

**Apostolic Religious Life Since Vatican II Reclaiming the Treasure
Stonehill Symposium September 27th 2008**

Love Alone is Credible¹

Caritas Christi urget nos. This Crie de Coeur from St Paul is a helpful reminder not just apposite because of the Pauline year but because it reminds us of the focus for our living and activity as religious men and women. Love alone makes us credible as religious – not our love manufactured by our own efforts and will but the love of Christ, deeply rooted in his relationship with the Father and empowered by the work of the Spirit.² It is this Trinitarian love which is the root and ground and heart of religious life. It is the beauty of this love that calls forth our vocations that inspires all our activity and that communicates through our joyful witness the eternal hope of the gospel and the reconciliation that God so desires for our fractured world. The title of this paper is ‘borrowed’ from a book written by the great Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. I purloined it because it seems to me that it succinctly summarizes the divine initiative and impetus at work within apostolic religious life when coherently lived out in contemplation and action. It is the love of God in action in the person of Christ which opens our hearts and minds to the reality of intimacy with our God. It is from this depth of Trinitarian intimacy that we draw the resources for a credibility of love for all with whom we live and work. It is the imperious nature of this love that it has the power to draw us beyond the destructive ‘political’ polarised struggles with which we all too readily engage; and the gentleness to disarm even those who have grown hardened; and it can lead us to seek what is common

¹ The title has been taken from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D.C. Schindler, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2004. Original German edition: *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*, 1963.

² C.f. John 15:16

to every religious vocation and charism – intimacy with the Lord and a sharing in his redemptive mission.

Following the exceedingly helpful keynote presentation of Sr. Sara Butler which clearly sets out the current state of religious life and the challenges we face, my focus will be in the area of the last part of her paper, namely identifying where the treasure of apostolic religious life lies and suggesting ways to more fruitfully live from that foundation in an authentic ecclesial witness. The structure of this paper is in three parts – three ‘jewels’: firstly a focus on the Love that underpins our initial vocation; secondly indicating the love expressed in the paschal mystery and the importance of ongoing conversion in our lives; and thirdly focusing on the love that is manifested in an ecclesial commitment. This is no sentimental love but a ‘tough’ love, a committed love, a passionate love willing to bear the cost of belonging to our Lord and our individual religious families and at the service of the Church in the world. Throughout this paper I shall be drawing on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and also on my Ignatian heritage.

The Love that underpins our vocation

The love that calls us in our vocation is the same love that brought us – each one of us – into being, that loved us into existence from all eternity. This is both the reality of our own lives and the reality of the witness that we are called to share with those with whom we live and work and all with whom we engage. And so as the Holy Father reminds us:

[God] loved me first, before I myself could love at all. It was only because he knew me and loved me that I was made. So I was not thrown into the world

by some operation of chance, as Heidegger says and now have to do my best to swim around in this ocean of life, but I am preceded by a perception of me, an idea and a love of me. They are present in the ground of my being. God is there first and loves me. And that is the trustworthy ground on which my life is standing and on which I myself can construct it.³

So important is this understanding for Pope Benedict that his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* elaborates the reality of “the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others”.⁴ It is in the light of this love that the vocational call is framed. The Lord reminds us of this prevenient love which draws forth a response of love that waits upon the word of the Lord’s leading; and is aware of the divine initiative that is always present before us and that is the sure ground on which we walk forth into the future. It is vital that we continue to spend contemplative time drawing from this source. The call to prayer is primary in all our endeavors. It is the only way in which our apostolate will be fruitful. It is the disciplined commitment to a relationship with the Lord that will empower all our activity. Balthasar considers prayer to be so important that he maintains “the Christian stands and falls with prayer”.⁵ How much more so is this for the apostolic religious.

