GENUINE CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM IN THE THEOLOGY OF HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

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Embarking on a profound journey into the essence of Christian martyrdom, Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological perspective reveals a unique, deeply Trinitarian, and Christocentric understanding. At the heart of his interpretation is the concept of being "crucified with Christ," which transcends mere physical sacrifice to signify a spiritual communion with Christ's passion and mission. This exploration differentiates Christian martyrdom from secular heroism or sacrifice, emphasizing its nature as a profound spiritual and existential commitment. Balthasar's approach articulates the interconnectedness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the act of self-sacrifice, thus framing Christian martyrdom as a manifestation of divine love and obedience. The essence of this martyrdom extends into everyday Christian life, profoundly influencing practices like Baptism and the Eucharist, symbolizing the believer's deep participation in Christ's death and resurrection. This theological exploration thus portrays Christian martyrdom as a holistic and dynamic expression of faith, rooted in a deep identification with Christ's suffering and a commitment to the mission of God's Kingdom.

Martyrdom as Means to Be Crucified for Christ: The Trinitarian Motivation for Martyrdom

What is the Christological definition of martyrdom? This is the constitutive question that motivates Balthasar's theology to discern genuine Christian martyrdom. Throughout

his writings, particularly in his books *New Elucidations*, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* and *Mysterium Paschale*, Balthasar consistently attempts to theologically anchor the following definition of martyrdom: "The reason He made Christian martyrs outstanding and special is because he was 'crucified with Christ'."[1]

Through his outstanding Trinitarian theology, Balthasar clearly establishes the centrality of martyrdom to Christology. Primarily, Christian martyrs are crucified with Christ, who had already been crucified for them. Their motivation for martyrdom differs from that of martyrs who die for humanistic ideals or heroic sacrifices:[2]

> I would much rather go straight to the heart of the matter, to the true and decisive motive of Christian martyrdom, which today as ever distinguishes it from every other self-offering, however heroic. ... 'I am crucified with Christ. I live; and yet it is no longer I; but Christ living in me. But what I am now living in the flesh, I live in faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me' (Gal 2:19-20). He is saying that there is one who, anticipating my existence, has suffered a martyrdom completely different from any that I or anyone else – even if he were Socrates – can suffer: a martyrdom for me, for my sake, in my place, vicariously for me who should have suffered it.

With respect to how Christian martyrdom is to be identified, Balthasar establishes his first principle of the theology of martyrdom in Christ's Crucifixion. To be crucified with Jesus Christ is a response to the love of Christ. In Balthasar's Christology, he presupposes (1) Pauline theology as the biblical principle of martyrdom; (2) exposits a theological framework

[1]Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* translated by Richard Beckley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 24.

[2]Balthasar, *New Elucidations,* 286.

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for his Trinitarian approach to martyrdom with "Jesus' self-giving love and obedience"; and (3) extends this definition to the daily lives of the Christian faithful.

Biblical Principle of Balthasar's Theology of Martyrdom

Because the fabric of Balthasar's biblical principle on martyrdom is remarkably realized on the Cross, the Christian martyr is patterned after the "crucified Christ." Balthasar identifies a martyr with Jesus Christ, who was crucified and gave up his life. He then compares the biblical motive of the Old Testament and Christ's suffering based on Pauline fundamentals, recognizing that "for Paul, the proclamation of the Gospel coincides with that of the Cross of Jesus Christ" (cf. I Corinthians 1,17).

Through his biblical principle, Balthasar's exposition reflects on Paul's inspiration, which connects "crucified Christ" and "Christian faith." His theology of Christ's Passion parallels Paul's view on the Crucifixion. For Balthasar, this is Paul's contribution to the theology of martyrdom, even though he affirms that the whole Bible testifies to the death and resurrection of Christ.[3]

First, "Being crucified with him," the prime principle of Christian martyrdom in Balthasar's theology, is inspired by the letter to the Galatians (2,19–20). Christian martyrdom distinctively follows the "crucified Christ." Hence, the true martyr does not die for an ideology but for him, with him, and like him. Inspired by Paul, his biblical fundamentals stem from the following:

[3]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 14-15.

> This is the distinctive, special characteristic of the Christian martyr: he is "crucified Christ," and the giving up of his life is an act of proper response, of self-evident gratitude. He does not die for an idea, even for the highest – not for human dignity, freedom, or solidarity with the oppressed (though all of these may be included and play a role). He dies with someone who had died for him in advance. (Gal 2.19–20)

Second, drawing on Paul's evidence regarding the meaning of imitating the Cross, Balthasar elaborates on another aspect of the theology of martyrdom. Paul's letters penetrate the heart of the Christian faith, highlighting how Christians follow in the suffering of Christ. Balthasar asserts that "Christian existence is a 'reflection' of the form of Christ as "Jesus died for all so, ... all have died" (II Corinthians 5, 14).[4] Christians must manifest this form of Crucifixion even though the death happened out of love "for me."

Third, following Jesus' Crucifixion, martyrdom became a distinct motivation for Christians. In Balthasar's analysis, which occupies a considerable part of the Pauline epistles, a synthetical demonstration, including prophetic and historical books, introduces the "hands-over-motif in the Passion of Jesus Christ" to distinguish between martyrdom in the Old and New Testament.[5]

Balthasar determines the motive for the "hand-over" of Jesus' Passion. He compares this motive as it is presented in both Jesus' sacrifice and martyrdom in the Old Testament. In the latter, the Apocrypha, the apocalypses, and rabbinic literature adopt this motive for the righteous person's suffering. Further, Daniel and Maccabees occupy a prominent place in the martyrdom of Judaism. The handing-over of self is a "total

[4]Ibid., 16-17.

[5]Ibid., 107–109.

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existential commitment." From the Old Testament to later Judaism, the motive of handing-over encapsulates the sacrifice of the innocent person.

However, Balthasar maintains that the "hand-over" motive is distinguishable from Christ's suffering because it is limited to highlighting ethical, moral, and religious discipline, just as the Maccabean martyrs were regarded as heroic witnesses. The most identifiable factor of Christian martyrdom is that for Jesus' Crucifixion, these motives were renewed and achieved in the Son's cry of abandonment on the Cross. Thus, a Trinitarian fashion in Christ's obedience is presented in contradistinction to the late Jewish theology of martyrdom. Christ's suffering, as the original model of Christian martyrdom, does not aim to accomplish the moralization of Jewish culture to which Daniel and Maccabees aspire:

> That God 'hands over' his Son forms part of the most unheard-of affirmations of the New Testament. We must understand the expression to 'hand-over' in its proper meaning, without diluting it to a mere 'mission' or 'gift'. ... The Christ was deliberately given over by the Father to a deadly destiny. God rejected him and delivered him to the death-dealing power, whether these be called 'man' or 'death' ... 'God made him to be sin' (II Corinthians 5, 21), the Christ is the accursed of God ... Here the *theologia crucis* comes to expression in a way than which none more radical can be conceived.[6]

