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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR AS A "FREE" THEOLOGIAN

Knowing the theological atmosphere of the mid 20th century in Europe was essential for perception of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology. This epoch can be called "back to the roots", because the attention was paid to ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church), it was the time of the patristic, historical, liturgical studies, and the liturgical theology itself, aimed at the-evaluation of the place of worship in the church life. The thought of H. U. von Balthasar belongs to the "new theology" movement, which emerged in the post-war Europe and survived many ordeals. The unity of man, God and another person can be noticed. Such theology emphasizes the openness of man to God, and on the basis of this openness we can see the freedom of grace. Ideas of H. U. von Balthasar have been rediscovered lately and his aesthetic approach to it is of a big interest to the researches. He tackled quite controversial issues, so it is really interesting. Here his theological project will be presented in a short and precise way in the talk of American bishop fr. Robert Emmet Barron along with the interview of dr Karen Kilby will be of great help to us here.

Key words: beauty, aesthetics, Christ, theology, patristics, God's glory.

Hans Urs von Balthasar is famous Swiss theologian, who is considered to be one of the most important thinkers of the XX century. Along with Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan, he was looking for an adequate response to the Western modernism, as they thought it led to the rejection of Christianity by people. That is why the scientific research connected to this important thinker is considered to be a **relevant** issue nowadays. The **problems** that will be tackled in the article are the redemption and theological aesthetics as seen by Balthasar. Still, his aesthetics is considered to be quite a complicated one, so here **the task** of the author of this article is to present it in a quite clear in precise way. Let us not forget, that 20th century was full of cruelty, which did not inspire people to be closer to each other. This tragic experience influenced Hans Urs von Balthasar. Here he agreed with another Swiss theologian Karl Barth, that in 20th century people forgot, that humanism includes the love to the neighbour [1]. This Barth's opinion was criticized by Heinrich Jochums and Lothar Gassmann. Gassmann stated, that otherworldly God 'disappears' and due to his dialectic gives credit to relativism and scepticism, therefore the atheistic 'humanism' can or must spread over the earth. In Johums opinion, the result of this is that God dissolves into the love of the neighbour, and therefore things like [...] dictatorship take over [2]. The main **goal** of the article, is to show some aspects of the theology presented by Balthasar.

When it comes to publications, that have been written on the topic before, it can be mentioned, that Balthasar wrote such books as: *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols, (Edinburgh, 1982–91; first published 1961–9), *Theo-Drama*, 5 vols. (San Francisco, 1988–98; first published 1973–83). If we talk about the publications about Balthasar in Poland, the works of Krakow scholar Marek Urban *In Quest of Aesthetics. Hans Urs von Balthasar Reading of Vladimir Soloviev* can be mentioned. That is an article, published in the book named *Russian Thought in Europe. Reception, polemics, development* (red. T. Obolevitch, T. Homa, J. Bremer, WAM, Kraków 2013, Humanitas. Studia Kulturoznawcze). Very precise analyses of Hans Urs von Balthasar was given by fr. Robert Emmet Barron in his oral interviews and in the foreword to the book written by Balthasar *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?: With a Short Discourse on Hell*.

The important thing to emphasize at the beginning of the article is the fact, that Balthasar presents a holistic image of the person, which differs him from other mystical or philosophical anthropologists; because they are always ready to sacrifice something in order to achieve human illusion of completeness, the imaginary integrity of the human image. Mystery of a man finds its answer in the mystery of God, relation to God allows a person to discover the image and likeness of Him, who always remains a mystery, thus justifies the mystery of the person. The search for an answer to the question of human humanity, a response to that question, which combines the creation and grace, are our theological search for Jesus Christ.