The call of Christ implies a choice, primarily God’s choice of the individual and then the human response of choice that disposes the individual to enter more deeply into the mission of Christ. This human response of choice is as it were a self-abandonment, characterized by an openness that enables the choosing of God’s choice. We cannot be more free than to choose God’s choice. In Balthasar’s *The Christian State of Life* he

³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *God and Man*, [San Francisco, Ignatius Press] 2002, 26-27

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est*, [Washington DC, USCCB, 2006]2.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations* [London SPCK,1971] 113.

makes clear that the primary call of human beings is the call to love, love of God and love of neighbor. This is an absolute call and admits of no exception.⁶ This love is active. Indeed if there was not a dynamic outward action of love it would not be truly love.⁷ At the heart of this love is the mystery of self-giving and, consequently, of ‘choice’. If love is true, “it gives itself to God and human beings by an interior movement that is wholly proper to it. ... Because it is compelled by no necessity, necessity and freedom are conjoined in it.”⁸

True love is radically and fundamentally disposed to renounce everything so that everything may be held in readiness for the first sign of the will of the beloved. In the Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius stresses the way in which the lover shares with the beloved.⁹ Balthasar emphasizes that so true is this of God’s love for human beings that the whole world is a demonstration of God’s unsurpassed love. The particular call that we have heard as individuals in a uniquely personal manner – through prayer and reflection on the word of God – becomes the foundation not only for a growing Christian maturity but also for the priestly state or the state of the counsels to which we have been called.¹⁰ As we made and continue to make our choice, we are drawn into the unity between Father, Son and Spirit. Every mission, every qualitative calling within the Church

⁶ “We are here to love - love God and to love our neighbor.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* [Ignatius Press, San Francisco. 1983] 27.

⁷ “The inner life of love is inconceivable without the rhythm of growth, of ever new openness and spontaneity. Love can never give itself sufficiently, can never exhaust its ingenuity in preparing new joys for the beloved, and is never so satisfied with itself and its deeds that it does not look for new proofs of love, is never so familiar with the person of the beloved that it does not crave the wonderment of new knowledge.” Ibid. 28.

⁸ Ibid. 29-30.

⁹ Ignatius Loyola *The Spiritual Exercises* 231, trans. George Ganss SJ, [Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1992]

¹⁰ There is of course clearly the married state to be emphasized and Balthasar does so in his work. My focus is on the state of the counsels – religious life and the priestly state, as this is the subject matter of this paper.

proceeds from the Father, and through the Spirit leads the one called to the Son, who has been called from all eternity by the Father. We might ask ourselves when did we last prayerfully ponder the beginnings of our own vocation? How far do we still allow this reality of God's choice of us into our everyday consciousness? Do we consistently understand ourselves as involved in God's mission or do we focus on my ministry? What means might we take to live from this foundation?

Love expressed in the Paschal Mystery – ongoing conversion

The Paschal Mystery is central to the understanding of our faith. More than this it is a reality sharply focused for Apostolic Religious many of whom have within their Constitutions or Rule the understanding of a call 'to serve beneath the banner of the cross.'¹¹ Indeed, all Christians at some time in their lives must face the full, dramatic horror of the Cross when they confront the suffering of Christ for their sinfulness, their alienation from themselves and God through sin, and the continuing suffering of Christ in the contemporary human realities of poverty, violence and oppression. It is perhaps Paul who best articulates the centrality of the Cross wanting to "know nothing, but Christ crucified."¹² This is the supreme 'foolishness' of God which paradoxically reveals God's power and wisdom.¹³ As Apostolic Religious this 'foolishness' is the ground on which we stand. It inevitably means being open and willing to embrace the reality of the cross in our lives both as individuals and as communities. It means living a life of ongoing

¹¹ C.f. Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus 1 in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*. [St Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996] 3.

¹² 1. Cor. 2:2.

¹³ C.f. I Cor. 1:18.

conversion and through that way of the Cross we are drawn deeply into the life of the Trinity. It inexorably means coming into confrontation with our own very human temptations to independence and self-aggrandizement.

The more deeply human beings allow themselves to be open to the dynamic spirit of God, the more they become aware of themselves in the midst of God's creation, at home in God's world and invited into God's creative and redemptive work. Credible apostolic ministry in the twenty first century requires an appreciation and imitation of the self-emptying love that lies at the heart of the Trinity. This is both an invitation and a challenge. The invitation is to a more profound understanding and a deeper participation in the life of the Trinity. The challenge is to personal and communal transformation and pastoral outreach.

