

**Mysticism in Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs
von Balthasar:
A Preliminary Comparison¹**

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Abstract

Even though the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar do not directly deal with Mysticism, a careful examination will uncover many of their thoughts that today we would call mystical themes. Thomas considers key issues in the history of Christian mysticism under at least four headings treated in the *Summa theologiae*. Balthasar eschewed the category of “mysticism” as an organizational or integral theme for his systematics; but he could not avoid mystical themes in his writings. Those are flagrant in his perspective based on the fundamental theological categories of beauty, action, and truth. Thomas Aquinas’s theology of mysticism is centered on the role of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the supreme gift of infused *sapientia* provides a connatural knowing and loving of God even in this life.

Introduction

Neither Thomas Aquinas nor Hans Urs von Balthasar made mystical theology, or its modern successor that murky term “mysticism,” an organizing principle of their theological thinking. Thomas wrote a

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commentary on the Dionysian *De divinis nominibus*, a key to the Platonic elements in his thought, but he seems to have consciously shied away from the *De mystica theologia*, quoting it only rarely in his writings (O'Rourke, 2005). Unlike his contemporary, Bonaventure, who was equally at home writing technical scholastic works and contemplative masterpieces such as the *De triplici via* and the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Thomas wrote no *opuscula* on what today we would call mystical themes. Of course this does not mean that the Dominican had nothing to say about matters of central importance to the mystical element in Christianity, but he treated these not as topics for separate investigation, but only insofar as they relate to *sacra doctrina* as reflection on the faith of the Church. More broadly, insofar as the Christian life as a whole is the search for eternal happiness through the mediation of the saving grace of Jesus Christ (*Summa theologiae II-III*), everything that Thomas wrote is suffused with a deep spiritual teaching, so that Jean-Pierre Torrell was quite right in giving the second volume of his masterwork the title *Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Maître Spirituel* (Torrell, 1996; Royal, 2003; Torrell, 2011). Nonetheless, it is striking that the Dominican avoided explicit writing or preaching on what we today call mystical topics. It is we, not Thomas, who try to create a systematic mystical teaching out of his writings (McGinn, 2007; Roy, 1948; Biffi, 1995).

A somewhat similar attitude toward mysticism is found in Hans Urs von Balthasar, despite the fact that Balthasar spoke of mysticism as "... the final experience of faith within the Church which is still in some way archetypal" (Balthasar, 1982). This is signaled by the fact that *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* gets by without any article on mysticism or spirituality, while *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner* contains an essay on "Theology and Spirituality" (Oakes and Moss, 2004; Marmion and Hines, 2005). Again, this is not because the Swiss theologian lacked interest or expertise in mystical authors or themes.

In the 1930s, under the influence of Henri de Lubac, Balthasar studied key patristic figures in the history of Christian mysticism, such as Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus Confessor (Oakes and Moss, 2004). However, Balthasar's developing plans for a systematic reworking of theology through an investigation of the transcendental attributes of beauty, action, and truth that began in the 1940s and 1950s did not feature independent attention to mysticism or mystical themes as distinctive topics in the trilogy, although many great mystics and aspects of their mystical teaching were to appear in the fifteen volumes published in German between 1961 and 1988, and translated

into English between 1982 and 2005. Volume I of *Herrlichkeit/The Glory of the Lord*, for example, has reflections on mystical topics under the Section on “The Experience of Faith” (Balthasar, 1982; Gavrilyuk and Coakley, 2012). Balthasar’s treatment of mystics such as Denys (Pseudo-Dionysius) and Bonaventure in Vol. II of *Herrlichkeit*, as well as of John of the Cross in Vol. III, are important expositions. Vol. V, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, considers late medieval mysticism from Eckhart to Cusanus under the Eckhartian conceptual model according to which “Being is simply identified...with God” (Balthasar, 1991). Balthasar also finds an Eckhartian root in what he, following Henri Bremond, calls “The Metaphysics of the Saints,” a tradition including many early modern mystics (Gavrilyuk and Coakley, 2012). Mystical themes are not absent from the two later parts of the trilogy, as shown, for example, by the sections devoted to “The Birth of the Son’: Rheno-Flemish Mysticism,” in *Theo-Drama. V: The Last Act*, (Balthasar, 1998) and by the treatment of “Negative Theology” in *Theo-Logic. II: Truth of God*. (Balthasar, 2004; Strolz, 1984). Under the title *Thomas und die Charismatik* Balthasar also wrote a detailed commentary on Thomas Aquinas’s section on the charismatic gifts and the active and contemplative lives as set out in the *Summa theologiae IIaIIae*, qq. 171-182 (Balthasar, 1996). My point is that mystics and mystical themes in Balthasar’s view are best viewed from a perspective based on the fundamental theological categories of beauty, action, and truth.

