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## Theological Aesthetics and Performatism in the Aestheticization of the Roman Catholic Liturgy

Audrey Seah

The flaunting of the *Cappella Magna*, a surge of interest in Gregorian chant and renaissance polyphony, and the return of elaborate gothic chasubles are just three visible trends among many that stir up liturgical debates today. Arguments for and against the new aesthetic reforms that span theological, philosophical, historical, social and anthropological approaches are aplenty. Many of these arguments attempt to justify a turn to the aesthetics by imposing a sort of objectivity in their arguments but few seem to offer satisfactory answers.

This essay attempts to examine the phenomenon behind the effort to objectify primarily subjective aesthetic forms in the liturgy, with the intention of offering an alternative perspective on the turn towards the aesthetics in the Roman

Catholic liturgy. I will begin my examination by juxtaposing the aesthetical phenomenon against Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics to discern the potential of aesthetics in theology. Then, I will compare the intended outcome of theological aesthetics to Performatism, an emerging cultural phenomenon that is manifesting itself in the Church and its liturgy. I will demonstrate that aesthetic and ritual reforms espoused by many critics of the post-conciliar liturgy are contrary to von Balthasar's theological aesthetic theory, and instead, reflect Performatist traits that are detrimental to theology. Finally, I will expound on the tension between von Balthasar's theological method and Performatism, and argue for a need to go beyond the aesthetics in theology and liturgical reforms today.

## Aestheticization as a Modern Phenomenon

German philosopher Wolfgang Iser defines the mainstream definition of aestheticization as the process by which the aesthetic exceeds its bounds and extends over non-aesthetic spheres.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the aesthetic concerns all that is sensible—taste, smell, touch, the audible and visible—and emotions. The senses shape what is considered beautiful. The aesthetic in the modern culture however, goes beyond the senses and permeates a deeper realm of the human experience. Iser describes the multiple facets of aestheticization in the modern world:

1. A surface aestheticization is visible in the emergence of a “spectacle society” where aesthetic practices in entertainment and fashion provide the paradigms for the different non-aesthetic spheres in society. Politics for example, becomes a business of spin-doctors and image-building advisers.

2. Technology is enabling an in-depth aestheticization of the material and social world by allowing the human subject to construct his or her own identity. Genetic engineering and virtual worlds are examples that facilitate this ability to manipulate one’s own identity.

3. The postmodern view (beginning with post-structuralism and deconstruction) that truth is fundamentally a construct encourages aestheticization. From this perspective, the human discovers itself as an artist and the world as its design. Aestheticization within this context is an extreme consequence of the modern turn to the subject and with the underlying intention to gain emancipation from authority. In an aestheticized world, human beings are finally enabled to become authors of their own life and world. Religious experiences are sought after only as far as they reinforce the subjective identity.

## Theological Aestheticization

Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics offer an alternative notion of aestheticization in an attempt to unseat autonomously constructed subjectivity with objectivity. True aestheticization for von Balthasar is an analogy of the Christian experience.

Writing in the 1960s, von Balthasar was pleading for a turn towards the aesthetic to break through the modern rational impasse. In the introduction to volume 1 of his major theological work, *The Glory of the Lord*, von Balthasar laments the loss of beauty in theology and the present superficiality of beauty in the world:

No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence

<sup>1</sup> The summary of Iser’s description of aestheticization in this section is taken from Yves De Maeseneer, “The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticization,” ed. Graham Ward, in *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London: Continuum, 2008), 99.

exposes features on that face, which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it.<sup>2</sup>

Von Balthasar’s observation is echoed by Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* (1970).<sup>3</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno performs a structural analysis of the subject-object relation and form in the aestheticization of the modern world. Adorno’s work is helpful for understanding the interrelation between subjectivity (albeit a false one)<sup>4</sup> driven by mass consumerism, and authentic aesthetic experience that enables true objectivity, which von Balthasar upholds.

Drawing from Adorno’s exposition of true aestheticization, von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics can be systematized in the following way.