The Scriptural corpus clearly indicates the reality of the cross can only be interpreted in the context of the Trinity and through faith. Likewise, the full doctrine of the Trinity can only be explored on the basis of a theology of the Cross. As Balthasar indicates the doctrine of the Trinity is "the ever-present, inner presupposition of the Cross."¹⁴ In this "drama" the divine soteriological initiative both invites and initiates human beings into the life of the Trinity. Here, we may glimpse something of the mystery of all mysteries. "God is supremely what he is in giving everything away"¹⁵. It is the Father's primary initiative in giving everything in and to the life of the Word. With the self-emptying of the Son there is a further manifestation of the life received from the Father which

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama vol. IV*, [Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1994], 319.

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama II*, [Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1990], 256.

continues to be a life realized in self-gift and manifested in the obedience of the Son and the work of the Spirit. The depths of this self-surrender and obedience are fully revealed in the events of the Passion.¹⁶

Self-Surrender

Self-surrender encapsulates the heart of the vows of poverty and chastity lovingly lived. “All authentic being in love” for Lonergan, “is a total self-surrender something in itself, something personal, intimate, and profoundly attuned to the deepest yearnings of the human heart. It constitutes a basic fulfillment of man’s being.”¹⁷ Many apostolic religious can echo Lonergan’s words in the resonance of their own hearts. The very possibility of such self-surrender and the intrinsic nature of this to authentic being in love, I would suggest, lies at the heart of the mystery of God and therefore is reflected in human beings created after the image of God. Accordingly, I am suggesting, after the manner of Balthasar, that self-surrender is a characteristic of relations within the Trinity and is thus part of the prevenient grace and intimacy that God offers to human beings. Indeed, it is a reflection of God’s ongoing love and desire for each person and the consequent blessedness of a human respondent.¹⁸ It is that space of *cor ad cor loquitur*, so important to St. Ignatius at the heart of the prayer of colloquy. Indeed, Balthasar links this action of self-surrender to the state of Ignatian indifference, and for him the mystery

¹⁶ In Von Balthasar’s meditation *Heart of the World*, he questions Christ about this obedience: “Do you know what you have chosen, Lord? Are you quite clear about the consequences of your obedience?” [75]

¹⁷ Bernard Lonergan, “Theology and Man’s Future”, *A Second Collection*, [London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974], 145.

¹⁸ So Balthasar states in words reminiscent of those of Lonergan above: “In seeking and hearing God, [the human being] experiences the highest joy, that of being fulfilled in itself, but fulfilled in something infinitely greater than itself and, for that very reason, completely fulfilled and made blessed.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, [London, SPCK, 1975], 21.

of indifference is “much more a mystery of personal love, and the exchange of wills, one which requires explanation in terms of the Trinity.”¹⁹ Is this not the love that the vows call apostolic religious to express?

The act of self-surrender is an act of fruitful love. This is true par excellence in the life, passion, death and resurrection of Christ, but it is also true in **our** human reality as apostolic religious. Since our lives, however, are obscured by the existence of sin this act of self-surrender involves an element of risk in a surrender to a God we do not clearly see or perceive. In consequence, true self-surrender always involves some degree of sacrifice or renunciation and a growing desire for real purification. This is a call of ever deepening love that enables our lives and our service to be truly a Christ light for others. Indeed, the more positive is our response to the divine initiative the stronger becomes the awareness that even desires, intentions and motivations need to be surrendered and purified.

This ongoing momentum of self-abandonment in which each level of indifference is sacrificed to an ever deeper self-surrender is clearly illustrated in Balthasar’s interpretation of the ministry of Christ. His mission is surrendered in apparent failure and in Gethsemane it appears that even his capacity to surrender to the Father’s will is shaken. The invitation to share in Christ’s suffering gives a more profound meaning to self-surrender, because “in the night [of Christ’s agony], in which God hid himself, there was the darkness of an extreme love, which could still be affirmed even in non-vision and

¹⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, [New York, Sheed and Ward, 1963], 239-240.

the naked faith of indifference.”²⁰ So it is that the human act of self-surrender is drawn into the divine act of Trinitarian self-surrender for the salvation of humanity. For Balthasar what takes place in Christ namely the divine-human self-surrender, finds its focus and inspiration in what he calls “God’s wound of love” that opening and outpouring of divine life and love in the Trinitarian perichoresis.”²¹

Obedience

Obedience may be linked with self-surrender in a way that focuses the dynamic of self-surrender into a moment of attunement to the Ignatian “magis” urging individuals forward to ever more holiness. Generous self-surrender may be seen in terms of real commitment to the leading of God and the needs of “neighbors” that is central to any concrete mission. Both self-surrender and obedience are crucial to apostolic mission. Without the latter the former runs the risk of being a deceptively self-transcending asceticism.

