BALTHASAR AND THE ECLIPSE OF NIETZSCHE

In the Post-World War 1 Zeitgeist the perception of massive cultural, social, and intellectual breakdown and the ferment of search for alternatives formed the horizon for very different kind of thinkers. For everyone but the deniers, there was an obvious attraction to forms of discourse that paid attention to a crisis regarded as a happening in which, whether fully acknowledged or not, there was a fundamental change regarding the prospects of the ideation, practices and forms of life that constituted Western European culture. Moreover, while in some respects the very monumental nature of the shift meant that it could only be experienced as unanticipated event, at the same time it was a happening imbued with a certain kind of necessity. Western European culture seemed to have run out of the moral and religious resources which, if rightly condemned as chronically inadequate, also had made Western European culture possible. The responses bore different levels of radicality with regard to diagnostics and interest in in mapping possible futures beyond a fundamental break, and the dawning sense that the caesura demanded new forms of thinking, feeling, writing, and living. The convulsion that was the expression of the unravelling of European culture did not leave Christianity unaffected as the prophetic voices of Kierkegaard, Dostoyevski, and Nietzsche had all attested. In the nineteen twenties these thinkers – together with poets such as Hölderlin and Rilke -- become at once a lingua franca of taking the cultural and religious pulse as well as setting the table for what an adequate Christian response would look like.

It should be said that Catholic thinkers were not to the forefront in terms of grasping and analyzing the situation and moving ahead with radical suggestions. While it would be unfair to say that most Catholic intellectuals initially sat it out, it is definitely true that Protestant response was far more energetic and decisive. Karl Barth had already a good grasp of both the cultural situation and the lack of
adequate Christian response before his famous *Commentary on Romans* (1921), and while his saving faith from the sinking ship of European culture was singular in its vehement eloquence, he was not in fact alone. He was joined by other theologians such as Emil Brunner and other dialectical theologians who felt forced to acknowledge that Christianity’s imbrications in Western culture in general and modern culture in particular made it bankrupt. Either no Christianity or a form of Christianity that was not dependent on Western culture and society which, if in one sense had lost its way, in another sense had simply revealed the vacuum that it was from the beginning. Despite allegiances to the institutional Church and the long Christian tradition, and major disincentives to see the problem provided by the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) and the anti-modernist oath (1910), while there may have been a lag, Catholics did see the problem and felt the need to respond. The three main figures in the immediate post-war period were Erich Przywara (1889-1972), Romano Guardini (1885-1968), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), the first two in due course teachers of the third. Balthasar is unusual in the generosity with which he acknowledges his debts, and I will speak occasionally throughout this essay of his debts to Guardini and Przywara, especially the latter. In this essay, however, the focus is on the complex response of Balthasar to one these visionary figures who prophesized the undoing of Western culture, that is, Friedrich Nietzsche throughout the nineteen twenties and thirties. In particular I intend to track shifts in Balthasar’s framing of Nietzsche and critical evaluation, with a view to seeing (a) how framing and evaluation tend to be a function of each other in the great resourcement theologian, whose work in this period, however, is not specifically theological, and (b) explore the paradox that as Balthasar begins to develop as a theologian in the late nineteen thirties, the gradual elevation of Nietzsche as a thinker, over the decade, turns out in fact to be the condition of his replacement by Martin Heidegger or perhaps better the apocalyptic German philosopher to the extent to which he is linked to Rilke and in a significant sense overshadowed by him.
Accordingly, the essay has two parts. In the first part, I address the changes in Balthasar’s framing and evaluation of Nietzsche essentially between his 1928 dissertation, *Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen Literatur*, an abbreviated form of which was self-published in 1930 (version referred to here), and the second volume of *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* (1939) which, in handling highly different forms modern thought under the rubric of immanence in the Dionysian mode, implies that the German philosopher is the key to interpreting the emergence of life (*Leben*) as a fundamental philosophical category. With regard to the dissertation, I speak to the way in which, despite the survey character of Balthasar’s ‘history,’ Balthasar insists on the pivotal nature of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as a diagnostic and existential pair while, arguably, performatively elevating Nietzsche to the status of first among equals. With an eye towards volumes 2 and 3 of *Apokalypse* which is almost ten years in the future I suggest that Heidegger and Rilke seem to enjoy sufficient authority in the dissertation such that it is not absolutely surprising that in the future they come to rival not only the prestige and pertinence of Kierkegaard, but the prestige and pertinence of Nietzsche also. I will also comment briefly on how the discursive style of the dissertation functions to depress and repress the rupture quotient in the discourses of ‘unveiling’ of Nietzsche and Heidegger, and especially of the latter, and that, ironically, it is only when Balthasar theologically inflects his genealogical discourse in *Apokalypse* that he is able fully to fully account for ‘rupture,’ and does so by inscribing it within the cross as promise as well as rupture.