Thomas Aquinas never wrote any treatise specifically addressing topics such as “mystical theology,” or “contemplation.” We can only speculate why he did not. Nevertheless, the *Summa theologiae*, as well as other of Thomas’s works, such as the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, contain investigations of issues of central significance to mysticism, both in the medieval tradition, and later. If Thomas is not a “mystical theologian,” it must still be allowed that much later mystical writing was influenced, directly but more often indirectly, by his view of the *intellectus fidei*. At the risk of some simplification, I would argue that Thomas considers key issues in the history of Christian mysticism under at least four headings treated in the *Summa theologiae*.

The first, and most important, is the perfection of Christian love and contemplation made available in the highest of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, infused *sapientia* (McGinn, 2014; Conley, 1963). This teaching is well summarized in a text from the *De veritate*, “In contemplation God is seen through the medium of the light of wisdom that elevates the mind to behold divine things.” The second heading is an epistemological issue, that is, what kind of knowing of God of a

non-discursive, connatural nature is given to the *viator* through the gift of Wisdom. Closely connected to this is the third topic, the nature of prophecy, rapture, and other charismatic gifts (*gratiae gratis datae*) and how these relate to ultimate *beatitudo*, the *visio dei* of heaven. Finally, there is the issue of the relation between the active and contemplative lives as modes of acting in the Church. Although not a treatment of contemplation as such, Thomas's teaching about the two forms of life, contemplative and active, was of considerable importance, as Balthasar has shown (Balthasar, 1989).

Balthasar eschewed the category of "mysticism" as an organizational or integral theme for his systematics; but he could not avoid it in his writings. The Swiss theologian's several papers on spirituality, especially the need for the re-integration of theology and spirituality, are well known; (Balthasar, 1993) less studied are his programmatic statements about the meaning of mysticism. The first of these is the brief sub-section, "Mysticism within the Church," found under "The Experience of Faith" in Volume I of *Herrlichkeit/The Glory of the Lord* (Balthasar, 1982). The second, longer and later treatment, is the essay, "Zur Ortsbestimmung der Mystik," translated as "Understanding Christian Mysticism." This was first given as a lecture at the University of Zurich, and later published in 1974 as part of a collection of three essays on mysticism put out by the Johannes Verlag at Einsiedeln (Balthasar, 1974, 1995). (The other two pieces were on the mysticism of Plotinus by the eminent philosopher Werner Beierwaltes, and a paper by Balthasar's student, Alois M. Haas, entitled "Die Problematik von Sprache und Erfahrung in der deutschen Mystik.") Balthasar, as noted above, also addressed some of the central aspects of Thomas Aquinas's theology of mysticism in his long commentary on *Summa theologiae II-IIae*, qq. 171-82, a work he contributed to the edition-translation-commentary project known as the *Deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe*, published in thirty-six volumes between 1951 and 1961. Never translated into English, this volume is among the least known of Balthasar's works. As the "Vorwort" to the new edition says, "The work remained hidden in the shadow of commentaries on the great Master, and with Balthasar himself in relation to the whole of his work it has thus far played an underappreciated role." For the full reception of Balthasar, however, especially his relation to mysticism, the Vorwort rightly claims "... this commentary is indispensable" (...ist deshalb dieser Kommentar unentbehrlich) (Balthasar, 1996).

