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JOY AS ILLUMINATION: PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S LIFE-GIVING TRINITARIAN
LOVE

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology·Seminary of Saint John's
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This paper was written under the direction of



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JOY AS ILLUMINATION: PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S LIFE-GIVING
TRINITARIAN LOVE

Description:

This graduate paper is on the topic of joy, especially as understood in the commentaries of Adrienne von Speyr, and the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar. In this paper, I show Christian joy as participation in God's own joy through an illuminated and inter-personal life-giving love as given through and shown in the entire life of Jesus Christ, from the Incarnation, through the suffering Passion, and unto the Resurrection.

This paper may be duplicated.

May 23, 2014

“God can encounter man in the light of his glory in such a way that it changes man’s whole life. His faith begins to radiate so that everything around him is lit up by it. Everything is given a new purpose; what was uncertain until now becomes clear to him and to those around him. This illumination is joy, a participation in the communal joy.”¹

The Swiss mystic, Adrienne von Speyr, tells us here that illumination of divine glory through God’s personal encounter with the human being is joy. Yet, God’s illumination to each particular man or woman is already a participation in a communal joy. Such communal joy points to the personal relationship of loving joy present in the Trinity. In this paper, I primarily intend to explore Adrienne von Speyr’s mystical-scriptural reflections on joy as illumination and participation in new life and God’s love. Her reflections on joy are woven into her reflections on the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery of Christ. Jesus speaks of and incarnates the analogies of birth and death in His own living, dying, and rising. I will use Hans Urs von Balthasar’s reflections on Christ’s grace-filled action through and within human relationship, particularly of mother and child, to observe how joy is evoked in another through life-giving love. I hope to bring the Christian concept of joy to better focus by tracing some of its constituent signs and manifestations in Scripture, mystical-scriptural commentary, and theological reflection. By these means, I plan to show Christian joy as participation in God’s own joy through an illuminated and inter-personal life-giving love as given through and shown in the entire life of Jesus Christ, from the Incarnation, through the suffering Passion, and unto the Resurrection.

Joy as illumination and participation

Joy comes first through an *illumination* by God, which brings about participation in an already-shared joy. Divine light shines in the darkness, bringing to light what is true and right in that which is already created so that it might *participate* in God’s life. Joy is found in the person of Jesus Christ who is the light of the world sent by the Father. Just as God commands the light

¹ Adrienne von Speyr. *Man Before God*. Trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 121.

upon the dark abyss at the creation in Genesis, so also in John's Gospel, the Word shines upon the world in the beginning. Jesus not only calls himself "the light of the world," but calls his followers the same."² John says that "through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."³ Adrienne von Speyr describes the important distinction between light and life:

Life and light are not absolutely the same. Life means giving and surrender, light is participation. Life unfolds, expands and spreads, light takes possession of the space thus created. Life is tension, light is relaxed, redeemed. Life is individual, personal, unique, light is the link, the general, the universal. Life is faith, light is love. Life is what is, light is the radiation of being, its riches, its glory, its beauty.⁴

In the preceding section of the *The Word*, Speyr makes clear that when speaking here about life, she means that life which comes fully from God as the ultimate source of all that is. Life is not merely biological striving for survival within a pre-determined realm, but is life in the context of all that is and even that which makes possible the many distinctions we can articulate between various senses of how we understand life. Light too is more than what we know from mere observation of the wavelengths of light. Light is not only an illumination but also a participation in God's own light and life. Speyr writes, "The light of love is not in the least only a light that gives illumination but is a light that participates, a light that has compassion, a light that shines out in order to draw closer and come to help."⁵ God's light comes to each of us, reaching to us in our human reality of suffering, and yet also drawing us into God's own life. God's light allows each of us to participate in God's life and receive healing by such participation. Finally, it is important to emphasize here that it is *God's* giving of life and light that is primary and even prior

² John 8:12, Matthew 5:14-16 [New American Bible].

³ John 1:4-8.

⁴ Adrienne von Speyr. *The Word: A Meditation on the Prologue to St John's Gospel*. Trans. Alexander Dru. (Collins St James Place: London, 1953), 45-46.

