare has said that Balthasar's method of doing theology actually requires that he "point out a whole list of people to defend his cause."¹²⁸ Saints are used to substantiate and authenticate his claims. Balthasar uses the saints to corroborate, to demonstrate, and to verify his own assertions. He seeks support in them. He uses them to confirm beliefs that either have already been established through his use of other sources, or else simply to sanction his own beliefs. In this case, the saints do not really add much to what has already been said. Some work has been done on the hagiographer and his or her use of the saints. The use of hagiographic material as a vehicle for affirming the writer's authority has been explored and legitimated.¹²⁹ In this sense, Balthasar's use of the saints to support his work is legitimate. Karen Kilby claims that Balthasar inverts the process. He arrives at his case in the process of presenting the various contributions of his figures, rather than refers to these figures to substantiate a case that he would like to defend.¹³⁰ My problem with this objection is that it does not emphasize enough the value of having chosen the contributors, which choice would have been made before the actual presentation, so that it is in itself significant and integral to the case that is being put forward.

In Balthasar, the saints also function as an excuse for experimenting with new methods. The method which Balthasar proposes for the study of the saints is what he calls "a sort of supernatural phenomenology" of the mission of the saints, or what he calls, "a hagiography 'from above.'"¹³¹ The term "phenomenology" usually refers to any system of thought that has to do with appearance. In Husserl's conception, phenomenology is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness, and with the study of such structures and phenomena. Balthasar suggests "a sort of supernatural phenomenology" of the mission of the saints. Balthasar is not really interested in arguing that all reality is directly or reflectively present to consciousness, or that the only knowledge we can have is that of phenomena. He is not interested in denying the thing in itself. Neither is he interested in rejecting the possibility of knowledge of the substance of a thing in the metaphysical sense. Balthasar is suggesting phenomenology as a method. He is suggesting "a purely descriptive approach to that which appears to us, without bringing in theory or explanations," and one which "focuses on the manner in which the subject structures, or 'constitutes' the world differently, on the basis of different experiences and cultural backgrounds, but also on the basis of adaptation to other subjects through interaction and communication."¹³² It is a descriptive science of consciousness, a science that describes the structure of intentional experience, and hence of experience itself. The phenomenological method claims to be relatively unadulterated, since it prefers pure description to explanation and interpretation. It is a descriptive theory of the essence of pure experiences and, therefore, as a method, it is certainly suited for a theology about the saints.¹³³ We could say that Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) gives Balthasar a method to describe phenomena as observed by the saints, and as observed in the saints through the eyes of God, as well as the license to do it. The method is especially helpful because, here, the form, the shape of consciousness is not a private item. It is public, and it can be shared. Husserl's intentional realism would have suited Balthasar: we are not trapped in our own mind. Balthasar would have wanted to bracket out unexamined assumptions so that the phenomena could speak for themselves. What is interesting is that Balthasar is not concerned with the paranormal or the blatant extrasensory phenomena sought out by the inquisitive. His objective is strictly to try and identify, understand, and describe, the structures of consciousness of the saint, and the distinctive, but typical phenomena, that appear in the acts of consciousness of a saint, who abandons him or herself to God.

I do not think anyone can coherently argue that Balthasar provides his readers with a full-blown phenomenology of the consciousness of the saints, but he does use the method of phenomenology to shed some light on the consciousness of the saints. Nichols has said that Balthasar's phenomenology of the saints is particular in that, unlike late nineteenth and early mid-twentieth century phenomenology, his phenomenology is at the service of Christian ontology. Balthasar's is not the positivistic phenomenism of Hegel, nor the noumenalism of Kant.¹³⁴ The

phenomenological approach seems to allow Balthasar to identify and describe the “structure of anticipations” which the saints experience, the noema (the object or content of the thought, judgment, or perception)—to use Husserl’s terminology—without, in the process, ignoring the object which they experience, that is, God. This is what Balthasar does in *Wahrheit der Welt* (TL1), but instances of this are also evident in his hagiography. There is also, in Balthasar, an attempt at an interpretive phenomenology, and not just a descriptive one. He is as concerned with meanings, as he is with phenomena.