Christology is always a measure and purpose of Anthropology that comes out of the limitations of the creative human being and is performed only in the fullness of the God-man. Man does not disappear in Revelation, on the contrary – he becomes true, freer, not only in one's assimilation to God, but also in the aspects, that radically distinguishes him or her from its Creator. Fundamentals are, firstly, self-discovery and "self-announcement" of God in Jesus Christ, and secondly, it is a participation in the divine life in the Holy Spirit. Balthasar distinguishes three basic anthropological models: pre-Christian, Christian and post-Christian. It is not a radical separation, because pre- and post-Christian anthropology are permeated by Christianity. In the first case as a preparation and expectation, in the second – as a constant presence of loss, that blurts out in pseudo-ideological searches and in conscious denial.

Background. Let us look at the major influences on his later thinking. He was born in Lucerne, a Catholic section of Switzerland. John Paul the II was going to create him a cardinal of the Church. Balthasar accepted the proposal, very reluctantly, but died just before the ceremony. In his young age Balthasar was fascinated by Mozart and was quite an accomplished pianist, which had a big influence on his thought. Balthasar wrote his dissertation on scatological problem, but in German literature, not so much in German theology or philosophy. Germanistic was his another influence. That very much shaped his approach to theology, which was aesthetic, rather than philosophical. His study of theology began with standard scholastic presentation of Thomas of Aquinas. He found it dry, lifeless and unconvincing. Then Balthasar met Henri-Marie Joseph Sonier de Lubac, SJ (known as Henri de Lubac, the Patristic specialist). Young Henry de Lubac taught young Balthasar mainly patristic: Origen of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, Jerome of Stridonium etc. For Balthasar that was like a breath of fresh air, a new theological world. The last influence on his thinking made an Ignatian Spirituality. The interesting thing was that he did not pursue a career of academics; he did not have a major teaching position in a university [3–4].

Main theological ideas. As fr. Robert Emmet Barron states in his interview: "The theological thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar is quite complex. His works are luminous and complicated. There are a few main ideas, present in it.

Firstly, the idea of three transcendentals. Can be mentioned. This is the classical idea of the True, the Good and the Beautiful. In the modern tradition there was Immanuel Kant, who looked at them precisely in their order. He writes *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which is on the True, *The Critique of Practical Reason* on the Good, *The Critique of Judgement*, which is on the Beautiful. Balthasar consciously reverses this order. He begins with the Beautiful. Probably, what he sensed was, that in our modern or post-modern world it is much more appropriate approach. When you start with the true or the Good, people tend to block you and say: "Who are you to tell me what is right and true?" There is something less threatening about starting with the Beautiful. He noticed that a lot of theologians, like Augustine of Hippo, Origenes, Saint Bonaventure, John Henry Newman C.O. and Saint John of the Cross also began with the Beautiful. Another observation about this: it was an answer to Luther, who was quite sceptic about using the Beautiful. We tend to think of the Beautiful as a subjective category, but in Balthasar's opinion, this category is as objective as the True and the Good. The Beautiful occurs in the crossroads of three things: *integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (harmony), and *claritas* (radiance). This thought of Aquinas is taken by Balthasar as fundamental. He states, that when the objectively Beautiful strikes you, it stops you. So we talk about *aesthetic arrest*. It means, that when you move along, something beautiful can strike you so much, that you stop in your tracks. Then it claims you and sends you as a missionary.

In accordance with this thought Christ is the prime example of the Beautiful. Let us think of it according to three sides of the Beautiful. When we talk about *integritas* (wholeness), we can state, that Christ is One. His life is about one thing, "I have come to do the will of my father" – there we have an integrity to his life. Moreover, there is *consonantia* (harmony) of divinity and humanity. Divine and Human meet in Christ and they are in harmonious, consonant relationship. Finally, *claritas* (radiance) means the shine, appearance and the radiance. Divinity and humanity are radiant in him. That is why Pontius Pilate, the evangelist despite himself, says, when he sees the Christ: "Look at the man!". Balthasar loves this line. On the other hand, St. Thomas says, when seeing Jesus Christ: "My Lord and my God!". Therefore, in Jesus Christ his divinity and humanity in their consonant relationship become radiant. To conclude, in Christ we can see the Beautiful *par excellence*. Imagine someone at mass, someone, who hears the word of God, someone, who hears even vaguely about Jesus. When that for is clear, it stops you. Furthermore, it names you, claims you and it sends you, just as Christ 2000 years ago stopped his Apostles on their tracks, named them and in some cases renamed them and then sent them. The same thing happens today.