⁵ Adrienne von Speyr. *The Discourses of Controversy: Meditations on John 6-12*. Trans. Brian McNeil, CRV. (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1993), 154.

to our reception. God's light draws each of us toward God. Yet, since joy is an illumination from God, and such initiating divine light comes not from us, it is clear that human beings cannot produce joy apart from God's prior action. There is no autonomous or self-generated Christian joy in a merely human way. This aspect is clear since light and life are always received *before* they can be communicated or shared further. Speaking of Christ, Speyr writes,

Because he is the light of the world, every lamp and every torch in this world can receive his light in order to burn. But no lamp can have light in itself and burn without receiving from his light continuously and without interruption afresh. The light of the world can indeed be communicated to the lamp as its own life, but it never possesses this in such a way that it would cease to be something received from God.⁶

We see here that light may even be given to the human as one's own life though always remaining something given by God. All good things come from God, whether understood as things formerly given or those things given at each moment as, for example, our every breath. Nevertheless, human freedom, especially in our receptivity to God's light and its transformative action upon us, retains its integrity. We, as free human beings, have the choice to accept and acknowledge the source of our light and life. God's light is the freeing action in Christ's life-giving love which brings true Christian joy. We have seen here that, for Adrienne von Speyr, joy is an illumination that also allows us to participate in God's own life. God's light radiates our lives, and such action gives us a share in the communal joy of God. But, what does this joy look like in the Christian life? For Adrienne von Speyr, the light of Christian joy is shown to be deeply intertwined with the mystery of sorrow and suffering, especially as shown in childbirth and death.

Sorrow, Suffering, and Joy

⁶ Speyr. *The Discourses of Controversy: Meditations on John 6-12*, 152.

Christian joy can be seen most sharply in those human experiences that elicit the greatest sorrow and suffering. The solemnities of Christ's Incarnation and Paschal Mystery are the most attended and celebrated Masses in the liturgical calendar. Yet these celebrations are preceded by anticipatory penitential seasons in Advent and Lent through reconciliation, fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. The great Christian joy associated with Christmas and Easter should be understood in the context of the sacrifices brought about both in the Incarnation and entire Paschal Mystery of Jesus. Both solemnities record events that follow two central human experiences often associated with suffering: childbirth and death. Christ prepares the apostles for Good Friday by providing an analogy to a woman in labor, who both suffers and receives great joy in the new life that she brings into the world. In the next section of this paper, we will briefly examine the scriptural-incarnational theme of childbirth and its relation to joy.

Suffering and Joy in Childbirth

Jesus tells his disciples,

Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.⁷

Jesus prepares his followers for his death by comparing the suffering of what is about to unfold to the experience of a mother's labor pains during her 'hour.' His analogous hour is what he is about to endure for an end that shall likewise bring about much rejoicing. In Adrienne von Speyr's commentary upon this passage, she says, "Labor is such a distress for a woman that in her affliction she forgets its meaning. She forgets that only through the labor pains will the way

⁷ John 16: 20-22.

become free in her for the child. She lives wholly in the present pain.”⁸ As a result of the deep suffering endured, the woman is disassociated in her pain from the meaning and purpose of the very event she has been awaiting for many months. This painful event is the very means by which the child enters the world. The Spanish translation for childbirth, “dar la luz,” brings us back to the association of joy with light. The chosen action of the mother brings about light for the child out of and through the darkness of her suffering, which is experienced by the child in a departure from the darkness and comfort of the womb into a newly seen light. In her commentary upon the passage Speyr continues:

And when her pains are at their worst, the child is born. One can scarcely speak of a transformation of pain into joy, because this moment of birth is almost more an abrupt alteration than a development. It is really birth: in the moment that the child appears, joy appears too, and all distress is totally forgotten. The joy is so perfect and so basic that it suffers nothing else beside it. The content of the joy is the child born into the world: it is joy as participation in life as the joint cause of a new life in this world. The joy lives because life has been given to a new living being.⁹

Joy comes all at once, follows the deep suffering, and is found primarily in the child, who is newly born into the world. The woman experiences joy in her own participation which brings about new life, a new being. The primary emphasis in joy is the content of the joy and the bringing about of new life. Such joy hearkens back to the illumination discussed above. What has come about in laboring is life from God through an event in which understanding is, at least temporarily, unrecognizable in the midst of its deepest pains. Speyr calls this joy “participation in life as the joint cause of a new life in the world.” Elsewhere, she says, “Joy, whether or not it is felt, is finally the same as a contemplative letting be, which has priority over doing.”¹⁰ The “letting be” of the woman has allowed new life to come to the light, to be brought into the world

⁸ Adrienne von Speyr. *The Farewell Discourses: Meditations on John 13-17*. Trans. E.A. Nelson. (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1987), 264.