Significantly, Balthasar also uses the saints to handle ecumenical issues, insisting, in the process, that the saints are authoritative in this regard, and that both the ecumenical movement and academic theology have a lot to learn from the saints. He claims that the differences between denominations “can only be handled by living organisms which have a capacity to meet and understand each other, only because they all can be animated by just one life: that of God in Christ.”¹³⁵ Clearly, abstract dogmatics are not sufficient, for in their abstraction they are not capable of resolving the differences. It is not surprising that Balthasar sees a saint (Thérèse) as the solution to the dogmatic issues of the Reformation,¹³⁶ just as he sees Maximus’s Christocentric Cosmology as the evangelical answer to Hegel.¹³⁷ Balthasar used her to teach “Catholic integration,”¹³⁸ and claimed that she could help resolve various other issues:

the rejection of Old Testament justification by works; the demolition of one’s own ideal of perfection to leave room for God’s perfection in man; the transcendent note in the act of faith . . . the existential fulfillment of the act of faith; and, finally, disregard for one’s own failings . . . ¹³⁹

This exploration of the multiple ways in which the saints function in Balthasar’s theology is certainly not comprehensive, but it should be enough to demonstrate that, in his own theology, Balthasar takes the saints and their theology very seriously. The saints are his models, his guides, his resources, even his sources. In his work, the authority of the saints is evoked and articulated in a variety of ways. Balthasar articulates their authoritativeness by praising their achievements, and by endlessly referring to them in his writings. In the way in which Balthasar uses the saints, and in his references to them, Balthasar attributes to them an authority that, though difficult to describe, is undeniable. The rest of this chapter will help us to determine the importance which Balthasar attributes to the saints within theology in general, and within the church, as well as to clarify what it is that we understand by authority where the saints are concerned.

Balthasar on the function of the saints in theology

We have just seen that the “authority of the saints” as we are using the phrase refers primarily to the accreditation which Balthasar gives them, that is, to the authority which he attributes to them, simply by using their work recurrently, by mentioning their name, by praising their theological contribution, and by attributing to them a critical function in his theology. Writing about expertise as argument, Zoltan P. Majdik and William M. Keith have claimed that “broadening expertise beyond the bounds of accreditation” is risky, because it “renders expertise completely relativistic, and reduces its democratic potential to individual subjective opinion.”¹⁴⁰ In this book, the phrase “authority of the saints” refers to the explicit recommendation of the saints as competent and worth considering, even when specific arguments put forward by the saints may be wrong. The phrase refers to an endorsement by individuals, by theology, or by the church, of the saints’ life and teachings. The implication is that any theology that is built on that of the saints may also be regarded as authoritative. I would agree with Kilby that “there is no real suggestion . . . that Balthasar would want to point to his own saintliness, to his own sanctity, as in any way a guarantee for his theology.”¹⁴¹ But Balthasar would certainly want to point to his dependence on the theology of the saints as a guarantee for his theology. Balthasar regarded the life of the saints and their theology as crucial to the task of writing significant theology. In this respect, Balthasar considered his own method of doing theology as exemplary. He maintained, not only that theology

should contemplate the saints and that authentic theology should use the saints to stimulate it, but, by his example, he also maintained that the primary role of theology is to serve the saints by elucidating their accounts of their own encounter with God. Therefore, with Balthasar we have theology through the saints and theology for the saints (that is, in the service of the saints). Balthasar insisted that the academic distinctions of scholastic theology required “mystical and spiritual sparks”¹⁴² and the saints provided that. The solution to the predicament in which theology had found itself was to be found in the saints, who could counteract the arid style of a theology that was disconnected from life, and who could restore to theology a dynamism that Balthasar believed was essential. According to Balthasar, the saints function as the way for integrating theology with spirituality,¹⁴³ which was why he thought of them as the proper solution to the predicament in which theology often found itself. Balthasar complains that “theologians have tended to treat [the] opinions [of the saints] as a sort of by-product, classifying them as spiritualité or, at best, as théologie spirituelle.”¹⁴⁴ The problem which disturbed Balthasar ultimately concerned the form which theology should acquire in order that “spirituality . . . could join with it,” as he puts it.¹⁴⁵ Balthasar maintains that the only theologies which “became vitally effective in history” were the ones “which bore their spirituality not as an addition but within themselves, which embodied it in their innermost being.”¹⁴⁶ It is only in the saints that this integration has taken place. Spirituality is thus understood as the “subjective side” of dogma.¹⁴⁷ The saints are portrayed as models for genuine theologians, and of authentic theology, thanks to their ability to overcome the “divide” between spiritual theology and dogmatic theology,¹⁴⁸ and between “theoretical and affective theology.”¹⁴⁹