Balthasar contends that the theology of martyrdom should be based on this Trinitarian view of Jesus' suffering in the relationship between the Father and the Son. Christ's sacrifice is distinct from the Old Testament's motive for martyrdom because genuine Christian martyrdom imitates Christ's "hand-over" to his Father in the inner life of the Trinity. Balthasar

[6]Ibid., 111-112.

elaborates that late Jewish literature, which stressed human ethics and morals, narrows down the divine surrender and human obedience in the relation of the Father and Son. Christ's voluntary obedience (Phil 2, Rom 8, 32) in this Trinitarian theme forges the meaning of Christian martyrdom.[7]

The Trinitarian Theme in Christian Martyrdom

Intrinsically, the "Trinitarian theme" in Jesus' suffering constitutes genuine Christian martyrdom. As Balthasar demonstrates, the late Jewish theology of martyrdom impacted the theology of Jesus' Passion. However, Balthasar contends that this downgraded the absolute originality of Christ's Passion to the level of moral thought: "it produces a flattening out of a moralizing kind which threatens the absolute originality of Christ's Passion."[8] The late Jewish theology did not consider martyrdom when reflecting on the unique and absolute meaning of Christ.

Therefore, the distinguishing principle of theology must originate from the theological proposition of the Son's obedience to the Father and the world. Through Christ's Passion, such a theology is defined through the self-giving love of the Father and the Son. In Balthasar's Trinitarian approach, genuine Christian martyrdom is defined and motivated by these principles.

Balthasar rejects themes of martyrdom that narrow Christ's Passion to a moral value, instructive direction for life, or ethical meaning. He contends that Christian martyrdom does

[7]Ibid., 107-111. Balthasar elaborates on "the handing over of Jesus" in Chapter 3, "Good Friday" in *Mysterium Paschale.* His purpose is to attend to "the Trinitarian theme" in Christ's sufferings. Balthasar's contribution to understanding the Paschal mystery in the Trinitarian view is explained through the theme of "handing over" of the Son.

[8]Ibid., 111.

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not stress humanitarian values or heroic aspects. A martyr's participation in the Son's Passion and death reveals the love of the Triune God. Therefore, Christian martyrs imitate this love, which motivates them to follow Christ's sacrifice. This absolute and unique sacrifice carves God's eternal love onto the hearts of Christian martyrs. To elaborate on this Trinitarian view of martyrdom, Balthasar highlights the following differences:

(1) martyrdom in the Trinitarian theme: distinctive characteristic of Christian martyrdom compared to martyrdom in late-Judaism;

(2) martyrdom by imitating "the suffering of his God" in the kenosis motive;

(3) martyrdom that accompanies the Holy Spirit.

First, the theology of martyrdom is anchored in Jesus Christ's sacrifice for God the Father. According to *Mysterium Paschale,* "the Cross of Christ becomes transparent; as the medium of reconciliation between the Father and ourselves."[9] The original actor on the Cross is God the Father, and the Son reconciles us to Him through this perspective on Triune love. In so doing, Christ's self-surrender surpasses the anthropocentric tendency to interpret Jesus' sacrifice as having a humanitarian and moral function.[10]

> ... It will not do to separate the idea of following Christ from that of imitating him (Paul also speaks of this) in such a way that the one crucified with Christ could not by grace obtain a share in Christ's redemptive work.[11]

Ultimately, a Christian martyr is "one crucified with Christ" within the Triune love. This is the most distinctive

[9]Ibid., 137.

[10]Ibid., 139–140.

[11]Balthasar, *New Elucidations,* 290.

characteristic in opposition to which an anthropocentric understanding limits the meaning of martyrdom to a moral function, heroic instruction, or humane value. Balthasar suggests that the Triune God's revelation in Christ is absent from the Jewish theology of martyrdom.[12] Maccabees is grounded in the reward for the faithful, while the second Isaiah's sacrificial motive (suffering righteous man) in the substitutionary theology of martyrdom only targets the just.[13] The theology of martyrdom in Judaism formed this anthropocentric value of the righteous victory which concerned only the old covenant with God, even though it sought to recover the relation of God and human.

The Jewish understanding of martyrdom is comparable to Christian martyrdom, as reflected in the Trinitarian view. In this context, Claude Tassin identifies a gap between the Jewish literature and Christ's self-surrender in the Triune God. A clear difference exists between them, but in the late Jewish theology of martyrdom, the progression from a call to heroism to a morality for daily life permeated the Gospel.[14]

This formed a particular understanding of martyrdom that proves the Law of Israel before God; as a rabbi, Akiba was martyred in A.D. 132. The martyrdoms of Akiba and Saint Ignatius are similar, but there is a critical difference. Tassin states that Christian martyrs, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, died and corresponded to the forgiveness of Christ. However, there

[12]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 95.

[13]Ibid., 97.

[14]Claude Tassin, "A Theology of Martyrdom in Ancient Judaism (2,3, and 4 Maccabees)," in *Theological Studies on Martyrdom,* Series of Martyrdom, edited by Cardinal Walter Kasper and others (Seoul: Brotherhood, 2013), 72-75. According to Tassin, there is no chemically pure martyrdom. In Maccabees, the Jewish theology of martyrdom defended the Jewish faith against Hellenism and attained aesthetic value.

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is no theme of pardon in the old Jewish stories of martyrdom, as in the case of Akiba.[15] According to Tassin, the most distinguishable characteristic is that Jewish martyrdom means to die for the Law, while Christian martyrs die for the love of God and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' sacrifice.[16]

Second, Christian martyrdom in the Trinitarian motivation assimilates Jesus' suffering, forgiveness, and love. More precisely, Walter Kasper argues that Christian martyrs experience "Christ's Kenosis in its utmost extreme, the total surrender of their person."[17] For Balthasar, self-giving love "to be crucified with Christ" parallels Christ's *kenosis*. The unity and communion in suffering with Christ take this form.[18] Balthasar deliberates on *kenosis* in *Passion of Christ*, where Christian martyrdom follows Jesus Christ's *kenosis*:

> In Matthew 16:24–25, Jesus says to his disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Some strands of traditional Christianity interpret this (and other biblical passages like it) in a

[15]"Rabbi Akiba was executed by the Romans between 132 and 135 A.D. Akiba was killed for having supported Bar Kokhba, whom he revered as the Messiah in the Second Jewish War." Conversely, St. Ignatius was martyred a dozen years before Akiba's death. Akiba died for the Law, but there is no motivation for forgiveness of sins. Only a Christian martyr bears witness to the motivation of love of the enemy. See: *Ibid*., 74.

[16]Ibid., 73.

[17]Kasper, "Dogmatical Studies on Martyrdom," 350.

[18]Christian theology describes "the goal and process" by which human beings partake in the divine nature in the sense of "Deification" or "divinization." For Balthasar, God's self-communication in reciprocal "Kenosis" calls for human beings to share the nature of God's love. See: Brendan McInerny, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 88-89.