In order to understand Balthasar's view of mysticism, as well as its relation to Thomas's teaching on mystical topics, we can start with the

brief section in Volume I of *Herrlichkeit*, written sometime between 1954 and 1961, before moving on to the 1974 essay, which represents his longest and most mature statement on the topic. In *Herrlichkeit* Balthasar is anxious to locate mysticism squarely within the experience of faith archetypally expressed in the Bible and mediated through the Church by the action of the Holy Spirit. Just as the biblical experience of faith included prophecy, other charisms, and visions, so too, these gifts cannot be excluded from the life of the Church, or relegated to some suspect status under the influence of Platonic denigration of the body and the senses. Referring to his earlier *Thomas und die Charismatik*, he says, "...a mysticism of charisms should not be separated from a mysticism of the *Dona Spiritus Sancti*" (Balthasar, 1982). Admitting "the great damage caused by the opposite extreme of naïve acceptance of all charisms," he criticizes both John of the Cross and Augustine for minimizing "the bond that connects ecclesial mysticism (the charisms) with its Biblical archetypes..." (Balthasar, 1982). Therefore, Balthasar argues that both the charisms and the gifts of the Holy Spirit can mediate the transition "...from the 'normal' life of faith to a properly speaking mystical life." In the case of the transition mediated by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, as ever with Balthasar, it is the experience of faith that is the main subject of attention. Although this deepening may include the taste (*sapor*) for divine wisdom (Bernard is cited) and a *cognitio per connaturalitatem* (citing Thomas), Balthasar somewhat strangely claims that "...none of this need yet be given the name 'mysticism' in the strong sense of the word." No, it is only in the surrender to the kenotic experience of Christ that "strong mysticism" (whatever that might mean) is realized. Balthasar puts it as follows: "For this reason, in 'mysticism' every deeper experience (*Erfahrung*) of God will be a deeper entering into (*Einfahren*) the non-experience of faith, into the loving renunciation of all experience, all the way into the depths of the 'Dark Nights' of John of the Cross, which constitute the real mystical training for the ultimate renunciations" (Balthasar, 1982). Regarding the transitions mediated by the charisms, Balthasar is mostly concerned with insisting that they must be seen as ecclesial, not individual, if they are to be judged authentic. Balthasar moderates his emphasis on kenosis, the Cross, and the Dark Night towards the end of this brief treatment by insisting that even the "darkest mysticism of the Cross" is eschatologically directed to the glory of the Resurrection and the New Age. For Balthasar, the interpenetration of the present age by the embodied glory of the Risen Lord guarantees the objective importance of the sensory dimension in Christian mysticism (Balthasar, 1982).

Balthasar's later piece, "Understanding Christian Mysticism," proceeds in quasi-scholastic manner, according to a kind of *sic et non*. He begins by distinguishing between the "objective coordinate" of mysticism rooted in the revelation of the mystery (*mysterion*) of Jesus Christ (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 2:6-16, Eph. 3, Col. 1, Mt. 13:11) and its "subjective coordinate," that is, the "experimental knowledge of God" (*cognitio dei experimentalis*), a phrase going back to Jean Gerson but rooted in Thomas Aquinas. He describes this experimental knowledge as "...an experience of the divine that is not just notional but existential." As ever, his emphasis is on the "...objectivist sense of this epithet [that is, "mystical"], its inherent dependence on the mystery" primarily realized in the Eucharist. Hence, mysticism in Christianity "...is fundamentally distinct from all that it is commonly held to mean in the framework of a universal psychology of religion." On the basis of this exclusivistic postulate, the second part of the essay sets out three possible relationships between mysticism in general and Christian mysticism.