So self-surrender is a prelude and a prerequisite for the active co-operation of apostolic religious in the divine enterprise. In that self-surrender individuals respond to the invitation to enter into God’s creative and redemptive activity. Here obedience is a response of love to that invitation and always includes the divine gift of a greater interior freedom and energy which in turn assist that response. Thus there develops a deeper intimacy with God through such obedience and a deeper integrity of the human person. Indeed, Balthasar is insistent that obedience is only true when undertaken out of love in a

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, V*, [Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991], 51.

²¹ Mark A McIntosh, *Christology From Within*, [Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2000], 74.

joyful response to the divine initiative of love, not out of fear. It is love alone which prevents obedience from becoming oppressive by engendering life-giving energy and permanence of commitment. In becoming obedient we, as it were, acknowledge for ourselves what is most truly ours our particular human selfhood, the particular form of co-operation with God which as individuals we were created to enjoy.²²

It is clear that the self-surrender of Christ was actualized in obedience even unto death in his loving being for others. The pattern of divine love is the cross - a pattern of life for apostolic religious who are drawn into the divine trajectory. This is not a destructive burden but rather a source of empowerment enabling a deeper refining of interior dispositions, a more refined *sensus Christi*.

Integrated apostolic religious

This emphasis on a gradual refinement of spirit after the manner of Christ is very much in accord with the vision of Ignatius Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises which he arranged as a dynamic Christian *Bildung*, a formation of the spirit which is both contemplative and active. The precondition for this formation, the seed ground for the working of the Spirit is *desire*. What Ignatius seems to be doing by focusing on desire is emphasizing the importance of taking a person exactly where that person is. He stresses a patient waiting with the person, listening and helping the individual slowly uncover the varied clutter that overlays the frail shoots of desire. As desire begins to grow, there is a process of

²² See also Mark McIntosh's discussion of obedience in *Christology From Within*, 75-87

harnessing it to further growth, always with a view to the end, a deeper relationship with God. Therefore one element of the dynamic is to bring into fruitful and powerful conjunction the obscurely desired and as yet unknown finality and the person's desire for it. The greater the love the greater the desire and this is a continual process of deepening relationship with God.

The Spiritual Exercises were part of Balthasar's own formation as a Jesuit and they influenced not only the way he prayed but also his developing theological understanding. He did not separate theology and spirituality. He did not see his academic work as separate from the life of prayerful contemplation and activity in the community of the church. He insisted that one could only do theology properly "on one's knees". For contemporary apostolic religious the question needs to be posed how far do we separate our prayer and our work. Is there a key integration such that all our apostolates are undertaken metaphorically 'on our knees'? Is there still such integration in the times where the Cross is more apparent in our lives in large ways or the irritating awkward mysterious freedom of those other real human beings with whom we live and work each day. In the drama of our lives are we aware of the divine and human dimensions – the ongoingly inter-subjective character of the divine encounter with human beings?²³ There are two essential dimensions to the drama the human and the divine but these are not in competition. The divine freedom expressed in the persons of the Trinity both constitutes

²³ For a more detailed exploration of von Balthasar's theodramatics see particularly, Ben Quash, "Drama and the Ends of Modernity", in Gardner, Moss, Quash, Ward, *Balthasar At The End of Modernity*, [Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1999], 139-171. Also Ben Quash, "The Theo-Drama" in eds. Oakes & Moss, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004], 143-157.

the reality of human freedom and preserves its distinctive character in the inter-relationship with the divine.