The ‘Kantian’ mindset has led to the modern precept of the relationship between subject and object as one that is an autonomous act, initiated entirely by the subject. An object is perceived the way it is, because the subject projects what transpires in him on to the object (see figure 1). Since the perception of the object is entirely subjective, the subject is free to construct a perception or meaning of the object any way it pleases. Such is the aestheticization of culture as Iser describes above. This aesthetic experience is entirely constructed by the subject making it potentially relative. The value or message of an artwork, for example, can be entirely made up by its spectator. Religious experiences within such a mindset are deemed to be entirely subjective.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Adorno and von Balthasar’s converge on their observation of the Modern phenomenon of aestheticization but the practical conclusions they reach are quite different. In this regard, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), confronts Adorno’s rejection of images including those of God explicitly in his 2007 Papal Encyclical *Spe Salvi* (nos. 42-43). The point where Adorno and von Balthasar deviate is certainly worth closer examination, but because of the limited scope of this essay, Adorno’s ideas will be used only to elucidate von Balthasar’s ideas more clearly.

<sup>4</sup> Adorno argues that what undergirds the subjective aesthetic experience is a modern instrumentalization of reason, which subsists in the leveling out of all differences. Maeseneer summarizes Adorno, “The modern subject identifies everything in function of itself. The imposition of a totalitarian identity upon the non-identical serves the aim of a total control.” An effect of this totalitarian identity is visible in the mass consumerist culture, which as such, fosters as false subjectivization. For more, see Yves De Maeseneer, “The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticization,” ed. Graham Ward, in *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London: Continuum, 2008), 101-102.

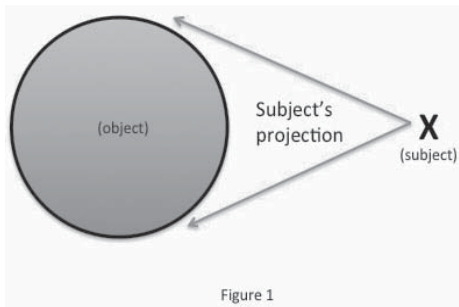


Figure 1

True aesthetic experience counters the potential relativism and extreme subjectivism of Modernity. In a true aesthetic experience, the object initiates the relationship while the subject relinquishes its will entirely, in surrender to the object (see figure 2). The subject must first become fully passive, thus allowing the object to move actively towards the subject and expand within it. Von Balthasar describes the block of appropriation by the subject in theological terms,

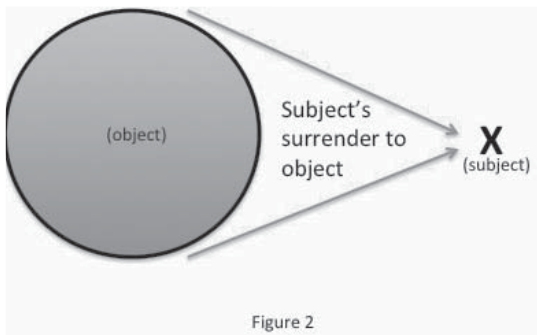


Figure 2

with God as “being” that can be discovered in the beautiful:

The quality of “being-in-itself” which belongs to the beautiful, the demand of the beautiful itself makes to be allowed to be what it is, the demand, therefore, that we renounce our attempts to control and manipulate it, in order truly to be able to be happy by enjoying it.<sup>5</sup>

Such is the first of two phases in theological aesthetics. Von Balthasar calls the first “*The theory of vision* (or fundamental theology): ‘aesthetics’ in the Kantian sense as a theory about the perception of the form of God’s self-revelation.”<sup>6</sup>

The second phase of theological aestheticization moves beyond a one-sided initiation by the object. Phase two requires the participation of the subject in the relationship so that the subject is truly immersed in the objective experience (see figure 3). Von Balthasar calls this second phase “*The theory of rapture* (or dogmatic theology): ‘aesthetics’ as a theory about the incarnation of God’s glory and the consequent elevation of man to participate in that glory.”<sup>7</sup> Von

<sup>5</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics*, 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Balthasar expounds on this essential interaction between subject and object and its importance in doing theology:

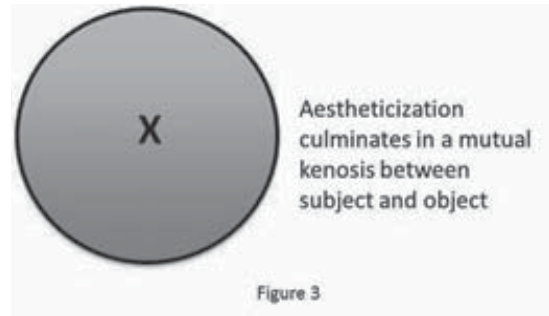


Figure 3

In theology, there are no “bare facts” which, in the name of an alleged objectivity of detachment, disinterestedness and impartiality, one could establish like any other worldly fact, without oneself being (both objectively and subjectively) gripped so as to participate in the divine nature (*participation divinae naturae*). For the object with which we are concerned is man’s participation in God, which from God’s perspective, is actualized as “revelation” (culminating in God’s manhood) and which, from man’s perspective, is actualized as “faith” (culminating in Christ’s Godmanhood). This double and reciprocal *ekstasis*—God’s “venturing forth” to man and man’s to God—constitutes the very content of dogmatics, which may thus rightly be presented as a theory of rapture: the *admirabile commercium et conubium* between God and man in Christ as Head and Body.<sup>8</sup>