The ecclesial function of the saints

For Balthasar, the function of the saints is not restricted to the production of theology and to their contribution to the method of doing theology. The theological importance of the saints extends to the wider ecclesiological domain. Their import must be seen within the context of the whole body of the church. For one thing, as Gerard Mannion has said, the saints “have also helped build up the body of teaching and contributed to the authoritativeness of the Roman Catholic Church’s mission and witness in the world.”¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Balthasar sees the saints as much more than a resource, or even a source, for theology. In brief, Balthasar does four things: firstly, he interprets the saints as principal contributors to the authority of the church, so that the Magisterium can only claim authority because of the contribution of the saints. Secondly, he sees the Magisterium (as well as theology) as the mouthpiece of the saints, so that the Magisterium and theology are non-authoritative unless they serve the saints and are in synch with the tradition of the saints. Thirdly, Balthasar correlates the authority of the church with the authority of holiness, so that holiness becomes the more pertinent authoritative element within the church. Finally, Balthasar allies the authority of holiness with the authority of saints, so that the authority claimed by individuals becomes meaningless unless accompanied by holiness, and any authority attributed to the non-holy becomes contradictory.

In Balthasar’s theology, the saints have a more pronounced claim to credibility, they are more deserving of respect, they are more qualified at providing instruction to the church, they merit more consideration than the ordinary Christian. Balthasar sees the saints as more capable of challenging the Christian community and more deserving of being heard, remembered, quoted, but also confronted. Balthasar evidently sees their position within the Christian community as a privileged one, although this privileged position is not one assumed by them. Authority may be assigned and attributed to the saints by others, through a conscious decision on their part, in which case it is a kind of bestowal of authority, but authority may also be aroused in others without any conscious encouragement either from the saints themselves or from other recognized authorities. In this case, it is more a recognition of an authority that has been manifested, rather than a bestowal of it.

Whichever way, any authority that they may have been assigned, or that may become manifest in them, and consequently recognized, is always to be seen within an ecclesial context. It is others within the *communio* who recognize this authority and who ascribe it to them. All the saints are *animae ecclesiasticae*, and it is in the spirit of the church that they are judged. For instance, Maximus is described as “one of the founders of the Middle Ages, even in the Latin West.” He is “the philosophical and theological thinker who stands between East and West.”¹⁵¹ He is a “genius,” a “biblical theologian,” a “philosopher,” a “mystic,” a “theologian,” a “monk,” a “man of the Church,”¹⁵² a “martyr of the intellectual life,”¹⁵³ “the last great theologian and martyr of the Christological controversies.”¹⁵⁴ Similar praise can be located for other saints whom Balthasar examines. From this ecclesial perspective, Gregory of Nyssa is “the most profound Greek philosopher of the Christian era, a mystic and incomparable poet.”¹⁵⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius is “the man who may well be the most profound thinker of the sixth century.”¹⁵⁶ Origen is a “man of the Church,” a martyr, a great lover of the Scriptures, a “daring theologian” who took that which was good and positive in Hellenism and “put it at the service of Christ’s truth.”¹⁵⁷ Thomas is the *kairos*, mediating between the ancient and the modern world.¹⁵⁸ John’s spiritual doctrine is valid for everyone, although only analogically, not literally.¹⁵⁹ Unless we consider these words to be mere exaggerations or mere rhetoric, we have to take these comments seriously. Balthasar is stating very clearly that the saints are indispensable for the church, that the recognition of their contribution is mandatory, and that their function is authoritative both synchronically and diachronically.

In Balthasar, the saints also function as unifying figures within the community. Yves Simon (1903–61) has argued that a community requires means to unify and to generate its common action.¹⁶⁰ Balthasar once wrote that “we should not underestimate the community-building power” of “the memory of a great dead person.”¹⁶¹ In this respect, the saints resemble Max Scheler (1874–1928)’s “value persons.” Memories of them are mandatory, if the community is to survive. We have to remember that community building was an important part of Balthasar’s project, and his judgment on all kinds of individuals is based on whether he interprets their experiences as ones which “bound them . . . the more intimately” to the community of faith, rather than which separated them from this community.¹⁶² In actual fact, Balthasar’s preoccupation with unity could, paradoxically, become counter-productive to any theology about the authority of the saints. But for the moment, it is sufficient to note the emphasis which Balthasar places on the unifying effect of a commemoration of the saints.

Balthasar may not have stated that the saints have the power or right to give orders, to make decisions, and to enforce obedience, but he does furnish them with an authority that makes demands. In this sense, it is analogical to that of the Magisterium where theological authority is concerned. Balthasar is clearly presenting the saints as a corrective, particularly in challenging situations where official authority becomes distorted. He presents them as a coping mechanism in situations where the sinfulness of the empowered authority requires some kind of regulation, thus acting as the authentic Magisterium.