> manner that encourages self-abnegation and personal trauma in the name of Christian discipleship.[19]

Balthasar's theology establishes a kenotic motive in Christian discipleship. In his marvelous work *Mysterium Paschale*, he decodes the mystery of Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection, theologizing on the love of Jesus from the Holy Friday to Jesus' Resurrection. Balthasar stresses that the Son's kenosis is the supreme expression of inner-Trinitarian love.[20] This "Trinitarian" distinction is concretized in Christ's kenosis, which calls every Christian to discipleship of the same self-damnation, self-abnegation, and self-surrendering love. God's inner love is embodied in the martyr's *kenosis*.

Jesus' obedience during the Paschal three days exemplified filial responsiveness to the Father, and his "Descent into Hell" completes the kenotic love of God. Ultimately, this self-giving love becomes the model of discipleship. As Timothy J. Yoder exposits regarding the kenotic motive in Christian witness (martyrdom), Balthasar values the motive of kenosis "in terms of the disciples' emulation of Jesus' emptying in his death."[21] Finally, Balthasar's theology defines Christian martyrs as "dying with Christ, who died for them in the sense of Kenosis."

Third, Balthasar's theology includes the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ's Passion. There is no doubt that "a martyr of Christ responds to the martyrdom of Christ."[22] Balthasar affirms that the Holy Spirit accompanies Jesus Christ's Passion, a

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[19]Timothy J. Yoder, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Kenosis: The Pathway to Human Agency" (Dissertations of Doctor of Philosophy, Loyola eCommons, Loyola University Chicago, 2013), 19.

[20]Adian Nichols, O.P., "Introduction- Balthasar, his Christology, and the Mystery of Easter" in *Mysterium Paschale* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 7.

[21]Yoder, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Kenosis," 21.

[22]Balthasar, *The Moment of Chrstian Witness,* 117.

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pneumatological accompaniment of the martyr. The testimony of Jesus on the Cross and his martyrdom echo St. Paul's pneumatology: "He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:13–14). The advocate of Christ is never absent in Christian martyrdom.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit can distinguish genuine martyrdom. In a martyr's testimony, this pneumatological aspect confirms that the Holy Spirit leads them to become a true Christian witness. Balthasar identifies genuine Christian martyrdom as a testimony which is not independent of the Spirit. "When the Spirit imparts his knowledge, it is Christ that he glorifies. There is no independent glorification in which the Spirit imparts his knowledge; it is Christ that he glorifies."[23] Martyrs are not true witnesses of Christ even though they bear the testimony of blood. The Holy Spirit binds Christ and the martyrs.

> At this point, however, the discerning of spirits comes into its own. There is no doubt that the area that Christian thinking has to accord to the Holy Spirit can never be wide enough. ... Someone who is 'in the Spirit' is 'removed'; he has lost the ground beneath his feet; he could not be 'in the Spirit' if he held on to something. The Spirit is also he who bears witness (Rom 8:16; Jn 5:9–10), and the disciples are witnesses with him (Jn 15:26–27).[24]

Therefore, Christian martyrs die with Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit teaches the martyrs what they should witness: "For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say" (Luke 12:12). Jesus proclaimed that the Holy Spirit assists when the disciples face persecution. The "martyrdom

[23]Ibid., 117.

[24]Ibid., 116.

of Christ" is inseparable from this Trinitarian dimension. Balthasar's theology synthesizes the Son's suffering and the advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

To summarize the first criterion of Christian martyrdom, the prime means of discernment is formed by a Trinitarian fundamental of Balthasar's view. The first formulation of Christian martyrdom is evaluated as follows: "Christian martyrdom is to be crucified with Jesus Christ by imitating the Son's Love, obedience, self-giving love aided by the Holy Spirit." Three factors in the Trinitarian motive support this:

(1) The martyrs of Christ were distinguishable from the Jewish tradition of martyrdom because they died for God's love, not for heroic, ethical, and anthropocentric values.

(2) Christ's self-giving love to his Father motivates Christian martyrdom through discipleship, imitating the same suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

(3) The Holy Spirit is embodied in the martyrdom of Christ and Christians.

Christian Martyrdom Enters into Solidarity with Jesus Christ: Christological Solidarity in Genuine Christian Martyrdom

In Balthasar's theology, Christ's suffering is inseparable from the concept of "solidarity." As demonstrated in the previous chapter, a martyr imitates the Father's love and the Son's

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obedience in the Holy Spirit.[25] This constitutes the first characteristic of "being crucified with Jesus Christ" in Balthasar's Christology. Furthermore, the martyr enters into solidarity with Jesus, who accepted the same "suffering of people, the sinful destiny of humans, and the death itself." In this context of "*com-passio*" (to join in the same suffering), Balthasar understands the second criterion of Christian martyrdom as solidarity.[26]

He rejects any reductionism that accentuates the humanitarian value and social justice dimension of the martyr's sacrifice. Balthasar thus emphasizes the "solidarity" of Christ's suffering and death. Whilst a sacrifice for socio-political justice alone is admirable in Christian martyrdom, it is not found in Balthasar's Christology. This concept of solidarity must correspond to that of Christ. Balthasar maintains that such solidarity lacks Jesus' atonement in the discourse of martyrdom; [the] "Christian martyr... is crucified with Christ, ... He does not die for an idea, even for the highest – not for human dignity, freedom or solidarity with the oppressed."[27]

> ... It will not do to separate the idea of following Christ from that of imitating him (Paul also speaks of this) in such a way that the one crucified with Christ could not by grace obtain a share in Christ's redemptive work. Otherwise, why would Jesus have invited his friends to follow him so closely and foretold for them persecution, rejection, court trials, even Crucifixion (Jn21)? This

[25]Self-giving love in the Father and Son denotes the "always more" of communion in the Spirit. For Balthasar, the Holy Spirit is also drawn to the Father and the Son in the unity of their essence. Christian martyrdom is also drawn into this solidarity of love in the Trinitarian relationship. For more about the communion in the Spirit, please see: Brendan McInerny, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 58.

[26]Balthasar, *Myterium Paschale,* 133-134.

[27]Balthasar, *New Elucidations,* 286.

> close bond between the follower and the 'founder of our faith' (Heb 12:2) was fully familiar to the early Church. Paul himself speaks of filling up in his body what is still lacking to Christ's sufferings, that is, what Christ in mercy had reserved of his Cross in order to let his Church share in his work and suffering (Col 1:24).[28]

According to Balthasar, solidarity is axiomatic in identifying Christian martyrdom. However, this is not to extend martyrdom to every socially engaged action of self-sacrifice and self-giving testimony. Balthasar positions the axis of solidarity on the Cross in Jesus Christ's being-with-us. Thus, the parallels between Jesus' solidarity and genuine Christian martyrdom are clear when the self-sacrificial solidarity of martyrs harmonizes with Jesus' Crucifixion, which is associated with all of humanity's sinful destiny, deadly suffering, and miserable isolation from God. This Christocentric understanding defines olidarity in Christian martyrdom.