⁹ Speyr. *The Farewell Discourses: Meditations on John 13-17*. 264.

¹⁰ Speyr. *Man Before God*. 123.

through her willing self-gift, by suffering in and for the hope of life. She has been given joy through her participation, carrying and laboring for a joy unknown for a time, which even in advance was only understood partially. Analogously, Christ speaks of the woman's "pain-into-joy" during childbirth so that his followers might know *something* of their own future suffering to come, and the incomprehensible quality that will accompany it. The analogy of the woman laboring in childbirth can be seen by looking at Balthasar's comments upon such a transition (from suffering into joy) in Jesus' own words and actions.

With the prospect of the Cross before him, casting its shadow in advance, Jesus—almost unbelievably—demands that his loving disciples embrace his coming Passion with joy: "If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father" (14:28), that is, via the path chosen by the Father, which leads through the Cross.¹¹

As was true in the mother's labor pains in childbirth, so also is the case in Jesus' unfathomable labor pains in His Passion: to understand the full extent of true Christian joy, one must understand that it encompasses darkness, sin, and death, never hiding from the full extent and reality of sorrow, suffering, and complete abandonment. Being herself a medical doctor, Speyr would have known intimately the experience of labor and childbirth in its various uncertainties, risks, pain, and joys. Such close identification with the image that Christ uses in John's Gospel carries over to the mystery of Christ's own experience of uncertainty and pain during the Passion. Yet, even this deepest suffering, uncertainty, sorrow, and abandonment are deeply interwoven with the mystery of joy.

Suffering, Sorrow, and Joy in the Paschal Mystery

It is only through the entire Paschal Mystery of Christ, knowing and sharing in Christ's Passion and Resurrection, his deepest suffering and sorrow, that we can find true Christian joy.

¹¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. Trans. Graham Harrison (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1987), 167.

Concerning Jesus' prediction of the Son of man suffering, dying, and rising as found in Mark's Gospel, Adrienne von Speyr says,

After the prophecy of suffering, the Lord also tells them about the Resurrection. Thus he gives, with the bitterness of suffering, consolation. This is very essential. He shows them that the end of his life will never be an occasion for despair. He will rise again.¹²

As in John's Gospel, Jesus shares with his followers what is coming as something that should not cause despair in their hearts. Whereas in John, Jesus uses the image of a woman laboring in childbirth to show the movement from suffering to joy, Jesus now explicitly shares what will come upon himself in order that they focus also upon the end of such suffering: His rising from the dead. Speyr continues, "In his suffering, perhaps in its beginnings, he will show them something they know. They know what suffering is, but they tend—because this is human—to link suffering and despair closely. He, on the other hand, links suffering and resurrection, suffering and joy."¹³ By placing emphasis upon suffering and resurrection, Jesus teaches his followers the integral relationship that joy has with suffering. Speyr highlights that the human tendency is towards despair rather than joy when one is presented with actual or anticipated suffering. She says,

Despair would be sorrow, not in love, but sorrow as an end in itself and therefore without room for hope. That would not be Christian sorrow, for this is always a limited sorrow leading to unlimited love and hope. The finite is sorrow; the Infinite is love, so that there can be no room for despair. It is in this form of the Lord's sorrow that the sorrow of the disciples participates. Even though it is a small, human sorrow, by becoming a sorrow of the Church it is poured into the form of the Lord's sorrow and is thus unavoidably immersed in the deeper joy and love of the Lord.¹⁴

There is always a hopeful end of sorrow for the Christian, even if it remains hope in the midst of deep suffering where the sight of fulfillment is impaired or blocked in the moment. Despair, on

¹² Adrienne von Speyr. *Mark: Meditations on the Gospel of Mark*. Trans. Michelle K. Borrás (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2012), 375.

¹³ Speyr. *Mark: Meditations on the Gospel of Mark*. 375.