The authority of the saints

Some further clarifications are called for. For instance, what authority do the saints manifest? And what kind of authority does Balthasar attribute to the saints? Furthermore, what response do the saints demand? Or rather, what does Balthasar believe our response to the saints should be? If the right of the church to teach requires the duty of obeisance on the part of the faithful, applying this to the saints becomes problematic. The answer to these questions will be followed by an inquiry into whether the saints can demand any recognition of their authority (or rather, whether Balthasar thinks we can remain indifferent to the saints). We shall take these one at a time, beginning with the first of them: that is, the nature of the authority which the saints manifest.

The “authority” which the saints manifest and which Balthasar attributes to the saints consists primarily in the competency and the credibility of their being, their action and their words. There is something with the saints which makes them worthy of attention, deserving of serious consideration. They inspire, convince, persuade (though not necessarily by means of reasonable arguments). There is something in them, in their actions and in their writings, which makes their statements moving and often irrefutable. Even when they are wrong, they deserve to be considered. The aptitude of such individuals is noteworthy, their contribution always to be taken seriously, and any so-called minor blunders do not affect either their authority, nor the authoritativeness of their judgments.

Balthasar attempts to provide a description of this authority in several of his works. In his *Aesthetics*, Balthasar writes of “the shaping power and the genius of the human spirit” and “the overpowering historical influence” which the human spirit may bequeath.¹⁶³ Although he is hereby describing the human spirit in a broad way, these words could easily be applied to the saints. In *The Christian State of Life*, moreover, Balthasar talks about the “imprint,” the “mark,” which the founder saints may place upon a candidate for the religious life.¹⁶⁴ In his interview with Angelo Scola, Balthasar speaks of “the ecclesial radiance of a person.”¹⁶⁵ The implication is that the *anima ecclesiastica*, and particularly the saints, have an appeal, an attraction about them that draws others to their way of life. It is like standing in front of an artistic object and like acting within a drama. You are drawn towards it and into it. Clearly, the authority of the saints which Balthasar is suggesting is more than just moral and cognitive. More precisely, it goes beyond the respect which others express for their good character or knowledge. It is an authority that is derived from the side of the saints themselves, not from the reactions of their devotees to them. In *Theo-Logic*, we are told that the saints can “restore anyone who has fallen.”¹⁶⁶ Such a statement on Balthasar’s part makes it clear that the authority rests as much with the saints as with their adherents. Is this to be interpreted as an attribution to the saints of the restoration that may only take place through Christ? It could be interpreted in that way. However, this is actually biblical (1Cor 6:2). Some translations would speak of “the Lord’s people,” rather than the saints. Balthasar’s own exegesis would go a step further. He understands the *communio sanctorum* to be itself Christ, and consequently competent to share in the restitution which is possible through him.

Let us now attend to the second issue: What authoritativeness do the saints demand? Or rather, what does Balthasar believe our response to the saints should be? How obliged are we to respond to the demands which the saints make? Although to some extent, it is peculiar to write about the saints presuming a response from others, what Balthasar wrote about the saints was partly meant as an appeal to the theologian, to the reader, to the Christian, and to the church, to turn to the saints and to attend to them. Therefore, this issue of the response is one thing we should discuss, even if hypothetically, since there is no authority unless there are those to whom this authority is being addressed and on whom demands are being made to respond or to comply to such demands. Edith Wyschogrod has said that *

Pauline Dimech explores whether and to what extent we may attribute authority to the saints, but also how we may ensure that it is the saints, and not the scoundrels, whose influence persists and whose memory endures. The thing that drives her research is the thought that history is full of examples of individuals who held positions of official authority that they did not deserve. Dimech is convinced that Hans Urs von Balthasar can help us clarify the issues surrounding the authority of the saints. Besides establishing Balthasar’s involvement with the enterprise, this book tries to establish the theological foundations upon which the authority of the saints

would have to be based in theory, and, possibly, already, however implicitly, based in practice.

"Students of Balthasar, be they Catholic or not, in leadership positions in the Church, in ministry, following the baptismal call of the faithful, will find this book challenging. Dimech's work stirs up the pot already brewing through contemporary debates on Balthasar. . . . This book daringly advances an important area of research in Balthasar studies which it is hoped will stimulate much more debate and discussion in the academy and Church as a whole."

--Dominic Robinson, SJ, from the foreword

"Pauline Dimech has done something impressive: in the crowded field of von Balthasar scholarship, she has identified a key question which has so far received no sustained study. Many have commented on the significance of the saints for von Balthasar's theology, but no one before Dimech has given sustained attention to the vital question of their authority. This well-written monograph, then, represents a significant contribution to the literature, and should stimulate further work in the study of von Balthasar, and in Catholic theology more generally."

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