Balthasar complaint, that much of theology is *sitting theology*. What one needs is *unkneeling theology*, where one is in the worship position to the Christ, who will name you, claim you and send you. It is very dynamic interpersonal consonance, because in Him two freedoms meet: a divine freedom and human freedom. The drama of a New Testimony is the play between these two freedoms. Christ says: "I only do what my heavenly Father is doing". We see a beautiful consonant play between two freedoms." This is the key to Balthasar's christology and anthropology. By his consonant display of divine and human freedom Jesus opens up a new acting area into which we can enter.

Majority is predicated upon autonomy, Balthasar states, that it is a distortion of real freedom, which comes from a surrender to a divine freedom, we mean names me-claims me-sends me scheme. As a Christian, a person enters a whole acting area of Jesus, and that is the whole drama of a spiritual life. That is an ignition exercises, to take a decision, which direction one's freedom is going to take. That is the heart of *Theo-Drama*. One of the key ideas there is that a person does not know who he or she is until finding one's mission. This is a Biblical idea. I do not know my identity until I receive my mission from God and I have done it. That is why Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, Saul becomes Paul and Simon becomes Peter. When they find their mission, they find their identity. When you find your role in Theo-Drama, then you know who you are [...].

Another important aspect of Hans Urs von Balthasar's ideas is presented in his Book *Mysterium Paschale* (translated by Aidan Nichols, Norwich 2000). Here we can find a resolution of the famous theological problem. We talk here about fact, that Thomas Aquinas, who was a Doctor of the Church, said, that God became human to save people from sins, if they had not sinned, by implication, we would not have the incarnation. He came here for particular purpose to save people from sins. Duns Scotus, one of the most important philosopher-theologians of the High Middle Ages, stated, that even without sins he would have come to manifest the divine glory. In Balthasar's opinion, this speculative theoretical theological debate is a false problem. The reason is that the glory of the God is revealed precisely in a measure that He solves the problem of a sin. The book is an illustration of how the problem is solved.

God's glory is revealed in the acrobatic act of love, by which the Father sends the Son all the way down into God forsakenness, to bring the world back to the divine life. Here we can find the Glory of the God display. The incarnation is directed downwards: the Son of God becomes human, so he humbles himself. The next step is that he accepts even death, death on a cross. So the Son of God goes into humanity, then goes all the way down, accepting even death on a cross (the worse way to die). The incarnation goes into the limits of God forsakenness. Therefore, we can trace a downward journey of the Son of God. The purpose of this is to grab even the last and least of sinners, who have wandered as far from God as they can. They run away from the Father, but they run into the arms of the Son. In the resurrection Jesus Christ grabbed everybody, in the spirit he brings them back to the Father. The Cross is the Redemption of all. An interesting controversial idea of the hope comes from this. The hope that all the people can be saved. This hope does not come from being optimistic or having positive feelings, but from the objective fact of a Cross. That what Balthasar means, when he speaks of reasonable hope [5].