The first is the familiar view that because of the similarity of descriptions of inner and outer phenomena all forms of mysticism are really the same. The second, that is, the counter-position, argues that Christian and non-Christian mysticism cannot be compared, a view that comes in two varieties – either the claim that Christian mysticism is the only true mysticism, or the view of dialectical theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, that Christianity has nothing to do with mysticism. The third, or middle view, noting the legitimacy of all human searching for God, holds for an analogical relation between Christian mysticism and other forms. Balthasar holds to this position, although, in adherence to his key theological premise of "the greater the similarity, the greater the dissimilarity" (Kevern, 1997), he affirms here and elsewhere in the essay that "...despite all of the considerable similarities between Christian and non-Christian mysticism, a still greater dissimilarity will prevail." So, Balthasar's view of Christian mysticism might be described as one of modified exclusivism.

Balthasar bases this greater dissimilarity on what seems the somewhat questionable notion he calls "diastasis," that is, the tension between the content of "the Christian experience of the faith" (which he seems to be easily able to identify) and the form in which this has been most often communicated, that is, "the subtle and already available conceptual net of Hellenistic mysticism." Balthasar's invocation of diastasis does not take into account, as far as I can see, the complexity of the relations between language and thought/experience that have been explored by modern hermeneutical theory and other recent approaches to language. He holds out certain mystics (mostly women) as exceptions

to the pernicious side-effects of *diastasis*. Further, Balthasar contends that most of the conceptual themes of Christian mystology (mystical writing) and mystagogy (formal instruction on the mystical life) (Behn, 1957), as well as many key mystics, have been deeply tainted by this tension between true Christian content/experience and suspect Greek philosophical form/expression. Along with this major historical problem, Balthasar notes what he calls “a material problem,” that is, does mystical ineffability mean the same thing in Christianity, a faith in which the hidden God expresses himself in his Word, as it does in other forms of mysticism?

The remainder of Balthasar’s essay takes this position as the basis for a dialectical investigation of Christian mysticism according to thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The first stage, or thesis, considers “...the commonality that reigns (for the most part) between non-Christian and Christian mysticism under the overarching assumption that in both the experienced God is ineffable.” Balthasar sets out seven aspects of common mystical expression, such as the customary three levels of the Christian mystical path (i.e., practical-purgative, contemplative-illuminative, unitive-superessential), which he appears to think also appear in other traditions. The “structural identity...almost to the point of univocity” uncovered here, argues Balthasar, is the root of the Church’s condemnations of what he calls “extreme mystology” in cases like those of Origen, Eriugena, Eckhart, Molinos, and Fénelon, although he admits that despite these anathemas, “these men will remain...the great spiritual directors of the future.”

The thesis of near-univocity is challenged by the antithesis of the second position, which argues for the uniqueness of Christian mysticism. This uniqueness is founded on the Biblical truth that rather than man searching for God, as in other traditions, in Christianity God goes in search of man, beginning with the call to Abraham, continuing in God leading Israel out of Egypt, and culminating in the Incarnation of the Word. The fundamental human response to God’s initiative is obedience, or readiness. “If Christian ‘readiness’ (*Bereitschaft*) is already a response to God’s address,” says Balthasar, “then it is not the point of departure for one’s own undertaking but the presupposition for God’s undertaking, who wants to gain a foothold on earth and in the heart.” Hence, it is not the *experience of union*, but rather *radical obedience* that constitutes Christian perfection, an obedience as closely bound to the experience of forsakenness (Christ on the cross) as it is to union with God. Following the example of Christ crucified, buried, risen, and ascended is always the fundamental pattern of Christian life. On this

ground, Balthasar rejects the traditional three-step mystical pattern of “purification-illumination-union” as an “individualistic Neoplatonic schematic.” He also attacks any mysticism that would consider the Cross as a stage to be surpassed.