¹⁴ Speyr. *The Farewell Discourses: Meditations on John 13-17*. 229-230.

the other hand, remains merely in the sorrow. It is through the form of sorrow which leads to hope and love that brings about participation in the Lord's joy. We see again here that joy, being an illumination is also participation. Just as when we spoke earlier of light coming from God into darkness as participation, so also Christ the light unites Himself with us in sorrow that becomes both hope and love. It is the disciples' participation in Christ's sorrow that finds its end in hope and love which allows the Church "to be immersed in the deeper joy and love of the Lord."

Another important emphasis lies in the fact that it is *the Lord's* own sorrow, joy, and love that is shared with his followers. The Church is dependent on God for joy, and this is always communicated personally in the entire mystery of Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection. Even the Holy Spirit who comes upon the Church at Pentecost is the Spirit of the Son revealing the Father's love. The Spirit testifies that Jesus is the Father's Beloved Son whose words and actions are trustworthy and salvific. Speyr says, "God can encounter man in the light of his glory in such a way that it changes man's whole life. His faith begins to radiate so that everything around him is lit up by it. ... This illumination is joy, a participation in the communal joy."¹⁵ Such communal joy is participation in Trinitarian joy. It is the joy of the relationship of love between Father and Son in which we participate through faith, hope, and love. Such joy can be seen concretely in the divine-human love present from Bethlehem to Nazareth, and even to Jerusalem, in the Trinitarian and Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

The Trinity, the Paschal Mystery, and Joy

The fullest joy is found in God's own Trinitarian joy. Speyr tells of divine joy as shared within the relationship between the Father and the Son:

The Son is the Father's joy, perfect divine joy. He lives for the Father, and everything that belongs to the Father is his. He has a complete share in the possessions of the Father and, therefore, also in his joy. He also shares in everything that is directed against the

¹⁵ Adrienne von Speyr. *Man Before God*. Trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 121.

Father, which then hurts him and moves him to redeem the world. He redeems it in the joy of the Father and in order to increase the Father's joy, but also in his own joy—the joy of giving a gift to the Father.”¹⁶

The Son is Himself the Father's joy who shares all things with the Father. The Son even bears what is against the Father, and it is as if this bearing moves the Son to redeem the world to increase the Father's joy. Yet, even this act of redemption for the Father's joy is a joy to the Son for that very reason. Speyr continues, “And still, in the midst of this joy lies the entire suffering of the Cross, which is not thereby decreased. “If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.” These are words of anxiety, which become words of abandonment on the Cross.”¹⁷ The suffering and darkness of the Cross is not decreased because of the joy. There is not a sense of ‘overlooking’ the darkness in a type of naïve happiness that wants to avoid the Cross. It is quite the opposite. She even calls the event of the Passion: “the greatest suffering that has ever existed: dying far away from God, carrying all the sins of the world, until the Suffering One, completely crushed by sin, sees neither the end nor the meaning of the agony.”¹⁸ Jesus experiences utter abandonment and confusion on the Cross. The Cross is reminiscent of the woman who cannot see the reason for, or meaning of, her actions during the intense labor pains of childbirth. Both Jesus and the woman in labor desire beforehand the fruit that such an offering will obtain. Christ's words in the garden and in the passion predictions witness to the struggle that he knows will ensue. Nevertheless, Christ chooses to fulfill the Father's will, even in the Son's darkest and most abandoned moment, for the sake of joy: “There is no answer to the question of the Dying One. The Father cannot allow himself to be heard because he wants to give the Son a perfect joy: the joy of dying in loneliness for him after carrying moment to moment the entire excessive

¹⁶ Speyr *Man Before God*. 121.

¹⁷ Speyr *Man Before God*. 121-122.

¹⁸ Speyr *Man Before God*. 122.

demand of the Passion.”¹⁹ Suffering and joy are not only linked as mere concepts floating in the ether, but are linked because of the joy that the Son has in offering redemption of the sinful yet loved world to the Father who shares all things with the Son. Joy is what the Son wants to give to the Father, and the Father does not want to refuse the Son’s gift of this highest joy, even when it means complete abandonment and suffering for the Son.²⁰ For Balthasar, “Suffering that is consoled is not ultimate suffering, it is not the Cross.”²¹ Both he and Speyr will be gravely misunderstood concerning their understanding of true Christian joy without considering the fullness of *ultimate* suffering in Jesus’ Cross.²² Balthasar even says that the Christian life is not “a case of simple alternation of joy and suffering,” and neither “can there be any question of relativizing the Cross as a result of Easter joy, for the Christian’s discipleship can enter the dark night of the Spirit, not only mystically but in the many kinds of *desolatio*.”²³ He points here to the deepest mystery of the Christian in the Church: one who faces the unfathomable suffering and utter abandonment of Jesus on the Cross, yet also whose hope for joy still remains in the Triune relationship of love revealed therein:

¹⁹ Speyr *Man Before God*. 122.

