

to *Meister Eckhart*, an almost surgical treatment of the many approaches that have sought to define Eckhart's thought.

MICHAEL DEMKOVICH OP

**BALTHASAR: A (VERY) CRITICAL INTRODUCTION** by Karen Kilby, *William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK, pp. xii + 176, £ 16.99, pbk

Writing an introduction to the way to approach the works of a major scholar is a difficult enterprise. In the case of this book written by Karen Kilby, when Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Nottingham (UK), the enterprise is much more difficult because of the intention to produce an introduction that is to be (*very*) *critical*.

The book's structure is sober, perhaps too much so. Between an introduction and a conclusion devoted to the defence of the core of the volume, Kilby's work offers substantially four sections in five chapters. This is a sketch of Balthasar's theological personality, an analysis of four central images drawn from his work (Picture, Play, Fulfillment and Circle) and some considerations about two of the recurrent themes in the huge output of the Swiss theologian: the Trinity, and the correlation between gender and 'the Nuptial'.

What is the main contribution of Kilby's *Balthasar*? Of course, it is designed to introduce the readers to his difficult and massive output, particularly helping them 'to find their way around in Balthasar's writing' (p. 5). More closely, on the basis of many passages of the book, it may be said that Kilby aims to criticize the role of this work in the theological debate of the last few decades, as well as in the consideration of John Paul II or Benedict XVI. In spite of his creativity and his importance for theological reflection, Kilby cannot agree with 'the current tendency to lionize Balthasar, to look to him as some sort of new Church Father, as *the* great figure to emerge in the twentieth century' (p.2). The dimension and the elusiveness of Balthasar's cultural output may disorient a scholar who aims to criticize it. In this sense, considering the secondary literature about Balthasar in English, to the point of taking into account the charges of heresy against the Swiss theologian (cf. p.11, about Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), Kilby considers that Balthasar has to be criticized because 'he frequently seems to presume [...] a God's eye view' (p.13). From Kilby's point of view, we can say that the weakness of this theology is its strength. Too often Balthasar, speaking as a very cultivated scholar and as a deep spiritual guide (cf. p. 161), offers a point of view that presumes to be 'above Scripture, above tradition, and history, and also above his readers' (p. 14).

This problematic aspect of Balthasar's theology emerges from various parts of his huge output. First, it emerges in the consideration of his original way into the field of fundamental theology, from the perspective of aesthetics (*Glory of the Lord*). Under the famous programmatic expression '*seeing the form*', the Swiss theologian found a way to hold together Barth and Rahner, overcoming their respective limitations. Yet the aim to describe the *wholeness* of the form (the Revelation in Christ), according to Kilby, cannot result in a dangerous 'all-or-nothing' (p. 55) approach, according to which either you understand the form as Balthasar does or you fail to see it. Secondly, the same difficulty is present at the core of *Theo-Drama*, considered by Kilby through the metaphor of the play that articulates the relationship between the Trinitarian drama and history.

Despite Balthasar's conviction concerning the impossibility of a standpoint outside the divine and historical dramas (cf. p. 70), Kilby asks if Balthasar himself plays the role of 'an actor *within* the drama' or rather 'of the theater critic – and perhaps also a theorist of drama' (p. 65). Thirdly, the other recurrent patterns in the work of the Catholic theologian (the 'fulfillment' and the 'circle') also manifest his peculiar point of view 'from *above*'. On one hand, Kilby stresses that Balthasar presumes to have a global cognition of the totality that allows him to judge the inadequacies of the other standpoints compared to the fulfillment in Christ. On the other hand, in the very clear words of Kilby, "Balthasar does not offer any kind of account how the historical thought-forms from the 'midpoint which is beyond history' [...]; rather, he makes reference to the common derivation from a transcendent center precisely to *reject* the need to give any particular account of the relationship between them' (p. 88). How can he practise a humble theology – as the Swiss theologian recommends – and, at the same time, presume this kind of higher point of view? Fourthly, the Trinitarian theology of Balthasar, thinking the mystery of the Cross in the kenosis of the Father that empties Himself in giving all to the Son beyond 'the usual bounds of theology', also shows that he seems 'to know more than can be known' (p.114) – a tendency that is united to the danger, in the field of the hermeneutics of evil, of sliding into a sort of divinization of the tragic.

Leaving to readers the detailed chapter on 'the gender' and 'the Nuptial', I wish to devote a few words to the conclusions of the book. From Kilby's perspective, the work of Balthasar depends too much, on the one hand, on his own brilliant personality and, on the other hand, on sources that are 'not available to the rest of us' (p.157), probably drawn from Adrienne von Speyr's extraordinary experiences. Perhaps for these reasons, unlike Aquinas or Barth, Balthasar was not careful to safeguard his theology 'against the presumption of a God's eye view' (p. 162). Despite the difficulty of the enterprise, the book risks resolving itself in a learned *argumentum ad personam*, lacking a deep criticism of the main weaknesses of Balthasar's theology such as those, for example, indicated by John Milbank in *The Suspended Middle* (pp. 62–78).

MARCO SALVIOLI OP

**C.S.LEWIS – THE WORK OF CHRIST REVEALED by P.H. Brazier, *Pickwick Publications*, Eugene, OR, 2012, pp. xx + 299, \$ 35, pbk**

This is the second of four books in a series entitled *C.S. Lewis: Revelation and the Christ*. The author, Paul Brazier, is an independent scholar living in London. He is the full-time caregiver for his wife, Hilary, who has epilepsy and to whom the series is dedicated.

The volume under review is divided into three parts. In the first part, Brazier looks at the relationship of scripture, revelation and reason in Lewis's thought. In the second, he gives an instructive assessment of the 'Lord, liar, lunatic' trilemma which famously features in *Mere Christianity*, though also, as Brazier shows, in at least another twelve places across Lewis's corpus over a period of twenty-four years. And the third section addresses Lewis's changing attitude towards Christological prefigurements in pagan myths.

The series aims to provide a 'systematic study of what Lewis understood about Jesus Christ, and the revelation of God, who is at the heart of orthodox, traditional, theology'. Brazier considers Lewis's concept of 'mere Christianity' to be 'the faith set out in the creeds and explained by the church fathers', a faith