ONE

The Split between Theology and Spirituality

Hans Urs von Balthasar begins his important essay "Theology and Sanctity" with the observation that "in the whole of Catholic theology there is hardly anything that is less noticed, yet more deserving of notice, than the fact that, since the great period of Scholasticism, there have been few theologians who were saints."[1] In this remark is summed up the history of the divide between theology and spirituality that reached its acme with the Neo-Scholasticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Though this neo-Scholasticism waned after the middle of the twentieth century, it seems to be attempting to extend its influence again at the turn of the twentieth century.[2] Von Balthasar's entire theological project centered on the deconstruction of such a dichotomy. In the essay, he notes the pre-Scholastic naiveté concerning such a divide, the perpetuation of the divergence until the middle of the twentieth century, and the attempt to overcome the split that was commensurate with the overthrow of Neo-Scholastic theology prior to Vatican II.

Pre-Scholastic Theology and Spirituality

When one looks at the great personages of the early church, one is struck by the fact that most of them were both pastors and theologians. Their lives were models of the unity of the Christian life and the elucidation of

1. Von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," 181.
2. Candler, "New Scholasticism," forthcoming.

Christian truth: a testament to a complete understanding of truth that "consist[ed] precisely in this living exposition of theory in practice and of knowledge carried into action."[3] Von Balthasar notes the New Testament teaching concerning the office of teachers and pastors. Both Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:29 attest to the distinctiveness of the roles of pastor and teacher. However, one need not maintain the possibility of distinct roles to the detriment of seeing both offices in a single individual. Not all pastors are teachers, and not all teachers are pastors, but one should not be surprised to see the two offices coincident in a single individual since they are so closely related by Paul in his epistles. Therefore, it should be no surprise to see that the greatest Christians of the early centuries of the Church are both pastors and teachers: Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and many others.[4] This unity of spirituality and truth is seen in a number of Johannine passages. The author of I John maintains: "Whoever says, "I know him," but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I Jn 2:4); and, later on in the letter, "Whoever is without love does not know God" (I Jn 4:8). "There is simply no real truth" von Balthasar contends, "which does not have to be incarnated in an act or in some action, so that the incarnation of Christ is the criterion of all real truth . . ., and 'walking in the truth' is the way the believer possesses the truth."[5] Indeed the New Testament and the early Fathers consistently exhibit a complete naiveté concerning such a divide. Instead, the writers of the New Testament and the early Fathers were "complete personalities," who were unable to envisage the separation of theology and spirituality. Even a cursory perusal of New Testament and Patristic sources would indicate the fact. Von Balthasar notes that it "would not only be idle but contrary to the very conception of the Fathers to attempt to divide their works into those dealing with doctrine and those dealing with the Christian life (spirituality)."[6] Perhaps Origen is the clearest indication of this fact. Origen left the Church an enormous amount of literature. Though it has been attempted by some modern interpreters, to divide his works into the speculative, polemical, spiritual, and hermeneutical would be artificial and

3. Ibid.

4. Von Balthasar notes that even those who were not both pastors and teachers in the monastic and mystical traditions "bring out still more clearly the union of doctrine and life." Ibid., 182.

5. Ibid., 181–82.

6. Ibid., 183.

detrimental to Origen's thought and to one's understanding of the work he bequeathed to the Church. Though some of his works may have been more or less practical or speculative or pastoral, each of his works has the primary aim of "expounding the word of God, which is as much a word of life as a word of truth."[7]

Von Balthasar maintains that this original unity was maintained for centuries. He contends that it was not until scholastic methodology gained prominence that such a division was made possible: "The early medieval thinkers in the West, under the aegis of Augustine, did not depart from this basic concept. Anselm, himself abbot, bishop and doctor of the Church, knew no other canon of truth than the unity of knowledge and life. The same may be said of Bede, Bernard and Peter Damian. But as theology increasingly took on a 'scholastic' form, and Aristotelianism burst in like an elemental force, the naïve unity hitherto accepted was gravely shaken."[8]

The Rise of Scholastic Theology

The rise of the Scholastic method within theological discourse radically transformed the way theology was envisioned from its bases and method to its purpose and sources. This change had a far-reaching effect on theology which would contribute to theology's own self-understanding. Whereas theology was initially more of a meditation on and exposition of God's self-disclosure in the Word, in the new style of theological discourse practiced by the schoolmen, theology increasingly became the methodical parsing of abstract truth which was dissociated from the concrete realities of an embodied Christianity. It must be noted that medieval Scholasticism made enormous contributions to the development of the Church's own self-understanding. Thinkers such as Thomas, Bonaventure and Albert were able to maintain a balance between theology and spirituality. However, it appears that it took such singular minds to keep the method from overtaking the aim.