²⁰ Balthasar has been accused by Karl Rahner of “‘theopaschism’ (holding that God suffered)” (Fergus Kerr. *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From Neo-Scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 142. Yet, according to Kerr’s reading of *Theo-Drama V*, Balthasar justifies his statements by reference to intra-Trinitarian language that allows for understanding divine ‘suffering’ as referring rather to an non-temporal, “eternal” process within the Triune relationship rather than the temporal understanding that implies any imperfection in God (Ibid). Such language is thus more properly analogical in terms of understanding God’s inner-Trinitarian life and relationship.

²¹ Balthasar. *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. 166.

²² One potential misunderstanding here is that Jesus’ suffering was merely his own rather than being universal in scope. Instead, his suffering is able to incorporate the suffering of the entire world: “He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24), and “just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all” (Rom 5:18). A second potential misunderstanding could come by not grasping the full extent of what is meant by Trinitarian “joy.” What this intra-Trinitarian joy encompasses is the *utmost* of suffering and abandonment, including the full experience of uncertainty and suffering, as is felt by Mary, Jesus, and the other women present at the Cross. The uncertain, ambiguous, and yet-to-be-fulfilled character is completely real for Jesus on the Cross, and for all who follow Christ in His Church. If either of these points are overlooked (the universal scope of Christ’s suffering, and the *full* depth of the suffering), Christ’s suffering will lose something essential of its divine character to offer transformative forgiveness and access to the eternal life of God, namely, salvation.

²³ Balthasar. *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. 169.

In fact, life in the Church remains in the unfathomable “between the times” mystery. Indeed, it lies deeper still: the Church’s understanding of the relationship between Cross and joy is to be found in the realm of the mystery of Jesus’ Cross: only in virtue of his filial intimacy with the divine Father can he suffer total abandonment by the Father and taste that suffering to the last drop.²⁴

The Christian, and the Church, stand in the most uncertain and difficult place while being at the Cross, and, as with the laboring mother, certitude and recognition of the joyful end are temporarily eclipsed, at least in terms of full awareness. In spite this real darkness, true Christian joy has the final say even while remaining necessarily connected to the mystery of ultimate suffering, the Cross. As Speyr says, “[A]ll the darkness of suffering is, as it were, blotted out and bracketed in the encompassing joy. ...God did not keep his joy for himself. The Father gives it to the Son and the Spirit, and they return it to him as a gift.”²⁵ Christian joy expands wider than even the fullness of suffering for even suffering and abandonment serve the ends of deeper joy in the Trinitarian relationship of love. The joy that is present in the Trinity is always the source of every other joy. Moving from the Trinitarian personal relationship to the human personal relationship, we will look now at Hans Urs von Balthasar’s comparison of the natural relationship between mother and child as a helpful analogy for the graced relationship of joy that God offers to each and every one of His children in the Trinitarian gift of Eternal Life.

Joy’s Relational, Life-giving, and Self-Constituting Love

Hans Urs von Balthasar’s discussion of the human mother-child relationship allows us to see the given-ness of joy’s relational, life-giving, and self-constituting love. First, for Balthasar, on the natural level, self-consciousness comes from another rather than from oneself:

The little child awakens to self-consciousness through being addressed by the love of his mother. ... The interpretation of the mother’s smiling and of her whole gift of self is the answer, awakened by her, of love to love, when the “I” is addressed by the “Thou”; and

²⁴ Balthasar. *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*. 169.