Accordingly, it can be defined by taking into consideration:

(1) how Jesus Christ accomplished solidarity with human beings in his Paschal mystery;

(2) what elements of genuine Christian martyrdom imitate Jesus Christ's solidarity in the meaning of "atonement";

(3) how Christian martyrdom can contribute to solidarity as the love of God and neighbor.

First, the "Trinitarian initiative" in Jesus' suffering involves "real communication (solidarity) of the humanity assumed with the reality of humankind..."[29] According to Balthasar's theology of the Paschal mystery, Jesus Christ drew Himself into

[28]Ibid., 290.

[29]Balthasar, *Myterium Paschale,* 105.

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co-suffering.[30] His obedience on the Mount of Olives strengthened the solidarity of co-suffering with human beings. From his incarnation, Jesus took the destiny of human life. He even descended to the world of sinners in order to co-bear the mortal suffering of human beings. Through kenosis, He co-suffered in his descending, emptying, and dying.

Solidarity in Jesus' co-suffering during the Crucifixion is a distinct characteristic of Christian martyrdom. Martyrs do not die solely for social justice; rather, they sacrifice themselves to enter into solidarity with Christ. For Balthasar, such solidarity is inclusive in embracing the suffering of Christ and the neighbors. According to Choi Hyun Soon's understanding in *Mysterium Paschale,* Christians are called to practice three-fold solidarity with Christ's suffering: "being-with," "co-suffering," and "co-crucified." [31] Thus, a distinguishable characteristic of Christian martyrdom is anchored in Christ's solidarity, which propels Christian witnesses to embrace all suffering.

However, Christian solidarity in martyrdom is not exclusively intended to save and liberate the poor neighbor, oppressed

[30]According to Balthasar's use of the term "solidarity" in the Paschal mystery, the solidarity of Jesus Christ has three dimensions. Firstly, Jesus underwent "co-suffering" with sinners and the dead, expressed as "co-suffering," "*compassio*," and "*Mit-Leiden*" (cf. Mysterium Pascale, 102-104). During His Paschal three days, Jesus experienced absolute loneliness and abandonment by God to co-suffer with all human beings. Secondly, Jesus' incarnation represents the kenosis of Christ in forming solidarity with human beings, expressed as "being-with" and "*Mit-Sein*" in Balthasar's vision of "*Theo-Drama*" (cf. Hyeon Soon Choi and Jong-Gou Park, "The Christological Meaning of Solidarity in Mysterium Paschale of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Theological Perspective* 196 (2017): 43). Finally, Jesus Christ entered into solidarity with the dead, representing a "being-with" the dead in the mystery of Holy Saturday (cf. *Mysterium Pascale*, 152-153).

[31]Hyeon Soon Choi and Jong-Gou Park, "The Christological Meaning of Solidarity in *Mysterium Paschale* of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Theological Perspective* 196 (2017): 68.

people, and victims of contemporary society. Consequently, the Christological significance of Christian martyrdom is pivotal to Jesus' compassion, to bear the Cross together like Simon of Cyrene (Mk 15,21). Second, Christian martyrs respond to "Christ's vicarious suffering"[32], which enables solidarity with Christ through co-suffering with God and neighbors.[33] Eberhard Schockenhoff introduces "atonement" to Balthasar's theology:

> For Balthasar, martyrdom is the utmost event of faith required to all Christians. Therefore, he tries to be exposed through himself to the miracle of God's love manifested in the extreme Passion on the Cross of Atonement without taking care of Himself. In order to give a proper answer to the enormous love exceeding human understanding, Christians must be prepared throughout their whole life. Christian faith is based on the simple fact that humans if it were not a whole being, cannot appropriately return God's love in any way.[34]

The love between the Father and the Son embraces "the whole world" to reconcile them, and Christian faith reproduces the same love, which culminates in martyrdom. Whilst Schockenhoff provides the key to understanding the Cross as atonement, Balthasar notes that "God is always forgiveness." Christ's atonement on the Cross reconciles the people to the Father. In this faith, true Christian witnesses embody the Son's vicarious forgiveness in their martyrdom. This statement

[32]Fiddes summarizes Christ's vicarious suffering as follows; "it is vicarious suffering, in that Christ experiences the effects of human sin, including the response of God towards sin - that is, he experiences utter alienation and forsakenness, the very darkest point of human existence." See: Paul S. Fiddes, "Sacrifice, Atonement, and Renewal: Intersections between Girard, Kristeva, and Balthasar," in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought,* edited by J. Meszaros and J. Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55.

[33]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 133.

[34]Schockenhoff, "What Makes a Martyr," 184.

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illuminates the divine forgiveness in the Cross: "finally, by means of this expiation, we are restored to our sonship in Christ. The Paschal mystery makes possible a new creation."[35]

Furthermore, Jesus Christ takes the place of sin, hell, and even death. His solidarity in atonement love accomplishes divine forgiveness. His death is a form of "vicarious suffering" on behalf of all sinners.[36] According to Balthasar, "we should not carry our suffering, but rather "the death of Jesus," because Christ died for the sins of all human beings.[37] Through Christ's Passion, he suffered for all the punishment due to all sinners, and thus realized universal salvation. Christ's solidarity thus surpasses a particular social value or political cause.

Balthasar's elucidation of solidarity in Christ's suffering is significant for discerning genuine martyrdom in the light of "atonement." Christ forgives sinners, purifies deadly sins, and liberates humanity from its mortal destiny. Thus, the principle of "Christian martyrdom" is embodied in the "atonement of Christ," which grants the persecutor unconditional

[35]O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God*, 71.

[36]Balthasar draws on the concept of vicarious salvation from the *Sententiarum Libri*, stating that Christ's death offers not exclusive, but vicarious salvation, "which takes all other co-sufferings, for the excess of his love transcends that of his suffering" (*Mysterium Paschale*, 104). G.F. O'Hanlon further elaborates on this concept, explaining that "it is Christ who then takes our place and who suffers in himself, for and instead of us, the effects of sin" (Rom. 8, 3; Eph. 2; 2 Cor. 4, 14-15) (*The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 31). This representative substitution of Christ for us, which goes beyond the notion of his solidarity with us, is successful so that we are truly and ontologically transformed into a state of reconciliation with God, not just in an external, juridical way. This substitution makes the event of the Cross, in both Paul and John, more than just a pure symbol of God's intense love for us or of the absence of any anger in God: it is the means by which God reconciles the world to himself (*Ibid.*, 31).