For Ignatius, contemplation and action are intertwined. It is not a form of contemplation that leads to epistemological issues – our activity of gaining knowledge - rather it is a contemplation that leads to action and an action that leads to the discovery of truth. Such a discovery is consequent upon participation in the world, a world we come to know in its beauty and truth through the self-giving love of God. We can only reflect on the truth of Christian revelation by becoming a player in the midst of this world, involved as we are in the passion and the Passion of God.²⁴

Ignatius always endeavours to preserve a spirit of openness which is the only true response to a God who is ever greater. At the heart of Ignatius' work there is a tension between intimacy and distance, likeness and unlikeness, profound love and the “fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom” rooted in reverence and awe. Balthasar and Ignatius are at one in their attempt to articulate the reality of God who is always greater than any conception of him – God of ever-greater dissimilarity.²⁵ It is through this reality of God this dialectic of seeming presence and absence that God entices us forward deeper into the divine mystery present in all our contemplation and action. The reality of this

²⁴ “The life common to Christ and the Church is actual life poised between perdition and redemption, sinfulness and sanctity. The existence of sin within the field of force of grace, the impact, here and now, between despairing obduracy and crucified love, these, and not a colourless and static world of philosophy, are the matter of theology. This is why it cannot be expressed solely in the sleek and passionless form of the treatise, but demands movement, sharp debate The virile language of deep and powerful emotion.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, [San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1989], 204-5.

²⁵ *Maior dissimilitudo* classically defined by the Fourth Lateran Council 1215.

dialectic, also gives rise to a divine dynamism at the heart of creation, a dynamism which is always new in each historical circumstance.²⁶

Love manifested in ecclesial commitment

For Balthasar as for Ignatius the primary embodiment of this work of reconciliation in contemporary times lies in the Church. For both men the institutional structure of the Church was important. Ignatius expressed his understanding of a true relationship with the church in his “Rules for Thinking, Judging and Feeling with the Church”.²⁷ Here, it is clear that Ignatius could see no definitive conflict between the freedom of the individual conscience and the teaching of the institutional church.²⁸ These men were committed to a similar understanding. Within the life and work of both Ignatius and Balthasar it is clear that they are not attempting, in their commitment to the institutional Church, to usurp the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit calling individuals to ever greater holiness and the fullness of the life of grace. Rather, they seemed to be able to hold these two realities in a creative tension that was fruitful for the life of the Church and the lives of those whom they influenced.

For Balthasar, his understanding of Ignatius’ “Rules” led him to emphasize the Marian character of the church which he linked to the graced openness and receptivity of Mary

²⁶ Ben Quash, “Ignatian Dramatics”, *The Way*, vol. 38, January 1888, 77-86.

²⁷ This is the term utilized by George Ganss SJ in his translation and commentary on *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, [Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1992], 133. Earlier authorities used the term “Rules for Thinking with the Church”.

²⁸ Ben Quash makes a similar point when he states: “Ignatius was committed to the view that there could be no absolute conflict between the nearness of the God of his conscience and experience [the grace from within] and the institutional direction of the official Church [the God from without].” “Ignatian Dramatics”, 85.

and which he saw as the disposition of commitment to the Church. He sees the primary issue in Ignatius's rules as focusing on an understanding of "obedient readiness". "Ignatius does not speak of "love for the Church" but of readiness before her, evidently in order to be drawn into her love for Christ, and through Christ for all human beings."²⁹ Balthasar is also insistent that alongside the Marian character of the Church there is also a Petrine character and that together these constitute the inner dimensions of the Church founded by Christ. Mary's full and free 'yes' to the will of God is expressed in a certain integrity of person and life. "We can say that she represents the perfect example of the existential priesthood, namely the perfect correspondence between person and office, where all is ordered to the divine mission."³⁰ It is the figure of St John, the beloved disciple, the friend whom Jesus loved and who was so close to him at the last supper who represents for Balthasar the religious life. Along with Mary, St John represents the Church of love which is brought to full expression in the faithful living of the evangelical counsels. Apostolic religious make a singular contribution to this reality. In understanding the reality of the Church then Balthasar calls us to see Mary, John and Peter in relationship and proposes the gospel scene of one of the resurrection appearances for our consideration. Receiving the news from Mary Magdalene John and Peter both run to the empty tomb. Although John – symbolizing the Church of love – arrives first, he gives precedence to Peter who symbolizes the Church of office. It is clear from this representation that Balthasar does not balk at the Church of love making submission to

²⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Die Kirche lieben?", *Pneuma und Institution*, 162-200, cited in Werner Loser SJ, "The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs Von Balthasar" in [ed] David Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar His Life and Work*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991, 103-120.