Von Balthasar’s theory of theological aesthetics forms the foundation of his theology. He uses multiple examples of aesthetic experiences in his writings as analogies of the ultimate Christ experience—that is one that culminates in the transformation of the human person. For example, von Balthasar describes the aesthetic experience of a subject that allows itself to be incorporated by the aesthetic form: by letting one’s senses fully engage with a painting that “opens itself” to the subject “and captivate it”, the whole person enters into a “state of vibration and becomes responsive space, the ‘sounding box’ of the event of beauty occurring within him.”<sup>9</sup> A parallel to this aesthetic experience can be found in von Balthasar’s exposition of the Christ experience as the progressive growth of one’s own existence into Christ’s existence, on the basis of Christ’s continuing action taking shape (*Sichbeingestalten Christi*) in the believer: “until Christ has taken shape (*Gestalt*) in you” (Gal 4:19)<sup>10</sup>

For von Balthasar, theological aestheticization is accomplished in the mutual *kenosis* of the divine and human person

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>9</sup> Maeseneer, *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

that enables an ultimate spiritual transformation.

### Performatism: A Reaction to Postmodernism

Forty years after von Balthasar wrote his theological aesthetics, his idea seems to be manifesting itself in the Church, albeit in an unexpected way. A turn to the aesthetic in the liturgy, for example, may reflect the faithful as being in-between the two phases of the theological aesthetic framework, en route to the true Christ experience. But there is another possibility brewing within the larger cultural milieu that must also be considered: Performatism.

Performatism is defined by Slavist literary scholar Raoul Eshelman as an emerging epoch beyond postmodernism<sup>11</sup> and its theoretical adjunct, poststructuralism. Performatism departs from the postmodern era and its “dualist notions of textuality, virtuality, belatedness, endless irony and metaphysical skepticism.”<sup>12</sup> In the new era, an aesthetic trend towards monism, driven by strategies emphasizing “unity, identification, closure, hierarchy, and theist or authorial modes of narration” is coming to the fore.<sup>13</sup> In Performatism, a “unified concept of sign and strategies of closure compete directly with—and displace—the split of sign and the strategies of boundary transgression typical of postmodernism.”<sup>14</sup>

To understand Performatism, it is first necessary to briefly establish an understanding of postmodernity, the cultural milieu it stemmed from. For this purpose, Eshelman draws from Derrida’s deconstruction of Kant’s philosophy. In Derrida’s critique of Kant, Derrida shows “that any talk of intrinsic aesthetic value depends on that value being set off from the ‘extraneous’ context around it by means of a frame.”<sup>15</sup> The frame is a subtle but crucial, yet constantly deferring precondition; it is that place where the text and context meet in a way that is both absolutely fundamental to the work’s makeup but impossible to determine in advance. Any piece of artwork that claims to be unified and closed is trapped by this frame. Eshelman describes the irony deconstruction prescribes:

Through the frame, the presumed closure of the work is always already dependent on the context around it, which is itself everything other than a coherent whole. The frame is always already dependent on

some aspect of the context around it.<sup>16</sup>

From the standpoint of the dominant Postmodern and Poststructuralist mindset, prospects for creating a new, autonomous monist aesthetic are nil. Postmodern artwork is thus continually undermined by a narrative frame that creates a state of recursive undecidability regarding the truth of some part of that work. Objectivity is inconceivable.