[37]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 135.

forgiveness. True Christian martyrs witness Jesus' solidarity to testify to God's vicarious suffering; as Balthasar states:

> What, then, should a Christian be? He should be one who offers up his life in the service of his fellow man because he owes his life to Christ crucified. But what does he possess of such worth that he can give to his fellow men? Certainly not visible things. The gift he has to give – that which was given him by God – is deeply rooted in the unseen and invisible nature of God. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). If a Christian were to imagine that he could make visible and give to his fellow men all the qualities he possesses, he would simply become mere surface and would no longer have anything deeper to offer.[38]

Therefore, a martyr dies for his neighbors to reveal Christ's solidarity with suffering humanity. Jesus' atonement already included the martyr and his fellow men. The genuine Christian martyr imitates His sacrifice. Christian martyrdom does not relativize the exclusiveness and uniqueness of this.[39] Through Christ's solidarity with us, the solidarity of martyrs invites their colleagues to join the Passion on the Cross of Atonement.

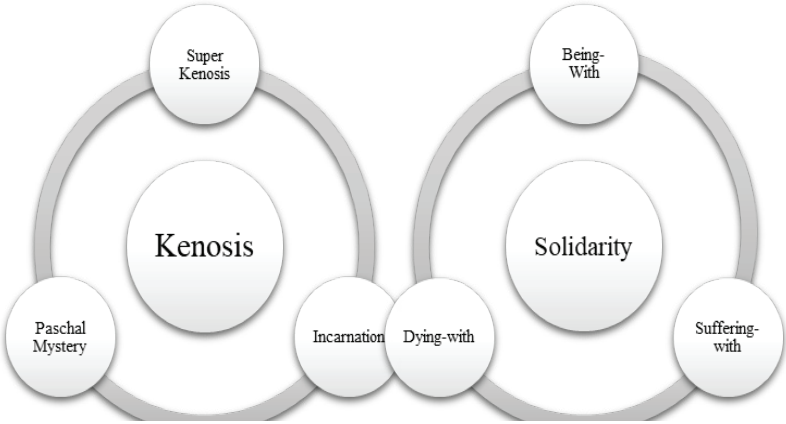
Third, "solidarity" in Christ's "atonement" – the second criterion of Christian martyrdom in Balthasar's theology – is paralleled in the Second Vatican Council's teaching. In genuine Christian martyrdom, "Love for God and love for neighbors" are intertwined. For Balthasar, such inter-connectedness reflects the self-revelation of the Holy Triune God. The Second Vatican Council connects central themes in Pauline and Johannine theology with the solidarity of martyrdom: "thus the first and most necessary gift is love, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of God."[40]

[38]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 133.

[39]Schockenhoff, "What Makes a Martyr," 185.

[40]*Lumen Gentium*, 42.

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△ **Three Keywords of Kenosis and Solidarity**

According to Schockenhoff, Balthasar's *Perichoresis* expressed the following understanding of martyrdom: "If someone were killed violently for justice or sacrificed their lives for protecting the rights of the poor and the marginalized, they ought to be regarded as martyrs for Christ."[41] However, this is not an arbitrary expansion of the idea. Martyrs who sacrifice themselves for social justice, political rights, and ethical values are distinguishable if they have died to testify to Christ's atonement, His vicarious suffering, and non-violent love. Not every voluntary death, regardless of its purpose, is entitled to be called martyrdom. The prerequisite of true Christian martyrdom is that it must fit with the unconditional forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

> (...) It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor that points out the true disciple of Christ. Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too, no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers. From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the

[41]Schockenhoff, "What Makes a Martyr?," 190-191.

> supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom, a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood ... [42]

Finally, Balthasar's theology of martyrdom establishes the true significance of solidarity in Christ's solidarity with us and his vicarious substitution on our behalf. Just as *Lumen Gentium* recognized martyrdom as the supreme testimony, the Christian martyr's solidarity with the crucified Christ and suffering humanity demonstrates the love of God and of one's neighbor. The Christian martyr imitates "his Master's death" to enter into solidarity with Christ, while the martyr's solidarity connects the love of Christ on the Cross to his neighbor. This two-fold solidarity establishes the second principle of Christian martyrdom in Balthasar's theology: "Christocentric solidarity."

Hence, solidarity with Jesus Christ's atonement establishes "how Christian martyrdom builds solidarity." Motivated by discipleship, Christian martyrdom enters into solidarity with Christ and manifests love of God and neighbor. Balthasar's following statement clarifies the genuine Christian martyrdom generated in Christ's solidarity: "What then should a Christian be? He should be one who offers up his life in the service of his fellow man because he owes his life to Christ crucified. But what does he possess of such worth that he can give to his fellow men? Certainly not visible things. The gift he has to give – that which God gave him – is deeply rooted in the unseen and invisible nature of God."[43]

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[42]*Lumen Gentium,* 42.

[43]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 133.

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The Bloodless Martyrdom of Devoting One's Life to God

Balthasar affirms various forms of martyrdom, including the Sacrament of Baptism, Eucharist, and religious life. In his theology, the form of death is not decisive in defining genuine Christian martyrdom. More broadly, Balthasar argues that "the physical sacrifice of one's life" is not final but that Christian martyrdom pursues "dying to the world in Baptism together with Jesus" and devoting one's life to the immortality of Christ.[44] He exposits non-bloodshed martyrdom as follows:

> Martyrdom means bearing witness. It is not so very important what form this finally takes – the physical sacrifice of one's life by bodily death, the surrender of one's whole existence to Christ by vowing to live according to his commands, or by dying to the world in Baptism together with Jesus in such a way that this death and resurrection may truly enable one to live one's life for the sake of that other, immortal life (cf. Rom 6:12 ff.). Man becomes aware of the nature of his particular mission in life when he calmly puts his trust in God. But whatever particular Christian state the believer may live in, he lives as one who has died and been resurrected, because his whole existence is an attempt to make a loving and thankful response to God 'by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20).[45]

This does not imply an unqualified extension to the definition of Christian martyrdom. Balthasar emphasizes that genuine Christian martyrdom is anchored in the Trinitarian and Christological imperatives of "being crucified with Christ" and "practicing love for God and one's neighbor." As he explains, "surrender of one's whole existence to Christ" is the pivot of Christian martyrdom.[46]

[44]Ibid., 140–141.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid.

Therefore, genuine Christian martyrdom is determined by motive rather than form. One example of this in Balthasar's theology is "Mary's assent." He clearly exposits her "unbloody martyrdom," which involves full consent and submission to the Son.[47] This entails "non-bloodshedding martyrdom, bloodless martyrdom, and witness to the truth without death," provided that the witness originated in the Crucifixion, experiencing both the suffering of Christ and the absence of God.

Similarly, Balthasar's theology affirms the motives of "self-submission" and "self-sacrifice" in the Church's Sacrament and consecrated life of Christian witnesses. This non-bloodshedding martyrdom does not reduce the uniqueness of the Christian testimony. Instead, it is motivated by the "Word" and contemplates Christ's Crucifixion, as Mother Mary became the model of bloodless martyrdom. Pivotally, martyrdom cannot take an excessive meaning beyond the Cross of Christ. He continues:

> This fearful need for love to give its assent to death, this "unbloody martyrdom" on the part of Mary, is the crucial situation out of which the Church springs to life. It is the fertility of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the apocalyptic woman in her birth pangs. The cry uttered by the Church at her birth is heard at the same moment as the mother's inaudible cry uttered as she beholds her dying Son.[48]

"How is genuine Christian martyrdom defined?" The third criterion of Balthasar's theology adopts bloodless martyrdom through theological reflection on Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and the Consecrated Life. As the passages on Mary's bloodless martyrdom elucidate, this theology does not elevate every kind of self-sacrifice to the status of martyrdom but brings martyrdom to the core of "Crucifixion."

