Imagining the revealed God: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Eberhard Jungel, and the triduum mortis

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Abstract:
‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.’ [Rom 12:2]

Hans Urs von Balthasar and Eberhard Jungel are profound and imaginative thinkers who unreservedly ground their theologies in revelation as God's self-disclosure. This thesis asks what resources such revelation-centred authors, from different traditions, may contribute to a theological understanding of the human imagination. Although theology has often been more interested in the constructive capacities of the imagination, it is the responsive quality of the imagination that is of particular interest to this thesis. Can the imagination contribute to a theological understanding which comprehends the action and speech of God as antecedent to human response?

This thesis examines the epistemological issues that are related both to the imagination and to revelation as the self-communication and self-interpretation of God. The imagination is conceived of as essential to perception and understanding; it allows for both recognition and re-cognition. Through the imagination we can rethink the patterns or paradigms that shape our lives. The renewing of the mind can be said to involve the imagination. However, spiritual transformation requires more than a notion of the imagination as a spontaneous mental act which determines its own content. Balthasar and Jungel, while thinking in lively and narrative ways, are constrained by divine self-disclosure. God's self-revelation provides the content of the paradigm or pattern by which the Christian believer is to live. The imagination can be said to act as the context or locus of revelation.

This thesis demonstrates that the three days of Easter are central to Balthasar's and Jungel's respective understandings of God. For Balthasar and Jungel, the triduum mortis is where the self-revelation of God is most apparent; it is here that God is understood to be self-giving love as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While quite distinct in their approaches, both authors work within trinitarian, and therefore relational, frameworks. This thesis traces the motifs that not only express their understandings of the paschal mystery in relational terms but also ground their respective understandings of renewed existence; for Balthasar, the motifs of mission and kenosis, and for Jungel, those of identification and justification. For both Balthasar and Jungel, the events of the triduum mortis can be said to provide the content of, and act as a boundary to, our conception of God. Nonetheless, it is proposed that, within their respective understandings of divine prevenience, Balthasar and Jungel leave room for the exercise of the imagination. God is mystery; God is not a fixed or completed concept.

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GL1 The Glory of the Lord, volume I: Seeing the Form (1961) tr. Barth and von Balthasar: a critical engagement; an Introduction to the Thesis. This thesis explores the influence of Karl Barth on the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar as it developed. It seeks to show not just what von Balthasar took positively from his study of Barth, an influence which has been widely recognised by subsequent scholars, but also how the development of his theological trilogy is shaped by his critical re-appropriation of a theme which Barth rejects in his Church Dogmatics, namely the analogia entis or analogy of being.