Von Balthasar maintained that the progress attained by scholasticism primarily lay in the philosophical realm. Though of great importance, this method placed theology alongside philosophy as a coordinating system (sometimes as a competing system) for the exposition of truth.

7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 184.

Von Balthasar writes of the advances of philosophical methodology of scholasticism:

> The booty in this case, however, was primarily philosophical, and only indirectly theological. Philosophy began to emerge as a special discipline alongside theology, with its own concept of philosophical truth, which was perfectly correct in its own sphere, and could lay no claim to superior content of revealed truth. *Adequatio intellectus ad rem* [conformity of the mind to reality]: this definition envisaged, primarily, only the theoretical side of truth. The intimate connection was seen, and indeed emphasized, between the true and the good as the transcendental properties of the one being, but it was looked at more from the human standpoint, in the mutual presupposition of intellect and will . . . , than in their objective mutual inclusion, or real identity. Philosophy, as a doctrine of natural being and excluding revelation, could not know that the highest mode of interpreting that philosophical definition of truth must be a trinitarian one.[9]

The scholastic method, left in inadequate hands, would provide disastrous results. The problem was that most practitioners were not equipped to maintain the balance between method and the integrity of theology and spirituality.

M. D. Chenu gives Abelard as a prime example of a practitioner of the scholastic method who was unable to balance the method and theology as practiced prior to Scholasticism. "In the west, the classic case of this failing is that of Abelard. This champion of dialectic was the first whose genius promulgated the laws of conceptual thinking in their application to theological knowledge. He is called, not without cause, the founder of scholastic theology. But in the intoxication of his discovery he could not maintain the proper spiritual attitude towards the awful silence of the mystery."[10] Chenu consistently commends individuals such as Abelard for the substantial contribution they were able to make, while at the same time chastising them for their inability to retain the proper spiritual balance. "It is in prayer and

9. Ibid., 185.

10. Chenu, *La Théologie est-elle une Science?*, 41; ET: *Is Theology a Science?*, 40. "Les cas classique e cette défaillance, en Occident. Est celui d'Abélard. Le chevalier de la dialectique, qui le premier eut le genie d'énoncer les lois du language conceptual dans l'elaboration du savoir théologique, et qu'on appelle à cause de cela, non sans raison, le fondateur de la théologie scholastique, ne sut pas, dans l'ivresse de se découverte , conserver a juste sensibilité spirituelle au respect, au silence du mystère." All subsequent English translations of this text will be Armytage's translation unless noted otherwise.

devotion, and in the profoundest sense of the devotion, that theology, the understanding of the Word of God, is born and lives. 'This sacred science,' reads the office of Albert the Great, 'is acquired through prayer and devotion rather than through study'—words not to be taken as an epigram but as a structural necessity. A theology that could be true without being devout would be a sort of monster."[11]

Furthermore, the Aristotelianism of the thirteenth century also opened up the space for the development of the concept of natural science, which would in turn give birth to a general secularism. Within this arena, the greatest of the practitioners of Scholasticism were able to transpose the concepts and methodology of Aristotelianism and the secular sciences into the field of Christian theology. This transposition had the effect of raising the method of the secular sciences to the "plane of the sacred, and so to import to [them] a real Christian ethos."[12] As a result, post-scholastic theology became a rational exposition of traditional theology (Von Balthasar uses the terms "biblical theology"), turning theology on its head. As the work of theology proceeded after scholasticism, the rational framework that had been attached to theology became more rigid with each succeeding generation. As a result of this process, the philosophical bases of theology usurped the position of tradition and scripture and became the arbiter of the faith, exercising authority over the entire theological process.[13]