²⁵ Speyr *Man Before God*. 122.

precisely because it is understood in the very origin that the “Thou” of the mother is not the “I” of the child, but both centers move in the same ellipse of love...²⁶

That the child comes to self-consciousness by being addressed by the love of the mother exemplifies the insight that “who we are” is given by another in love. Though not specified, one can picture such an encounter as present between mother and child in the very first moments following childbirth. The two have shared nine months of intimately-close bodily growth, not to mention the arduous labor of childbirth at its end. Nevertheless, Balthasar makes it clear that, despite the intimately close connection of child and mother, there is not just one person, but two fully real personal centers of love: an “I” and a “Thou.” He continues,

In the beginning was the word with which a loving “Thou” summons forth the “I”: in the act of hearing lies directly, antecedent to all reflection, the fact that one has been given the gift of the reply; the little child does not “consider” whether it will reply with love or nonlove to its mother’s inviting smile, for just as the sun entices forth green growth, so does love awaken love; it is in the movement toward the “Thou” that the “I” becomes aware of itself. By giving itself, it experiences: *I give myself*.²⁷

We witness here the evident giftedness, given-ness, of the entire constitution of self that happens by means of the mother’s loving smile. Even the reply here is shown for what it is, a gift, in that the mother’s inviting smile of love draws forth the child from itself toward the other. The child becomes aware of himself through the gifted experience of: “*I give myself*,” which unveils the inter-personal realization of self (as loved-and-loving-child-who-loves-with-that-already-given-love) that comes about only as a response to the self-constituting, given love from another. As Balthasar says, “By crossing over from itself into what is other than itself, into the open world that offers it space, it experiences its freedom, its knowledge, its being as spirit.”²⁸ There is true freedom in the open world and space given to the child. There is room for its offering of love in

²⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar. *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. Trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 15.

²⁷ Balthasar. *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 15-16.

²⁸ Balthasar. *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 16.

response. And mysteriously, it is out of the response of giving love in return that the child experiences “its freedom, knowledge, and being as spirit.” What we have in the mother-child relationship thus far is the given-gift of love through the smile of the mother, the constitution of the child by means of the mother’s loving gift of self, the space made for the elicited response of love present in the gift of love given, and finally the initiated response of the child which awakens awareness of “its freedom, its knowledge, and its being as spirit.” We see here the evident inter-personal character within the given-relationship of love between mother and child.

How does such an interpersonal relationship relate to joy? Balthasar continues to explain what it means to be addressed by the love of the mother and to be awakened to self-consciousness by her love in terms of making a *response* of love. Joy has to do with the realization of love’s personal focus and depth, as well as how it disposes one toward such a response and return of love. He writes,

But where love summons the “I” into the state where it is permitted to answer, the “I” is affected in the core of its being and can reply only with its totality, its center, its fullness: it must collect together what is best in itself in order to respond to that summons. It comes into play at once as a totality. This state in which claim is laid to the totality belongs to the highest joy bestowed by love: since the summons by the mother is not addressed to something *in* the child but to the child itself beyond the sum of its qualities (which it can share with other children), precisely in reality the “I” of the child, it experiences at the same time that my “I” is loved, is lovable for my mother, and that my reply can lie only in the gift of this “I”—together with all that may belong to it...²⁹

The child realizes that the mother truly loves him, this particular child, his “I.” Such love is not only a feeling or a mere recognition of care, but much more. This love “summons” the child to respond with the whole of his being and totality. It is a self-constituting love that has, as its end, love’s full gift of self for the beloved, and the response of love is an integral part of receiving love’s fullness. Thus, it is only when the child fully receives and recognizes the full depth of the

²⁹ Balthasar. *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 16.

love of his “I” that he also realizes that the reply lies in his own giving of his beloved “I.” Such a response of love is the response of the totality of love given with the totality of love received. And it is the highest joy to be able to give completely of one’s own love received. “Small children throw themselves upon one’s lap like a round ball.”³⁰ It is the child’s entire gift of oneself back to the mother that shows forth the return of love with the child’s totality of self-giving. On the human level, the example of mother and child shows forth what joy is through inter-personal self-constituting love which makes room and summons a response of that love with one’s whole totality. Ideally, such a relationship between mother and child will make transparent the relationship between God and the child when the child realizes how God is the source of the love in his mother. The relationship between mother and child described here is an analogy “for the natural love of God” possible in this world on the level of “the primal knowledge of love... where as yet there is no distinction between divine and human love.”³¹ Even what we have described of the mother’s summoning love may be the very rare case because, as Balthasar writes, “in a nonparadisaal world order, it is precisely this summons that will largely fail: common humanity will in many cases be obscured by laziness, egoism, coldness of heart, injustice and cruelty and will often be almost destroyed.”³² Nevertheless, the mother and child have provided an important analogy to that relationship between God and the child of God where one finds the highest joy.