Within a postmodern context, liturgy would be constantly in flux as communities try to discern the “right” way of doing liturgy. Postmodernism can be seen as a plausible factor for the post-Vatican II “experiments” that have been heavily, but understandably criticized.<sup>17</sup>

Performatism, in its attempt to re-empower the frame, can be seen as a reaction to the uncertainty of postmodernism. In Performatist framing, “a blend of aesthetic and archaic, forcible devices” are used to establish a new monism in an attempt to re-establish some kind of objectivity<sup>18</sup> Eshelman describes the phenomena in the following:

Performatist works are set up in such a way that the reader or viewer at first has no choice but to opt for a single, compulsory solution to the problems raised within the work at hand. The author, in other words, imposes a certain solution on us [*sic*] using dogmatic, ritual, or some other coercive means. This has two immediate effects. The coercive frame cuts us [*sic*] off, at least temporarily, from the context around it and forces us [*sic*] back into the work. Once we [*sic*] are inside, we [*sic*] are made to identify with some person, act or situation in a way that is plausible only within the confines of the work as a whole (...). On the one hand, you’re [*sic*] practically forced to identify with something implausible or unbelievable within the frame—to believe in spite of yourself [*sic*]—but on the other, you [*sic*] still feel the coercive force causing this identification to take place, and intellectually you [*sic*] remain aware of the particularity of the argument at hand. Metaphysical skepticism and irony aren’t eliminated, but are held in check by the frame. At the same time, the reader must always negotiate some kind of trade-off between the positive aesthetic identification and the dogmatic, coercive means used to achieve it.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I recognize that Eshelman’s attempt to bookend the period of postmodernity by calling it an “-ism” may be a point of contention for some. Due to the limited scope of the paper however, I will defer to Eshelman’s definition of the term and avoid discussing the semantics of “postmodernism.”

<sup>12</sup> Raoul Eshelman, *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2008), xi.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Liturgical “experiments” of the ‘60s and early ‘70s are often blamed on a sort of liberalism, inauthentic interpretation of post-conciliar reforms or the academic character of the reform as shown by the critiques addressed in John F. Baldwin, *Reforming the Liturgy: a Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008). Few critiques however, take the postmodern context into consideration when crafting their arguments.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

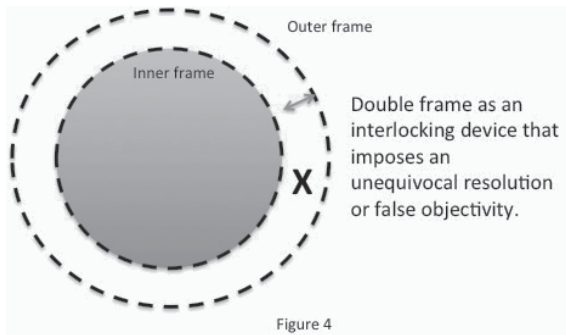


Figure 4

The forced, artificial unification of a work takes place in what Eshelman calls double framing (see figure 4). The inner frame provides the originating context, while the outer frame imposes some sort of unequivocal resolution to the problems raised in the work on the reader or viewer. Implausibility in a work results in two possibilities: some sort of irony could undercut the frame from within and break up the artificially framed unity, or an inner frame simply confirms the outer frame's coercive logic.<sup>20</sup> Eshelman concedes that a certain amount of tension between the frame is inevitable, but notes that the difference between Postmodernism and Performatism is in the fact that "one is now being offered a specific *choice* as to the outcome of a reading or viewing, rather than being condemned from the start to a misreading or misprision."<sup>21</sup> Double framing as such, can be summarized as a specific way of creating aesthetic closure; allowing an opaque or dense subjectivity, governed by an authorial mode of organizing temporal and spatial relations, which in turn promotes a false sense of objectivity.

### The Incompatibility of Theological Aesthetics and Performatism

Theological Aesthetics and Performatism share the aesthetic gene but are ultimately intrinsically incompatible. Within a theological aesthetic framework, the divine is reached when both subject and object undergo a *kenosis*. The passive reception of an aesthetic is only a beginning; a single frame (or object) can thus be said to eventually dissolve into the subject and vice-versa through a mutual interaction. The culmination is in the true Christ experience where beauty is God.

On the contrary, the Performatist's double frame traps the subject in a recursive loop of false objectivity of the outer frame, preventing true interaction with the ultimate divine "object." The subject never attempts to break the frame, choosing instead to bounce back and forth between the inner and outer frame, for fear of drowning in a sea of relativism. When theology is done within a Performatist context, authoritarian strategies reign. Hierarchical ecclesiology, authoritative documents, rule-based catechesis form both the inner and outer frame, allowing one to appeal to any of its aspects to

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.

reaffirm one's stance, without having to confront intellectually contradicting scenarios. Within the liturgy, a Performatist would prefer a rigid obedience to rubrics and monist interpretations of ritual elements, even when interpretations are allegorical. Within the Performatist bubble, true *Kenosis* is not possible. The Christ experience for the Performatist is thus, greatly limited, although not entirely unattainable.