[47]Ibid., 38–40.

[48]Ibid., 39.

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The Sacrament of Baptism: Motive of Christian Martyrdom

Bloodless martyrdom does not derogate the supreme witness of bloody martyrdom. In the Sacraments, non-blood-shedding martyrdom is clearly associated with the genuine motive of Christian testimony. As St. Paul noted, a person dies to sin through Baptism: "... the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20).[49] Balthasar clarifies that the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist motivate Christian witnesses to bear the Cross and be crucified with Jesus Christ:

For Christians, there is no question of such an attitude, for 'all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death' and 'we were buried therefore with him by Baptism.' It holds good for all the Christians that 'our old self was crucified with him' and that 'if we have died with Christ' (Rom 6:3, 4, 6, 8) and are 'buried' (Col 2:12) we are also 'raised' with him and 'sit with him in the heavenly places' (Eph 2:6; Col 2:12) so that 'our common wealth is in heaven' (Phil 3:2; Heb 12:22) and consequently we are 'strangers and exiles on the earth' (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:9, 13). Mark stresses that Jesus 'called to him the multitude with his disciples' when he said to them: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross and follow me' (Mk 8:34 ff.), and Luke does likewise (Lk 14:25 ff.), adding the speech concerning the complete surrender of all earthly goods: 'So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple' (Lk 14:33).[50]

[49]*Lumen Gentium,* 44.

[50]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 135.

For Balthasar, Baptism initiates every Christian to be formed in the likeness of Christ, especially his Death and Resurrection.[51] The Sacrament of Baptism ultimately directs the Christian's discipleship, which "denies himself and takes up his Cross." Hence, becoming a Christian in the Baptism manifests "the death of Jesus" and 'Jesus' Suffering.'[52] In "being co-crucified", Christian life is inseparable from martyrdom.

In Balthasar's perspective on Baptism and martyrdom, the willingness to lay down "one's life" for the love of God leads to one's vision of the death of Christ.[53] Just as Balthasar stresses the "co-crucified" in his theology of Christ's suffering, baptized Christians are also invited to experience such suffering. Consequently, bloodless martyrdom in Baptism awakens Christians to rebirth and resurrection, such as in Christ's Paschal mystery.

The Motive of Christian Martyrdom in the Holy Eucharist

Balthasar views the Sacrament of Eucharist as a motive of Christian martyrdom. He contends that "the whole Church must be co-crucified" with Christ through the Eucharist.[54] He asserts that the Cross "takes me to him again in the Eucharist."[55] The calling to "co-Crucifixion" is initiated with the Baptism and leads to the Eucharist, which nourishes the Christian and promotes the motive of martyrdom. Balthasar integrates Baptism and the Eucharist with this motive when he writes, "the Christ who lives in me is so deeply within me,

[51] *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

[52] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale.,* 135.

[53] Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 28–29.

[54] Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 134.

[55] Ibid., 112.

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... because he died for me."[56] Ultimately, the non-bloodshed motive of martyrdom is completed in the Eucharist, which presents the death of Christ.

Furthermore, Balthasar's theology synthesizes the meaning of Christ's blood in his sacrifice. This renews the sinners and shares the "precious blood" (I Peter 1, 19).[57] He elaborates that Christ's blood is granted to all people. It becomes a gift for Christians and accomplishes God's love as revealed in Christ's Crucifixion. In this Paschal mystery, Balthasar induces the Christian motive of martyrdom by clarifying the implications of sacrificial meal and drink.

In addition, the Holy Eucharist engages the Christian vocation to the daily life of witnessing and sacrifice. It renders the Christology of martyrdom to incorporate the faithful in Christ's blood. Non-bloodshed martyrdom is connected to the Blood of Christ. The "atonement of Christ," as the identifiable motivation for Christian martyrdom, implies that Christ's blood was shed for the guilt of sinners vicariously. For Balthasar, this Eucharistic meaning of martyrdom is fundamentally directed toward Christ's salvation through His Holy Blood. In so doing, Christian martyrdom is extended to include daily devotion and self-abstinence. As Jennings explains:

> But sanctification also begins at Baptism and the ritual and participatory inclusion of the convent within the Christian corporate body. Literal martyrdom is, in fact, simply the completion of one's baptismal vows. Finally, however, one's martyrdom can be daily, existential death in Christ. And this is where ascesis finds its logical

[56]Ibid., 112–113.

[57]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 98.

> place within Christian doctrines of sanctification and martyrology.[58]

Consequently, Christian martyrdom can be discerned even in non-bloodshedding Christian participation in charity and daily dedication, provided it is incorporated into the Blood of Christ. Through the assimilated Christian motive, the spiritual meaning of bloodless martyrdom is manifested in Balthasar's theology of the Paschal mystery. "Co-crucified," Balthasar's critical essence of martyrdom, is enshrined in the motive for the non-bloodshed martyrdom of the Sacrament of Baptism and Holy Eucharist.

Significance of Non-bloodshed Martyrdom in Balthasar's Theology

Balthasar cautions against overly spiritualizing Christ's suffering and emphasizes the Trinitarian dimension of genuine martyrdom in the sense of Christ's Paschal mystery.[59] He outlines the distinctive characteristic of bloodless martyrdom as a "Trinitarian" dimension, extending beyond an anthropocentric, psychological, and spiritualized approach to Jesus' suffering as the model of genuine martyrdom.

According to Balthasar, non-bloodshed martyrdom has been interpreted and practiced in the form of asceticism. He criticizes this narrow understanding of Christ's suffering, such as in the "spiritual Cross," which enlightens the genuine meaning of martyrdom without losing the Trinitarian background or relying on the functional aspect of Christ's suffering. He argues:

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[58]Nathan G. Jennings, *Theology as Ascetic Act: Disciplining Christian Discourse,* American University Studies, Series VII., Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 81-82.

[59]Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale,* 40. (It has been designated "affective" or "spiritual" theology by focusing on ascetic interpretation of the martyrdom.)

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> Despite the major impulses given by the saints, the official theology did not succeed in constructing a genuine theology of the *Triduum Mortis* to complement the abstract soteriology. By and large, that was because, on the one hand, the implicit theology of the saints was at times narrowed down to a specialized 'affective' or 'spiritual' theology, while on the other hand, it was taken captive by anthropocentric schemata of ascent and purification, still dominant in the doctor of the Church John of the Cross himself.[60]

Balthasar opposes an "affective" and "spiritual" understanding of Christ's Cross, which discredits the Trinitarian pivot of genuine Christian martyrdom. Such a reductive approach separates a martyr's witnessing from Christ's sacrifice, which unveils the Son's absolute and voluntary obedience to the Father. He asserts that the genuine motive of Christian martyrdom prompts reflection on the emotional, spiritual, and ascetic characteristics of Christ's suffering. Ultimately, in this Triune relationship, genuine Christian martyrdom includes bloodless martyrdom through "participation" in God's mutual love.