The Child of God in Trinitarian Love

³⁰ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 17.

³¹ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 31-32.

³² Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 36.

Balthasar moves from the natural relationship of mother and child to the graced relationship of joy between God and the child of God. The Christian as a child of God integrated into the Triune life of God constitutes her being and life, and therefore her joy. Balthasar writes,

For the “Thou” that encounters man here is not “a” someone who possesses the quality of loving but *the* someone who as such is constituted by love itself. The Trinitarian-personal process is “love”, and this is so neither as something abstract nor as a collective but as something incomprehensibly personal: the only God (Father) gives me (us) his “only Son”, in order to fill me (us) inwardly with his Holy Spirit of love.³³

The interaction between God and the human being in grace is an occurrence like no other for it is an encounter with love itself as eminently and incomprehensibly personal. The particular woman or man encounters God as Triune, as the Father who gives His own Son to fill her or him “inwardly” with His Son’s “Holy Spirit of love.” Although spoken in terms of the Trinitarian action for the particular person, we have the same outline of the gift of joy that we have traced throughout this paper. God the Father [illuminates or] gives me His Son [who is both the Life and Light of the world] “in order to fill me (us) inwardly with his Holy Spirit of love” [self-constituting love that disposes us further toward deeper relationship with God and with God’s own love]. The Father’s giving of the Son includes within it the entire Incarnation through the Paschal Mystery, even with full suffering, sorrow, and abandonment upon the Cross. And all of this action of God is directed toward God’s own loving, Triune joy. It is this joy that reorients and fills each particular child of God who receives such divine love in grace. Balthasar writes, “The creaturely person cannot find within his own resources any even half-credible answer to such an event. Even if he were affected in his innermost core (as the child is affected by the mother), he would have nothing to offer as a gift in return.”³⁴ The reception of divine love that brings about participation in the Triune love and joy is sheer gift. Beyond the merely human

³³ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 45.

³⁴ Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 45.

relationship of love is this divine gift of incorporation into the love that is God's own personal gift in the Son. Balthasar concludes,

His answer can only be to permit God to be God in himself, to give God all the space to which he lays claim for his love. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." The answer (which becomes possible through grace) is thereby the greatest possible act of making oneself available (Ignatius of Loyola); not as a merely negative, resigned act of abandonment, because one has nothing of oneself to offer and therefore gives God permission to take for himself what he wishes and needs, but a positive, offering *indifferentia* for which it is the highest joy beyond all distinctions to give up all that he possesses, or to do whatever is required, as it may be pleasing to the divine majesty.³⁵

The highest joy is the response, "let it be done" of Mary to the angel Gabriel. It is the indifference of Saint Ignatius of Loyola that places oneself at the disposal of God to go wherever God calls, to wherever the need is the greatest for the sake of the greater glory of God and the good of souls. As Balthasar says, such a response can only come through grace. It is true availability to place all of oneself before God and to follow where Christ calls. The only response to the gift of such divine love is the complete handing over of one's life to Jesus Christ. Such a self-gift flows both out of and into love, and is thus the highest joy, for God is love. The highest joy to which we are called is found in the entire life of Jesus Christ from Incarnation through the Resurrection and Ascension. We are called to live the life of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him is our joy truly complete.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have traced the various ways that Christian joy is seen, especially by means of the writings of Speyr and Balthasar. For both, the Christian finds true joy in the entire life of Christ. Jesus, through his words concerning a woman in labor pains, offers his disciples a glimpse of the mystery of joy that will be wrapped in suffering and even in some form of unknowing. The ultimate fullness and height of such suffering is reached in the Jesus' Cross.

³⁵ Balthasar. *Explorations in Theology III: Creator Spirit*. 45.

No suffering can be minimized in the light of true Christian joy because it is through the moment of ultimate suffering that all joy has its font. The font of Christian joy then is the Trinitarian relationship of love and joy which, as a mother's smile, illuminates the child with the fullness of self-constituting love. The light of God shines upon the child, allowing participation in God's own inner-Trinitarian joy through the Son. And it is in faith and true joy that the child of God, the Christian and the Church, responds by following her loving Lord through personal life-giving love from His Incarnation, through His suffering Passion, and unto His Resurrection.

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