### Evidence of Performatism in the Liturgy

In his book, *Reforming the Liturgy*, John F. Baldwin, SJ responds to a number of critics of the post-Vatican II liturgy. Baldwin notes in his introduction that aesthetic elements in the liturgy including art, architecture, music, gesture and movement are inescapably linked to any approach to the reform since it is inherent to the lived experience of the liturgy.<sup>22</sup> It would thus make sense that many of the critics' arguments end with proposals for aesthetic reforms.

What is curious about the various critiques however, is the point at which many of them converge—that is in the style of liturgical aesthetics—despite the wide-range of approaches used to critique the reform. The style upheld is one of grandeur and ornate details, often inspired by gothic architecture from the high Medieval Ages to early Renaissance, along with the period's elaborate rituals, processions, unutterable words and polyphony. It is also worthwhile to note that such an aesthetic style is quickly gaining mainstream appeal.<sup>23</sup>

The convergence in liturgical aesthetic style and increasing normalcy of it raises important philosophical and theological questions. Is the convergence in liturgical aesthetic style and its increasing normalcy a coincidence? Or is it a subtle effect of von Balthasar's influence on the scholars' theology and an acceptance of theological aesthetics by the faithful? More possibly, could it be a reflection of a shift in cultural paradigm to Performatism? Whether the scholarly work of the critics has had a direct influence on the aestheticization of the liturgy and its increasing mainstream appeal is debatable. What is apparent is simply the increase in preference for a particular style of liturgical aesthetic accompanied by refrains espousing "more reverence", "beauty", "transcendence" and "evoking the sacred." These mantras certainly have overtones of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, but I suspect, are more likely to be superficial chants from a Performatist's cell.

A brief examination of the aesthetic reforms proposed by two of the most influential critics of the reform, Catherine Pickstock and Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI)

<sup>22</sup> John F. Baldwin, *Reforming the Liturgy: a Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Reflecting this trend is the increase in pictures of masses celebrated in the extraordinary form within the last three years. A sample of pictures can be seen on the blog, New Liturgical Movement, accessed May 13, 2011, <http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/>.

will help illustrate my hypothesis.<sup>24</sup>

Catharine Pickstock, who takes a philosophical approach in her critiques, suggests the “Medieval”<sup>25</sup> liturgy as a model for modern liturgical reform. As a postmodern philosopher, much of her ideas are based in language. Thus, she concentrates her aesthetical reforms in the oral aspects of the liturgy. She finds value especially in the hesitations and “impossible logic” found in the ritual texts of the Tridentine Mass in which she ironically offers textual analyses akin to medieval allegorical interpretations of the mass by Amalric of Metz (ninth century) or William Durandus (thirteenth century).<sup>26</sup> For instance, in the priest’s prayer before the Gospel, “*Munda*” within the context of the prayer’s formula can only mean the verb “cleanse.” Pickstock however suggests that the use of the word implies a “request to be *worlded*,” in which the Gospel makes us more citizens of the world. Such an interpretation is an unnecessarily fanciful one that may be aesthetically novel, but clearly undermines the prayers intended meaning. Pickstock’s depression of a word’s intended meaning can be seen as an example of a Performatist’s double-framing effect. Her supposed meaning of “*Munda*” as “*worlded*” is an interpretation that works only within the construct of her “medieval mass” and the philosophical context she argues within. The only way to espouse her support of the “medieval” mass is to appeal to her philosophy.

Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI is another scholar who has made significant and vast contributions to the contemporary liturgical debate in his role as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and as Pope. As a theologian, Ratzinger’s critiques of the liturgy are largely influenced by his Eucharistic theology and devotion to “Christocentricity as well as a cosmic and eschatological vision”<sup>27</sup> The aesthetical reforms he suggests as a result of his theologizing have as many Performatistic peculiarities. Because of the limited scope of this paper, I will provide just one of the many aesthetical reforms he has promoted that reflects creeping Performatism—the use of music in the liturgy.