For Balthasar the position he has outlined alters the “whole system of values on [traditional] mysticism in general.” Three important consequences of this alteration are discussed. The first, echoing what we found in the treatment of mysticism in *The Glory of the Lord*, is that it is the experiential knowledge of the things of God given in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of wisdom, where most Christians will come into contact with God, rather than in the extraordinary visions and special charisms found in the Bible and in the lives of many saints. The second point criticizes Thomas Aquinas’s view of charisms found in the *STh IIaIIae*, arguing that charismatic graces, especially sensory and imaginative visions and the like, are not independent of saving grace, but are given for the Church’s benefit, as Paul argued, and therefore can only be appreciated from the viewpoint of the *sensus ecclesiae*. Finally, Balthasar weighs in on the issue of whether mysticism is to be identified as the goal of the “normal unfolding of the Christian life” to the degree that charisms become epiphenomena; or, as others have claimed, mysticism is only for the favored few because such extraordinary experiences alone are to be called truly mystical. Balthasar sides with the former view, and accuses some mystics (e.g., Teresa, Evagrius, Eckhart, John of the Cross) as taking their own unique way of life as a model for the Christian experience of God in general. I find this claim highly questionable. It is patently untrue for Teresa, especially in *The Interior Castle*, and one can argue it is also a misreading of these other mystics.

The final section of “Understanding Christian Mysticism” presents a series of “Christian Criteria” as a synthesis of the two counter-positions. The first criterion by which mystics and all Christians are measured is not their “religious experience,” but their love of God and neighbor - a point made by all Christian mystics. Second, purity of mind and soul, not the degree of intensity of experience, is the model for following Christ - again, something commonly taught by most mystics. Third, the problem of ineffability in Christian mysticism assumes a unique form through the utterance of the Word in history and in the human heart. Balthasar expresses it this way: “The more nearly God comes to us, the more ungraspable he appears to us - not more abstractly but more concretely.” A similar dynamic, he says, is found in relation to mystical union - How can there be union between what is essentially One and what is essentially many? The answer is that there is no unbridgeable

opposition between the One and the many, because the many come from Oneness and return to it, and the many are internally determined by the One. Hence, "The possibilities for God to let the experiences of union outweigh those of difference within Christian mysticism are infinite." This is especially the case in Christianity, founded as it is in the union of the three Trinitarian persons in the one God and the uniting of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ.

At the end of the essay Balthasar returns to his stress on the objective character of Christian mysticism, insisting on the primacy of the mystery over the personal experience that is the living out of faith in the lives of believers, which stands in the second place. Finally, the special experiences and charismatic graces given to some for the benefit of others come in the third place.

Before turning to what Balthasar did and did not learn from Thomas Aquinas on the subject of mysticism, there are two central claims in "Understanding Christian Mysticism" that need further discussion. According to Balthasar, the decisive maxim that decides the issue of the uniqueness of Christian mysticism is that "...It is not the experience of union with God that represents the standard for perfection (the highest rung in the ladder of ascent) but *obedience*." This begs the question of whether union and obedience need to be seen as opposites, or rather can be viewed as two sides of the same reality. With regard to union, it is interesting to note that in an essay rich in biblical citations Balthasar only once utilizes New Testament texts about union, such as Paul's notion of being "in Christ" (*en Christo*), or the union texts of John 17. Although he mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially wisdom, and the ultimate priority of love of God and love of neighbor as a criterion, Balthasar's emphasis on obedience and faith means that the theological virtues of hope and especially the charity that flowers in the gift of wisdom are not well integrated into his picture of the meaning of Christian mysticism, at least in this essay. A second point of contention concerns the role of Christ. Christ is, indeed, the norm and model of all Christian mysticism, the God-man, who, as Balthasar says, has been crucified, buried, risen and ascended. Balthasar rightly criticizes some mystics for suggesting that in the higher stages of the ascent the crucified Christ can be left behind. To be sure, some few mystics can be read this way, but on closer study the picture becomes more complex. Laying out a schematic Christian path to God in a mystological way, such as we find in Bonaventure, Ruusbroec, Teresa, John of the Cross, and others, should not be confused with actually living the imitation of Christ in which all the mysteries of the life of Jesus are realized and made present, though at different times and in differing modes. The mystics

whom Balthasar criticizes for forgetting the Cross might wonder where the significance of rising and ascending with Christ are to be found in his own view of mysticism. These mysteries are, indeed, noted in the short section on mysticism in *The Glory of the Lord*, but are not stressed in "Understanding Christian Mysticism." For all its originality and insight, then, Balthasar's explicit treatment of the mystical element of Christianity leaves the reader with many questions.