³⁰ John O'Donnell SJ *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, [London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1992] 133.. I am indebted to the late Fr John O'Donnell - who first taught me theology at Heythrop College, University of London – for conversations 2000-2001 around these points.

the institutional Church. But at the same time he draws our attention also to the reality that the institutional Church has no other function than to serve the church of love.³¹

In the contemporary Church we are challenged to live this tension in ways that are equally life-giving. It is clear from what has already been indicated that the possibility of living in such an ecclesial way so that the mission of Christ may be promoted involves a deeper contemplative living that finds expression in an active apostolate. Central to a living out of this ecclesial relationship is as I have indicated elsewhere,³² a hermeneutical principle that benignly interprets the words or actions of another. This is a valid hermeneutical stance drawing its authority from the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius.³³ It is also a stance that arises from and contributes to a deep contemplative disposition enabling this to be the foundation from which action arises within the mission.

The contemporary Church, because she lives in the reality of these tensions “lives in an incomprehensible place between earth and heaven, between death and eternal life, between the old world that is passing away and the new and incorruptible world.”³⁴ In this liminal space, the Church is poised to respond both to her Lord and to the world within which she has temporal existence.³⁵ The heart of the Church is the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is at the centre of life for an apostolic religious. It is here in

³¹ “For Balthasar, office in the Church is meant to be the crystallization of love.” Ibid.

³² Gill Goulding IBVM, *Creative Perseverance*, [Ottawa Novalis, 2003], 143.

³³ See the Presupposition of the Spiritual Exercises.

³⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology II*, [Ignatius Press, 1991], 511.

³⁵ C.f. *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] #9; *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World] #41. where it states that the Church defines itself as “an instrument for the redemption of all, sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth”. But also Church defines itself as the “sacrament by which Christ’s mission is extended to include the whole of man, body and soul, and through that totality the whole of nature created by God.”

the gift of the Eucharist that the mystery of the Church's role is revealed for the Eucharist is "a reciprocal communion between Christ and the Church and ultimately between the Trinity and the entire cosmos."³⁶ Here, the Trinitarian life of God is manifested and so also "the ultimate nature of created being in their difference and unity."³⁷ So also is revealed within the Eucharist the end to which the Church is oriented, "for the goal of the entire ecclesial reality is the salvation and rescuing of the world".³⁸ In the Pauline formula all things are to be reconciled in Christ. Indeed, Healy and Schindler argue that this inclusion in Christ of all creation means also that "creation is taken into the mission of Christ to the extent that it shares in his mission of mediating the Trinitarian love of Father, Son and Spirit by realizing its original purpose in being created."³⁹ In a depiction reminiscent of the Ignatian *Contemplatio* [the Contemplation to Attain the Love of God], Balthasar indicates that in the Trinity's plan for the world, creation was a gift from the Father to the Son revelatory of the life of the Trinity. And in the redemptive work of Christ there is a return of this gift of creation from the Son to the Father. Human beings are drawn into this divine dynamic at the heart of creation.⁴⁰ In the *Contemplatio* Ignatius encourages the one making the Spiritual Exercises to become aware of the gifted nature of all reality, and to respond by a prayer of self-donation an offering of gift of self in response to the gift of Self that God gives in creation and supremely in Christ.

³⁶ Nicholas Healy and David Schindler, "For the life of the world: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist", *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, [Cambridge, University of Cambridge Press, 2006]51-63.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology II*, [San Francisco Ignatius Press, 1991], 316.

³⁹ "For the life of the world. 54.

⁴⁰ "The world can be thought of as the gift of the Father [who is both Begetter and Creator] to the Son, since the Father wishes to sum up all things in heaven and earth in the Son, as head [Ephesians 1: 10]; thus the Son takes this gift – just as he takes the gift of Godhead – as an opportunity to thank and glorify the Father." *Theo-Drama II*, 262.

This is a life-giving exchange of gift and this understanding lies at the heart of the reality of Eucharist. It is “the event whereby Christ communicates the whole of his human and Trinitarian life by gathering into himself the whole of creation; and the event whereby the Church offers herself and ultimately the whole cosmos by receiving the gift of Christ and entering into his mission to renew the cosmos.”⁴¹.