In his book entitled *New Song for the Lord*, Ratzinger decries the “stupor, ecstasy and delirium” characteristic of “Dionysian” contemporary music in liturgy.<sup>28</sup> In his

<sup>24</sup> Both scholars offer non-aesthetically related critiques of the reformed liturgy that are valuable but for the purposes of this paper will not be discussed. A summary of their critiques can be found in John F. Baldwin, *Reforming the Liturgy: a Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Pickstock’s supposed medieval Mass lacks credibility in that it is not sufficiently grounded in historical research. For this reason, the Mass she describes has been critiqued by liturgical historians. See *ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

general disapproval of contemporary music, Ratzinger basically attempts to make an inherently subjective aesthetic interpretation objective. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, he goes on to suggest that a “cultural universalization” of liturgical music is needed<sup>29</sup>—essentially building a Performatist frame by doing so. Further, he suggests the choral singing of the *Sanctus* as opposed to the generally accepted liturgical principle that acclamations ought to be sung by the congregation.<sup>30</sup> His argument for the choral *Sanctus* is that “since we are invited to join the praise of the heavenly choirs of angels, a choir is useful in transcending our own poor abilities and uniting us to the cosmos.”<sup>31</sup> Ratzinger’s argument is questionable. What does uniting us to the cosmos mean? Does a choral *Sanctus* evoke a feeling of ascending to the cosmos? Or is it a mindset that we must adhere to, in order to justify a choral *Sanctus*? Ratzinger goes on to suggest the possibility of splitting the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* as traditionally done in the Tridentine rite. His reasoning is that “The *Sanctus* is ordered to the eternal glory of God in our midst...For this reason the *Benedictus* is meaningful both as an approach to the consecration and as an acclamation to the Lord who has become present in the Eucharistic species.”<sup>32</sup> Both of Ratzinger’s arguments for the reform of the *Sanctus* are allegorical. As Baldwin notes, the liturgy, just like the scriptures, is open to allegorical or spiritual interpretations, but it does not mean that the form of analysis provides an adequate basis for reforming the liturgy.<sup>33</sup> Allegorical interpretations are traditionally a result of a reflection on a ritual that is practiced rather than the source of it. Using an allegorical argument for reform the way Ratzinger does makes his argument a monist one—one that works only within the frame of its interpretation—and thoroughly inferior when considered against the theological reasons behind the post-conciliar reforms of the Eucharistic prayers.

It is worth noting that Ratzinger’s theology is heavily influenced by von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics.<sup>34</sup> One can tell by his preference for choral music in the liturgy and use of ornate vestments in his liturgies that aesthetic elements in the liturgy are extremely important to him. For Ratzinger, like von Balthasar, aesthetics are a window to the divine. There is however a subtle disparity between Ratzinger’s and von Balthasar’s aesthetics—for Ratzinger, the aesthetic is a construct; for von Balthasar, the aesthetic speaks for itself.

## Conclusion

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-century Catholic Theologians: from Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 193-197.

The Performatist framework is one where the value of aesthetics is distorted and reduced to a superficial and culturally mediated construct that leaves the finite fundamentally disengaged with the infinite. The manufacturing of beauty as mere eye-candy makes God's real beauty indiscernible in the liturgy and the Christian life. Because Performatism locks the subject within an enclosed space, there is also little space for adaptation. When aesthetic trends change, the divine encounter could be shaken up, or worse, lost to the participant.

Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics on the other hand, is a sound and worthy approach to theology. It is one that is not simply limited to the senses (beauty), or human constructs, but one that culminates in a true Christ experience, a divine glory that is infinite (Beauty). Unlike Performatism, Von Balthasar's aesthetics ultimately allows the Christian to find Beauty amidst mundane every day tasks, rubbles of a disaster and humor of creation.

Unfortunately, as our examination of some liturgical

trends spurred on by critics have proven, attempts to use the aesthetic for theological purposes today, seem to inevitably fall into the traps of Performatism. When Performatism is coupled with the shallow notions of beauty and symbols embraced by a materialistic world, true aestheticization becomes even more challenging. Thus, aesthetics as a theological method must be re-situated within an alternative theological framework for its full value to be realized.

In this regard, I suggest that a starting point for a broader post-aesthetic framework can be found in the development of a sacramental worldview substantiated in a sound pneumatology and Trinitarian theology. The fundamental aim of a sacramental approach is to retrieve a wholism by bridging the subject object dichotomy and ridding of the false discordancy between the secular and sacred. Within a sacramental worldview, the aesthetic grounds itself in creation and human dignity, allowing it to extend beyond personal preference and cultural mediation, enabling ultimate *kenosis* with the infinite divine mystery.

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