What resources did Balthasar find in Thomas Aquinas for his view of mysticism? The commentary *Thomas und die Charismatik*, precisely because it is a commentary, both reveals and conceals Balthasar's partial indebtedness to the Dominican Master. Broadly put, I would say that Balthasar's view of mysticism relates to that of Thomas Aquinas on at least three general issues, two of which can be directly found in *Thomas und die Charismatik*. The first concerns the roles of faith and love in the path to union with God. Like all Christian theologians, Balthasar stressed the necessity of love in a number of his writings, (Balthasar, 1969) but, as should be clear from what was said above, the Swiss theologian emphasizes the centrality of the "readiness of faith" in Christian mysticism, whereas for Thomas it is essentially through all three theological virtues, especially *caritas* as realized in infused wisdom, that the believer comes to whatever form of deeper knowledge and union with God possible in this life. The second point concerns Thomas's view of charismatic graces in the *IIallae* on which Balthasar directly commented. Balthasar basically sees the Dominican as reflecting the biblical and early Christian understanding which ties mysticism and the charismatic graces, including prophecy, together, without, nonetheless, identifying them. Balthasar's detailed "Einleitung. Charisma, Prophetie, Mystik," in *Thomas und die Charismatik* led him to the conclusion, against most Thomist commentators, that these graces are integral, but derived, aspects of Christian mysticism. Thirdly, Balthasar's study of Thomas on the active and contemplative lives in his commentary on the *IIallae*, as well as several essays he wrote on action and contemplation, enabled him to see this distinction as an historical artifact of doubtful relevance, an example of the "diastasis" between Christian content and Greek philosophical concepts. Contemplation has no essential priority over action. As he put it in "Understanding Christian Mysticism": "Purity of mind and soul is the real standard, and this can be expressed just as much in secular action or orthopraxy as in contemplation." Balthasar expands on this point in his essay "Action and Contemplation," where he bluntly says: "The Fathers and the Scholastics were unable to develop fully a Christian doctrine of contemplation and action, because they shared with the Greek philosophers a too-individualistic idea of contemplation, and so failed

to see where its real fruitfulness lay." The essay praises Thomas for opening up new perspectives on the topic through his meditation on the Dominican ideal of *contemplata aliis tradere* (*STh IIaIIae*, q. 188, a. 6), but does not hesitate to criticize him and assert that "... whatever remains of Greek intellectualism in Thomas must be abandoned." Many Christian mystics after Thomas Aquinas reached a similar conclusion by their teaching that it was possible to combine action and contemplation, to be, as was said of Ignatius Loyola, *in actione contemplativus*.

It is not possible in a brief essay to give an adequate account of the long *Thomas und die Charismatik*, a work that displays Balthasar's astonishing command of the Christian tradition. It is a puzzle why the book has never been made available in English for the profit of the wide audience of those interested in spirituality and mysticism. This is no less a shame than the failure to translate that other great mid-century work of scholarship on mysticism, the multi-author article "Contemplation" (550 columns) that appeared in the second volume of the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* in 1953, just a year before Balthasar's book on Thomas.

For those who are not familiar with *Thomas und die Charismatik*, it may be useful to give a brief outline of the book. Balthasar adhered to the format of the collection, which began each volume with the Latin text and German translation of the section of the *Summa* in question, in this case Questions 171-182, of the *IIaIIae*. The bulk of the volume, however, as is the case for most of the volumes in the *Deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe*, is taken up with a commentary (252-586), which Balthasar divides into four main sections, following Thomas's order: (1) Prophecy (qq. 171-74) on pages 253-428; (2) Rapture (q. 175) on pages 429-99; (3) The Remaining Charisms (qq. 176-78) on pages 500-35; and finally, (4) Action and Contemplation (qq. 179-82), treated on pages 536-86. This enumeration will at least provide a sense of what Balthasar thought most important. Prophecy may seem to predominate in Balthasar's treatment, but that is only because he prefaces it, as noted above, with the general "Introduction" (252-319) on the whole issue of "Charisma, Prophecy, Mysticism." This is the center of Balthasar's exposition, the place where he expounds his view that the New Testament charismata stand as the middle ground between Old Testament prophecy and the mysticism of the history of the Church.