By many researches of the religion Hans Urs von Balthasar is considered to be the most influential theologian of the 20th century. Professor (a doctor then) of Durham University Karen Kilby, in her interview named *Why Study: Hans Urs von Balthasar*, talked about him as about a marginalized thinker during his lifetime, as he was not taken too seriously then. Recently he has become increasingly influential, to the point that now probably more has been written about Hans Urs von Balthasar than any other 20th century Catholic theologian and some people are presenting him as the major figure of modern Catholicism and the Church father for our times. It is quite complicated thing to answer the question why he has become popular. Different people are drawn to him for quite different reasons. He is a very rich, post-modern thinker, because he rejects a certain kind of rationalism. Also, he can be quite appealing to protestant thinkers and conservative Catholics. There is a vast body of writing that he has created. He is quite distinctive. He was writing in a quite different style and pattern than anyone else was doing it, which means it takes a while to get used to it. Balthasar was taken away from a theological world for a while.

The important thing, when we talk about his freedom of thinking, is that he was not bound by the structures of his education, needs of students or warning of colleagues, he even became his own publisher, which meant no control by the publisher. That gives a kind of creativity to his thought, which meant there is genuinely more new interesting avenues opened up in it than it might be. It can be said, that there is even some kind of danger in his deliberations. So professor Kilby would place herself somewhere between that position where people used to marginalize him and where people now analyze him and say: "There is a great deal of interest in his thought!". But one should probably approach it with certain awareness. In the history of theology there are thinkers, whom you take good ideas for, but you do not follow them, and then there are masters able to generate a series of disciples. Anselm of Canterbury can be put in the first category. He is someone that you react to; you get good ideas from, even though you may not follow his system. Saint Thomas Aquinas is put in the 'master' category, people see that he is actually producing a body of thought, he can lead you into a way of doing theology, Getting ideas from Hans Urs von Balthasar is really a safer way of using him than to allow him to become a theological master, although he is still very fruitful for study. Karen Kilby also does not consider thinking of Hans Urs von Balthasar as a theological master to be a nice way of approaching him. There are some things that students should pick up with awareness, before thinking: "Yes, this is the way theology is done!". It is a general style, tone of his theology. He is an expositor of grand vistas, but still full of good ideas [6-7].

As a **conclusion** it can be said, that hopefully, in future more works about this great thinker will be written and some new aspects of his outstanding theology will be presented by the scholars all over the world. He can really somehow can be called 'free', because he tried to show some new way of looking at theology and showed, that 20th century was full of new need and challenges when it comes to theology and spirituality. People need God, they long for spirituality, so theological research is quite important nowadays. Balthasar wrote: "The will of God coincides with absolute freedom, so for a person to fulfill God's will in every situation, including the most difficult, means acquisition freedom. The second thing Christ told us was: God's will always have love for us" [8].

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Туровська О. А. Ханс Урс фон Бальтазар як "вільний" Богослов.

Ханс Урс фон Бальтазар є одним з найбільш оригінальних мислителів-богословів двадцятого століття. На його ідеї сильний вплив мали потрясіння, які пережила Європа протягом цього часу. Любитель мистецтва (особливо музики Моцарта), він включав мотиви естетики до своєї теології. В багатьох аспектах теологічна думка Бальтазара була новаторською, деякі його ідеї можна навіть назвати контрверсійними. В дослідженні цього вкрай оригінального мислителя нам допоможуть американський єпископ о. Роберт Баррон Еммет та доктор Карен Кілбі – спеціаліст у сфері релігії та католицької теології.

Ключові слова: краса, естетика, Христос, теологія, патристика, Божя слава.

Туровская О. А. Ханс Урс фон Бальтазар как "свободный" Богослов.

Ханс Урс фон Бальтазар является одним из наиболее оригинальных мыслителей-богословов двадцатого века. Значительное влияние на его идеи имели потрясения, которые пережила Европа на протяжении этого времени. Любитель искусства (особенно музыки Моцарта) он включал мотивы эстетики в свою богословскую мысль. Во многих аспектах его идеи были новаторскими, некоторые из изложенных мыслей вызывают много споров. В данном исследовании нам помогут американский епископ Роберт Баррон Эммет и доктор Карен Килби – специалисты в области религии и католической теологии.

Ключевые слова: красота, эстетика, Христос, теология, патристика, Божья слава.