Moreover, as Timothy Yoder asserts, a commitment to monastic life and evangelical counsel are also related to martyrdom, which invites one to be the perfect witness of Christ's self-surrender unto death.[61] As a spiritualized attitude to martyrdom, *Fuga Mundi* is overcome by Balthasar's extension of Christian martyrdom. It avoids an over-spiritualized and emotionalized attitude of accepting Christian faith about Christ's suffering and directs the faithful to the Son's self-giving love for God. The bloodless martyrdom in Balthasar's

[60]Ibid., 39–40.

[61]Timothy J. Yoder, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Kenosis: The Pathway to Human Agency," 259-261.

theology achieves "participation" in Christ's love and the Church's Sacraments.

It also introduces the continuation of martyrdom in the Sacrament of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, which are interrelated in "an unbloody martyrdom." As Ignatius of Antioch states, the Christian vocation is directed toward dedicating oneself to becoming the pure bread of Christ, to be "ground by the teeth of wild beasts."[62] This is initiated in the moment of Baptism and fulfilled in the Holy Eucharist. In Balthasar's extension, the sense of martyrdom is summarized as follows:

(1) Genuine Christian martyrdom incorporates even bloodless martyrdom.

(2) Like the example of Mother Mary, self-submission and sacrifice essentially constitute a Christian martyrdom which signifies co-Crucifixion with Christ;

(3) The Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist propel the Christian vocation to bear witness, including "bloody martyrdom" and "bloodless martyrdom";

(4) Pivotally, a bloodless martyrdom must involve the Trinity's self-giving and self-surrender.

In summary, the extension of Balthasar's definition of martyrdom to bloodless martyrdom avoids the indiscreet expansion of all kinds of self-denial, such as suicide bombing, and the spiritualized view of martyrdom. Notwithstanding the bloodless testimony, a genuine Christian martyrdom pursues a "co-crucified" love for Christ. Significantly, this criterion emphasizes that Christian life in the Sacrament and all religious life incorporates the whole vocation into the absolute

[62]Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 140-141 and Timothy Yoder, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Kenosis," 259-261.

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and unique sacrifice of Christ. The life of the Church bonds the faithful to the Cross.

Martyrdom in Testimony to "God's Kingdom of Love"

In Balthasar's theology, "the atonement of the Son" on the Cross is a criterion of genuine Christian martyrdom, which imitates Christ's solidarity with us and vicarious forgiveness for human beings. Also, the solidarity of the Christian witness with one's neighbor is anchored in the Trinitarian fundamentals of martyrdom. Surrendering one's life and freedom is also initiated by love and obedience to Christ. In Balthasar's view on the Cross, genuine Christian martyrdom is formed by Trinitarian initiatives and Christological centeredness, which invites all Christians to be "co-crucified" from the moment of Baptism.[63]

Through the abovementioned criteria, the final criterion for genuine martyrdom deepens the practice of love for one's neighbor and for God. Self-giving love and the practice of one's Christian vocation were elaborated on in detail in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Christian martyrdom aims to build the "Kingdom of Heaven." Balthasar rebukes the theological tendency to consider the discourse of Christian martyrdom in terms of human autonomy and indiscreet heroism. The two-way love of God and neighbor motivates the Christian witness, and its aim is to establish God's rule and righteousness

[63]Cf. Balthasar argues that the discipleship of human beings is to participate in Christ. Human beings are drawn to join this eternal self-giving love of the Trinitarian life which Jesus revealed in the Crucifixion. "Participating in Christ, human beings discover themselves their own true calling and personhood as they are drawn into God's drama with the universe, into the encounter of the finite with the infinite. (*Theodramatiks II*, 302-11). See: Mark A. McIntosh, "Christology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* edited by Edward T. Oakes, SJ and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34-35.

in this world. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is a specific factor in discerning genuine Christian martyrdom, as Balthasar explains:[64]

> This can be proved theologically by highlighting the 'radical identity' of the love of God and one's neighbor precisely as the central message of Christ. According to him, the commandments are alike (Mark 12:31 and parallels); they are together the epitome of the Old Testament, and, in the judgment, the 'love of one's neighbor will be the only criterion for admittance to the Kingdom of God' (Mt 25:34 ff.). Paul emphasizes these statements several times, and, according to John, we are loved by God (Jn 14:21) and Christ, so that we can love one another (Jn 13:34), which love is the new commandment of Christ (Jn 14:34), that for him is specific (Jn 15:12) and is what is asked of us (Jn 15:17). And so for John the consequence that God, who is love (1 Jn 4:16), has loved us, is not that we love him back but that we should love one another (1 Jn 4:7, 11).

Balthasar's criterion does not consider Socrates as a genuine Christian witness. Technically, Balthasar recognizes Socrates as a witness who sacrificed himself for the truth.[65] However, this sacrifice is regarded as "an ethical and philosophical model."[66] Moreover, his death was not oriented toward establishing the Kingdom of God in the name of Christ. As Balthasar explains,

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[64]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 103.

[65]Balthasar, *New Elucidations,* 287.

[66]Socrates was recognizable as a witness to the truth before the advent of Christianity, but not as a Christian martyr. Balthasar summarizes the meaning of Socrates' death as follows: (1) Socrates died for self-conquest in the of philosophy and ethics, (2) Socrates rejected "suicide," and (3) Socrates had an insight into the ultimate destiny of life in the sense of immortality (but this was in terms of reincarnation.) Although Balthasar's theology acknowledges Socrates as a former model of martyrdom, Christian martyrdom requires the notion and motivation of "co-Crucifixion with Christ." *See*: *Theo-Drama II*, 137-138., *Theo-Drama IV*, 100-101.

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genuine Christian martyrs are presented if their testimony insists on God's justice and his eternal love, as revealed on the Cross. The criterion for admittance to the Kingdom of God is conformity to Christ's complete self-surrender to the Father on the Cross.[67]

In this Christocentric discourse on Christian martyrdom, Balthasar's discernment of true martyrdom focuses on that to which the witnesses testify and how they confess their faith. His criticism of the undiscerned extension of martyrdom arguably targets an extended definition of this concept by Karl Rahner. Balthasar criticized Rahner's view in *The Moment of Christian Witness,* with his fiercest criticism aimed at the "anonymous Christian."[68] Balthasar rejects the "radical identity" of the love of God and one's neighbor in identifying Christian martyrdom.

Consideration of the argument surrounding the radical extension of Christian martyrdom highlights the theological difference between Rahner and Balthasar. The discussion concerns "Christology," that defines genuine Christian martyrdom. Balthasar evaluates Rahner's "anonymous Christian" as an "evolutional Christology," which he regards as secular. Balthasar's critique of Rahner has two aspects: (1) prioritizing the love of God, and (2) distinguishing between the "anonymous Christian" and "anonymous Christianity."