In the *IaIIae*, which considers human acts in general in the return to God, Aquinas interpreted a standard medieval terminology regarding grace in his own way by distinguishing *gratia gratum faciens*, or saving grace, from *gratia gratis data*, or special grace, the charisms mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. Hence, *gratia gratum faciens* is treated in qq. 109-114

of the *Ilallae*, while the forms of *gratia gratis data* are not considered until the *Ilallae* qq. 171-178, under the category of acts given only to some or in a special manner. Balthasar does not question that there is a distinction between the two forms of grace, but he felt that the separation of the two treatments in the *Summa* was unfortunate because it encouraged some followers of Thomas to think of these gifts as unimportant and largely personal, rather than as actions of the Holy Spirit for the community of believers. Balthasar strongly opposed Thomas's view, as argued in *Ilallae*, q. 172, aa. 4-6 (Klauck, 2011), that the charism of prophecy (and by extension other charismatic graces) do not demand the possession of saving grace. He says: "That a person would possess through grace a function in this process of love [i.e., the life of the Church] without himself being in God's love, is a monstrosity (*eine Ungeheuerlichkeit*) that contradicts and is not fit to cast light on the final being of this grace."

Despite these criticisms, the overall strategy of the "Introduction. Charisma, Prophecy, Mysticism" is to show that these three topics have always been intimately related in the biblical and Christian tradition and that Thomas's treatment, with some exceptions, needs to be seen from this perspective. To this end, Balthasar divides the "Introduction" into six parts: I. A History of Christian Charismatic Gifts from the New Testament to Thomas (255-77); II. A Treatment of *gratia gratis data* in Scholasticism (277-85); III. The Priority (*Vorordnung*) of Prophecy (285-88); IV. A History of the Concept of Prophecy (289-300); V. The Place of Prophets according to Thomas (300-05); and VI. Charism and Mysticism in Thomas (305-16), where he explicitly discusses the Dominican's view of mysticism.

According to Balthasar, there are four main *loci* or topics in Thomas's understanding of mysticism: (1) the missions of the Trinitarian Persons, i.e., the Son and the Holy Spirit; (2) the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit; (3) contemplation, which also entails the relation of the active and contemplative lives; and (4) the charisms, above all that of prophecy. There are intimate relations between the gifts and contemplation, as well as between contemplation and prophecy. "Also," says Balthasar, "ecstasy or rapture is common to both prophecy and contemplation. Perhaps according to Thomas ecstasy appeared even as a form of addendum, because it was primarily identified as a component of prophecy, while it was historically just as often connected for the most part with the contemplation of divine things, and (as with Bonaventure) was always regarded so." Hence, while prophecy and mysticism are not the same, they should not be separated, because they are both rooted in saving grace and take their flowering through the action of the gifts of

the Holy Spirit. But if neither charismatic gifts nor prophecy belong to the theological core of mysticism, how then are the phenomena related?

Balthasar notes that the “objective holiness” of the Old Testament prophets was never without a subjective realization, so that in Christian history the greatest prophets, especially Moses and Elias, are seen as models for the Christian mystics. The revelation of the Old Testament, then, is to be realized in two stages: first, in historical human beings as carrying out God’s words and deeds; and second, as meditation on salvation history, such as is found in the Psalms and the Wisdom literature. This second phase is both a part of scripture, but also the first stage of “mystical contemplation,” as distinct from prophecy. Hence, “mysticism” begins in the Old Testament and shows the necessary connection between subsequent Christian mysticism and the biblical witness. Balthasar, not unlike Gregory the Great (whom he does not cite), extends this back even further into the picture of Adam in Paradise as the *Vorbild und Urtyp* of all prophetic and mystical knowledge of God.