If there is an intended Eucharistic destiny at the heart of creation then an abiding openness to the world is a primordial stance for the Church and especially for apostolic religious. Balthasar emphasizes through his work that the vocation of the Church is “to pour itself out for the life of the world, even as the world finds herself in the life of the Eucharist.”⁴² The Church will be enabled to do so the more deeply rooted its members are in the life of the Trinity. This will involve as we have seen an entry into the way of self-gift, self-surrender and obedience – for it is the way of the Persons of the Trinity.

Relationship between Religious Life and Priesthood

In Balthasar’s theology the religious life and the life of priesthood form are closely linked. This is an insight that we might fruitfully ponder. With regard to the priesthood Balthasar continues to be present in the world through his word, his sacraments and the ministerial priesthood. Since no human being is able to adequately represent Christ,

⁴¹ Healy and Schindler, “For the Life of the world”, 57. C.f. There is one incident of graced awareness in the life of Ignatius which seems to bear a remarkable resemblance to this architectonic vision. This understanding appears to the author to be reminiscent of what one senses in the graced understanding granted to Ignatius beside the river Cardoner where “The eyes of his understanding began to open. He beheld no vision, but he saw and understood many things, spiritual as well as those concerning faith and learning..... he received a great illumination in his understanding.” Autobiography #30.

⁴² “For the Life of the world”, 63.

Christ as it were lays hold of a man and through the sacrament of holy orders enables that man to represent him. No human being is fully able to do this and therefore there is always a real gap between the priest and the office to which he has been called. The subjective holiness of the priest never matches the objective representation of his office - this gives the potential for great humility - but nevertheless Christ guarantees that when the priest acts in his name by preaching his word and celebrating his sacraments he is present to the faithful with his grace through the action of the priest. "If the evangelical counsels represent primarily the subjective surrender of the consecrated person to Christ, the priesthood emphasizes his objective office in the community."⁴³ It is important that religious life and the priesthood are seen as complementary and vital for the life of the Church not as competitive or alternative vocations.⁴⁴ In the tradition of the Church there is a clear recognition of an inner coherence between these two vocations.

Conclusion – the language of love

How are we to speak of the treasure of apostolic religious life today? What is the vocabulary of the love that drives us? The recent publication of the decrees of the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus might help us for it has evoked surprise amongst some readers.⁴⁵ The sections dealing with the Society's identity and charism; the relationship with the Holy Father; and the decree on obedience generated the most

⁴³ John, O'Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 132.

⁴⁴ "On the one hand, the subjective surrender of the religious to Christ becomes objective as he or she is inserted into a religious family with a rule approved by the Church. On the other hand, the objective ministry of the priest calls for a way of life in conformity with the ministry, a way of life that makes the ministry credible."

⁴⁵ I am indebted for these ideas to conversation with Fr Peter Bisson SJ a delegate to GC 35 from the Province of English Speaking Canada and a member of the preparatory commission for the General Congregation.

interest. The surprise element is the language in which these decrees are written. There is a certain expectation that Jesuit decrees will be analytical, precise and action oriented. These particular sections use the language of the affect – not merely the emotions but involving the deepest place of the spirit – and call for an engagement of the heart of the reader. They use words such as ‘fervor’ and ‘zeal’ and ‘fidelity’ words that were prevalent in the vocabulary of the founders and foundresses of many orders of apostolic religious. They call for a contemplative reading a prayerful pondering and they evoke great consolation. They recall Jesuits and members of the Ignatian family to their roots, just as the Conciliar Fathers at Vatican II requested. It is imperative that we reclaim something of this contemplative way of proceeding with regard to our prayer, our planning and our practices as apostolic religious.⁴⁶ Certainly if we do so both as individuals and communities, it will make a difference and assist the transformation of our Institutes, and here the faithful loving life of even one member has enormous influence. For graced joyful fidelity bears witness to the faithfulness of our Triune God, it is divine love flowing in us and through all our apostolic efforts that gives real credibility.

⁴⁶ In an email correspondence with Sr. Sara Butler the possibility of something akin to the Institute of Priestly Formation but for apostolic religious was raised. Certainly ways of helping to form and ongoingly form religious in this way would be helpful.