First, Balthasar criticizes Rahner for proposing "the unity of love of God and love of one's neighbor" in the theology of the "anonymous Christian." He argues that Rahner's humanism reduces and underestimates the significance of the priority of God's love, and that his transcendental Christology "leads

[67]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, 103.

[68]Karen Kilby, "Balthasar and Karl Rahner," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar,* edited by Edward T. Oakes, SJ and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 259.

to a loss of the distinctiveness of Christianity, and also a loss of commitment."[69] According to Balthasar, if one becomes a Christian anonymously, why does a genuine Christian bear witness by paying the cost of their life and making sacrifices?

> Anyone who speaks of 'anonymous Christians' cannot avoid (nor doubtless would he want to) the conclusion that there is ultimately no difference between Christians who are such by name and Christians who are not. Hence – despite all subsequent protests – it cannot matter whether one professes the name or not. And anyone who proclaims the identity of the love of God and one's neighbor and presents the love of one's neighbor as the primary meaning of the love of God must not be surprised (and doubtless is not) if it becomes a matter of indifference whether he professes to believe in God or not. The main thing is that he has love. Admittedly, this is true if he knows what love is. But by what criterion does a man who is essentially a sinner measure love? ... But a person who does this assuredly knows God alone.[70]

In this criterion of the unity of love, Christian martyrs practice and implement the same love of Christ for their neighbors. Through Christ's love, the Christian faith imitates the same love for all people, whether through social justice, political righteousness, or abundant charity. However, the outcome of the righteous person's actions does not render them Christian. Their motivation and personal love are what decisively distinguish the genuine Christian witness. Furthermore, Balthasar warns that if Christian martyrdom is reduced to ethical goodness, it can lapse into a form of "Neo-Catholicism," which "contradicts so radically the Church's entire canon of

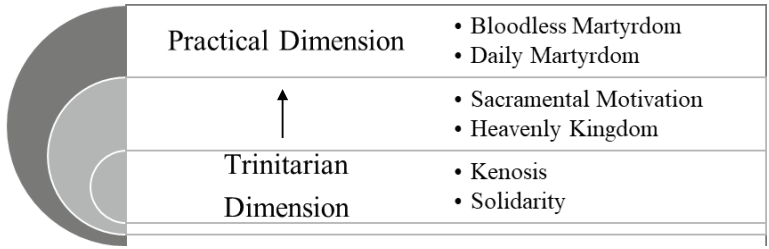
[69]Ibid. 260.

[70]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness,* 120–121.

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sanctity."[71] Therefore, anonymous martyrdom is unacceptable in Balthasar's theology.

Second, to refute the reductionist Christianity in Rahner's theology, Balthasar adopts Henri de Lubac's distinction between "anonymous Christians," which has long been argued but not developed,[72] and an "anonymous Christianity," which is urgently revealed in this era.[73] The sense of an "anonymous Christian" is valid in that all human beings can be saved by Christ's salvation. However, Christians are motivated to lay down their lives for Christ and their neighbors by the love they have received from Christ. Therefore, "anonymous Christianity" does not exist; genuine Christian martyrs die for Christ "in His name and in the Church's name."[74] This becomes a testimony about Christ, that is, martyrdom conducted by giving up one's life for Christ. Therefore, there is no anonymity in the Church as it has a name, "the love of God."



△ **Criteria of Genuine Christian Martyrdom**

Balthasar accepts this distinction, which functions to affirm "anonymous Christians" and reject "anonymous Christianity." De Lubac's formulation is acceptable in the way genuine Christian martyrdom can be identified. If a martyr has testified to the truth in the name of Christ, they cannot be

[71]Ibid., 149.

[72]Karen Kilby, "Balthasar and Karl Rahner," 261.

[73]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, 122-124

[74]Ibid., 151.

considered anonymous. For instance, Pope Francis names the thirteen Egyptian Coptic Christian martyrs who were killed by Islamist extremists in 2015 as "witnesses of Jesus."[75] They did not protest against social injustice on behalf of an oppressed people but were simply migrant fathers trying to feed their families. They were slain but proclaimed the name of "Jesus Christ" against the violence of Islamist extremists. Ultimately, these unnamed Christians were named Christian martyrs.

> ... the Church has canonized (elevated to a standard rule) in two thousand years as sanctity according to the measure of the Gospel corresponds unequivocally to the criterion proposed in The Moment of Christian Witness: every saint has attempted to shape his life into a loving response to the crucified Trinitarian love of God and thus placed himself at the disposition of Jesus' work of establishing God's Kingdom of love among men. The attempt to reduce religion to ethics, love of God, and personal love for Christ to love of neighbor contradicts so radically the Church's entire canon of sanctity that one would have to contrast it sharply with the tradition and say, 'Neo-Catholicism'.[76]

In distinguishing the true Christian witness in Trinitarian love and God's Kingdom of love, Balthasar suggests a criterion for identifying genuine Christian martyrdom. True martyrs shape their lives into a "loving response to the crucified Trinitarian love of God" and establish "God's Kingdom of Love." Finally, Balthasar's Christ-centered view of immanent Trinitarian theology circumscribes the boundary of Christian martyrdom. It is the "love of God" and the "Kingdom of Love."

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[75]Pope Francis, *Visit to "Villa Nazareth" Address of His Holiness Pope Francis*, 18 June 2016, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/june/documents/papa-francesco_20160618_villa-nazareth.html (accessed 25 May 2022)

[76]Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, 149.

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Christian martyrs thus die for love in the name of the Church in order to establish the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

By joining the "co-crucified" with Jesus Christ, Balthasar adapts his Trinitarian and Christological theology to clarify the criteria of Christian martyrdom. Being constituted by the self-giving love of the Father, Son, and the Spirit is a primary criterion for distinguishing the genuine Christian witness. The second criterion privileges Christ's solidarity, which is described in Jesus' reconciling work of atonement by posing "solidarity with God and one's neighbor." The third criterion is motivated by the Sacrament of Baptism, the Eucharist, and daily sanctification. Balthasar accepts bloodless martyrdom as a model of genuine witness to Christ, akin to Mother Mary's total dedication. The fourth criterion sustains Christian engagement in building the Kingdom of God's love through martyrdom.

Finally, Balthasar's theology of martyrdom is formulated as follows: "a genuine Christian martyr is crucified with Christ" in the sense of (1) "giving up his life for love of God"; (2) "imitating Christ's solidarity"; (3) practicing the Christian faith in their day-to-day life; and (4) pursuing God's rule and promoting His Kingdom. These are the distinctive characteristics of true Christian martyrdom. In Balthasar's view, Christian martyrs do not die simply for an ideal, social justice, or political righteousness; they sacrifice themselves to testify to God's love, His forgiveness, and His Kingdom.