Balthasar then moves his case forward into a consideration of the Early Church. As in other places, he blames the reaction against Montanism for what he considers the marginalization of the charismatic elements in Christianity and the separation of the social-prophetic and the charismatic-mystical - an historical judgment of a somewhat questionable nature. This is why Balthasar is so taken with Thomas’s treatment in the *IIallae* of the *Summa*. By considering the two aspects (prophecy and charisms) under the same heading, Balthasar thought that the Dominican was recovering an insight essential to biblical theology. Speaking of Thomas’s stress on the social aspects of the charisms set out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, he says: “If this is grasped, one ought not only not criticize some variations of Thomas between mysticism and prophecy, but rather much more welcome them as indications of the New Testament fusion of these two realms.” Abstracting from the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, then, Balthasar concludes that Thomas has been able to integrate the three other aspects of his theology of mysticism into an “organic whole” (*organischen Zusammenhang*).

At this point Balthasar moves on to an extended commentary on the *IIallae*, one that takes up close to three hundred pages in the 1996 edition (320-586). Thomas’s commentary on prophecy (qq. 171-74) takes up more than a hundred pages (320-428), and that on rapture (q. 175) extends for seventy pages (429-99). The other charisms (qq. 176-78) are dismissed briefly in thirty-five pages (500-535), while the treatment of the active and contemplative lives (qq. 179-82) is given fifty pages (536-86). These discussions are filled with information and

insight, both about Thomas's own views, and how these issues were treated by his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. It is not possible here to go into this richness in detail, but I would like to note one important observation Balthasar makes at the end of his treatment while commenting on Thomas's view of the impossibility of mixing the active life and the contemplative life. Aquinas, as contrasted with Bonaventure, notes Balthasar in a critical fashion, always addresses these mystical themes abstractly rather than concretely. If we can accept this judgment of the German theologian on Thomas, we gain an insight into his view of the value, but also of the limitations, of the Common Doctor's view of mysticism.

Conclusion

I have suggested that Thomas Aquinas's theology of mysticism is centered on the role of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the supreme gift of infused *sapientia* provides a connatural knowing and loving of God even in this life. Thus, it is wisdom, not rapture, other charisms, or the superiority of the contemplative life, that constitutes the core of what Thomas had to say about what we today call mysticism, or, as I have termed it, the mystical element in Christianity. From this perspective, it may seem puzzling that Hans Urs von Balthasar, who had much to say about the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and theology, and who noted that the gifts constitute one of the four *loci* of Thomas's view of mysticism, did not develop a more complete theology of the gifts of the Spirit when discussing mysticism.

Balthasar's intimate knowledge of the long tradition of Christian mysticism allowed him to make trenchant criticisms of many aspects of the Neo-scholastic teaching on mysticism in which he was trained, and for this we are much in his debt. But it remains to be seen how far his theology can provide a major resource for those engaging in current theological efforts to understand mysticism. Something similar is true for Thomas Aquinas, who, as we have seen, showed little interest in either the "mystical theology" of the Dionysian tradition, or in trying to create an account of the theory and practice of attaining union with God in this life, such as we find in his contemporary Bonaventure. To be sure, Thomas says that "Saving grace is principally given so that the human soul may be united to God through charity," but he thinks of this goal as more eschatological than actual. Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar, despite their differing contexts, provide us with important, but fragmentary resources for a contemporary theology of mysticism. We need not reject what they have given us, but we need to continue our own efforts.

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Roman World by René Arnou (1716-62); III. The Greek Fathers and Eastern Christians by several authors (1766-1911); IV. Latin Christian Literature by Michel Olphe-Gallaird and Jean Leclercq (1911-1948); V. The Twelfth Century by Jean-Marie Déchanet (1948-1966); VI. The Thirteenth Century by Paul Philippe (1966-1988); VII. The Fourteenth Century by François Vandebroucke (1988-2001); VIII. The Fifteenth Century also by Vandebroucke (2001-2013); IX. The Sixteenth Century by Fidèle de Ros and Michel Olphe-Galliard (2013-2036); and X. The Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries by various authors (2036-2057).

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