The Effects of the Split between Theology and Spirituality

Von Balthasar concisely sums up the main effect of the split between theology and spirituality opened by the over-reliance on scholastic method. The period following the advent of scholastic theology "saw the disappearance of the 'complete' theologian . . . , the theologian who is also a saint. In fact, spiritual men were turned away from a theology which was overlaid and overloaded with secular philosophy—with the result that alongside dogmatic theology, meaning always the central science which consists in the

11. Ibid., 41–42. "C'est dans la prière, dans l'adoration, dans la devotion, au sens profound du mot, que naît et cit la théologie, l'intelligence de la Parole de Dieu. «Cette science sacrée, est-il dit dans l'office du maître Albert le Grand, s'acquiert par l'oraison et la devotion plus que par l'étude». Ne prenons pas cela comme une bon parole, mais comme une exigence structural. Une théologie qui pourrait être vraie sans être pieuse, serait en quelque sorte monstrueuse."

12. Von Balthasar, "Theology and Sanctity," 186.

13. Ibid.

exposition of revealed truth, there came into being a new science of the 'Christian life,' one derived from the mysticism of the Middle Ages and achieving independence in the *devotio moderna*."[14] The culpability need not fall solely on the introduction of scholastic method and the subsequent exacerbation by the neo-scholasticism of later centuries. Von Balthasar clearly notes that the "saints" were as culpable for the division as any other. While scholasticism pushed the practitioners of the spiritual life to the side, the "spirituals" all too readily retreated from the schools to widen the gap between theology and spirituality to an even greater degree.[15] "The saints, intimidated by the conceptual entanglements drawn round the gospel truth, no longer dare to collaborate in the necessary work of the exposition of doctrine, or think themselves qualified to do so. They leave dogma to the prosaic work of the School, and become—lyrical poets."[16]

This situation ends in a number of exacerbating results. There developed among the spirituals a concern to describe and delineate the affective states of ascetical and mystical theology.[17] Though this phenomenon can be seen earlier—particularly in the Spanish mysticism of the sixteenth century—it is in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which demonstrate the most concrete instantiation of this fact. In the manuals of such thinkers as Adolphe Tanquerey, the Jesuit Joseph de Guibert and the immensely important Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagarange, an elaborate "technology of the self"—to use Mark McIntosh's language—fused the scholastic manualistic style with an extreme concern with delineating the progress of the soul to perfection through the stages of ascetical theology and mystical theology.[18]

14. Ibid., 187.

15. Ibid., 188–93.

16. Ibid., 192.

17. The terms ascetical theology and mystical theology came to have very specific and distinct meanings. *Ascetical theology* concerned the "form and progress of the Christian life up to the beginnings of passive contemplation," whereas, *mystical theology* "analyzed further stages up to mystical union." Sheldrake, *Spirituality & History*, 52.

18. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 8. The fusion of the concern for affective mysticism and neo-scholastic method is laid out in Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 52–55.

Prospects for Reintegration

In Mark McIntosh's contribution to Blackwell's "Challenges in Contemporary Theology" series, he, like von Balthasar, notes that theology, when it separates itself from mystical experience (or as McIntosh and Bernard McGinn prefer, "mystical consciousness), it "becomes ever more methodically refined but unable to know or to speak of the very mysteries at the heart of Christianity."[19] Likewise, mysticism, when it isolates itself from speculative theology, "becomes rootless, easily hijacked by individualistic consumerism." But, unlike William Johnston, who holds little hope for the reintegration of theology and spirituality (believing that theologians remain "unregenerate"), McIntosh believes that there are identifiable avenues in the study of theology and spirituality which may in fact lead to such a reintegration.[20]

Even more basic to the discussion than ways in which academic theology can reacquaint itself with spirituality, it appears that McIntosh's implicit, and more profound, solution to the problem of the split between theology and spirituality entails a view of the human person that disallows any division between one's articulation of Christianity and one's own lived "spiritual stance" concerning concrete events and situations. More important than whether or not one speaks of the encounter with God by means of "divine grounding language" or by means of "union language," more important than whether one describes the mystical encounter with God in terms of "mystical consciousness" or in terms of "mystical experience," McIntosh holds up the example of those individuals who exhibit an understanding of the encounter of divine presence by the manner in which they articulate that encounter and how they live their lives in light of their own understanding of the encounter with God. Here McIntosh gives the example of Edith Stein, who, on the night of her arrest by two German SS officers, demonstrated that her "theological understanding of what she saw as the self-sacrificing pattern of divine life grew increasingly more incarnate in her own spiritual stance. She repeatedly articulated her belief that a spirituality of compassion and responsibility for others enabled one to contribute in some limited personal way to the unlimited self-giving that she understood to be constitutive of God's existence—a self-giving embodied for her in the history of Jesus."[21]

19. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 10.
20. Johnston, *Inner Eye of Love*, 195–96.
21. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 4.

This picture of an individual who embodies the unity of the spiritual and theological indicates in a clear manner that the split between spirituality and theology is only entirely mitigated by integrated personalities. For Edith Stein, McIntosh tells us, "her work as an interpreter of major theologians such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Thomas Aquinas, and John of the Cross was all of a piece with her spirituality."[22] It is in such personalities that we are able to identify a "pattern for the re-weaving of spirituality and theology," a pattern found in "complete personalities"—to use von Balthasar's parlance—who are examples of an integrated anthropology.

McIntosh rightly points out that at its very roots the split between theology and spirituality seems to be a bifurcation of the individual person and represents a defective view of the human person—what would be described in theological short-hand as a defective anthropology. The answer to the gap between the disciplines is not bridged through methodological or academic orientation, but rather is achieved by realizing who we are. In a brief essay for *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jean Daniélou notes that investigation into the arena of who we are as human beings typically falls short because it fails to assess the human person in its entirety. The material sciences fail in their account of the *humanum*—as do the psychological sciences—in that they fail to see what is human in its totality and in turn omit what is most essential to humanity. Therefore, Daniélou reflects, "We must ask ourselves what these . . . types of inquiry lack. What they lack is, essentially, that they do not lead to the [essential] dimension of man at the core of his existence: the relationship with a God by whom he was begotten and for whom he was created."[23] Indeed, Daniélou maintains that "the idea that there is in our life two poles which are opposed—a human pole and a divine pole—by no means corresponds to the true Biblical conception of humanity."[24] The human person must be seen in its entirety which entails accounting for that which makes humanity truly human. This essential quality of the human person is found in humanity's participation in divine life without which humanity is a mutilated form of its true identity. As Daniélou notes, "There is in the relationship with God a relationship that constitutes the very being of man."[25]

22. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, 3.
23. Daniélou, "Man in Search of Himself," 10.
24. Daniélou, "La Vérité de l'Homme," 4.
25. Daniélou, "Man in Search of Himself," 10.

Conclusion

Daniélou believes that a proper understanding of humanity must entail an assessment of it as a unity. To propose that the material aspect of humanity and the spiritual aspect of humanity can be partitioned from each other is to "fall victim to the most detestable form of idealism which separates spiritual existence from its material and sociological substratum. *It is our profound belief that man is a unity; that is to say, that there is a fundamental connection between the problems of the body and those of the soul.*"[26] Thus, any true humanism is an integral humanism which views humanity in its totality.

Secondly, an essential aspect of this unified view of the human person is its doxological nature. For Daniélou, "prayer is an absolutely universal human vocation."[27] Therefore, he concludes, prayer is in itself "a fundamental part of all humanism."[28] To fulfill a basic quality of one's fullest expression of his humanity is to participate in the adoration, worship and contemplation involved in the life of prayer.

26. Daniélou, *L'Oraison Problème Politique*, 27; ET: *Prayer as Political Problem*, 27. "Le méconnaître serait pécher par cet idéalism que nous détestons par-dessus tout, car il sépare l'existence spirituelle de son substrat matériel et sociologique. Or nous croyons profondément que l'homme est un, c'est-à-dire qu'il y a une relation fondamentale entre les problémes du corps et ceux de l'âme." All subsequent English translations of this text will be Kirwan's translation unless noted otherwise. See also Daniélou, "L'Oraison comme problème politique," 62–73.

27. Ibid., 28–29. "L'oraison est . . . en élément constitutif de la vie humaine."

28. Ibid., 24. "Prière est . . . un dimension fondamentale de tout humanisme."