In part 2 I analyze the way in which the second and third volumes of *Apokalypse* (1939), on the one hand, even further elevate Nietzsche by making Nietzsche alone and not the pair Nietzsche-Kierkegaard the centerpiece of volume 2 which goes under the sign of Dionysus and, on the other, simultaneously elevate the Heidegger-Rilke pair who come to be the centerpiece of volume 3. If in one sense, this makes merely fully explicit what is implicit the dissertation, in another sense it sets up something like a contest between two powerful centers apocalyptic thought which if both are
hyperbolic in their emphasis on rupture with conventional representation as well as the past, have
different proximities to Christianity. While this rivalry does not necessarily lead to the eclipse of
Nietzsche -- as witnessed the importance of Nietzsche for Henri de Lubac in the nineteen thirties and
early forties -- in the case of Balthasar it does. This is largely due the emergence of a theological voice,
which in Balthasar’s case means a screening of non-Christian and anti-Christian figures for their
hospitality ratio vis-à-vis the Christianity and the figure of the crucified. Heidegger wins out in the
Darwinism of apocalyptic types largely because he does not proclaim, as Nietzsche does, a non serviam.
The eclipse is in full effect by the time of Wahrheit der Welt (1947) even if in 1942 Balthasar publishes
an anthology of Nietzsche’s writings. Wahrheit is, however, the first major episode of many in a ramified
and complex negotiation with Heidegger that marks Balthasar’s theological project at its most
fundamental level to the end of his theological career which closes with his death in 1988.

Continuity and Change in Balthasar’s framing and Evaluation of Nietzsche Between 1928-1939

Balthasar’s dissertation, Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen
Literatur, completed only a year after the publication of Sein und Zeit (self-published in 1930), is the
work of an aspiring Germanist and not the work of a theologian. It is as encyclopedic in range as it is
economic in detail. A dizzying array of modern thinkers are covered, novelists such as Turgenev and
Dostoyevki, poets such as Rilke, Stefan George and Ludwig Klages, religious thinkers such as Soloviev,
Kierkegaard, and Barth, and philosophers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Even more modern
thinkers, mainly German writing, thinkers are mentioned. If eschatology is the encompassing theme,
and signals both finalization and rupture, Balthasar’s broadly speaking Germanistik methodology inclines
him to organize his material according to a number of important subthemes, for example, the Dionysian
myth (ch. 4), Christ and anti-Christ (ch. 6), and person and death (ch. 10) as well as different sub-
disciplines such as psychology and eschatology (ch. 5), theology (ch. 11). Whether the division into
Balthasar’s attempt to bring to order a multiverse of discourses that speak to chaos while they represent novel orderings of experience, language, and thought. In any event, it is not as if Balthasar fails to suggest something like a hermeneutic key. After a two short chapter set up, the dissertation begins in earnest in chapter 3 (21-48) which has the revealing title: Die Alternative: Kierkegaard und Nietzsche. Although the title is banal is one sense, in another it is revealing. Why ‘and’ and not ‘or’? Of course, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were a primary pair in the case of Romano Guardini. But focused on Christian faith in the Römerbrief Barth had resolutely decided for Kierkegaard. Still, the decision for Kierkegaard was not simply a Protestant affair. One can point to Przywara’s early work on Kierkegaard as itself a decision for the Danish religious thinker who is adopted precisely because he believes the declension of Christianity to be reversible, even if with great difficulty, since both originally and in the last instance Christianity is not a cultural acquisition. Personal appropriation of the Christ of Christianity is always necessary, perhaps even more now in Europe of the nineteen twenties than it was in Denmark in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Now just as Balthasar does not make the same decision for Kierkegaard over Nietzsche as Barth and Przywara, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that he is simply imitating Guardini. The Germanistic method deployed by Balthasar in the dissertation, which calls for focusing on the replacing of one cultural figuration by another, has significant effect on the grouping. The cultural figuration being replaced by the eschatological thought of both is that of Romanticism and Idealism (27-8). Equally both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have had a fundamental glimpse (der Augenblick) of the crisis and cultural unraveling (25). Nonetheless, uneasy lies the pair. When Balthasar speaks of glimpse he seems to favor Nietzsche by citing a passage from Ecco Homo (25-6). When he lumps Kierkegaard and Nietzsche together as combatting the cultural figuration of Idealism he necessarily is favoring Kierkegaard who explicitly sets himself this task (27; also 34, 36, 40). In contrast, Nietzsche’s task is seeking an end to
Western rationalism with respect to which Kierkegaard’s beloved figure of Socrates is posited as origin. This suggests that Kierkegaard is being favored, a position, arguably, reinforced by the fact that it is Kierkegaard who is the more cited. Balthasar is satisfied to simply render Nietzsche’s radical voice, and only rarely annotating with critical comment. Despite this ascesis, however, Balthasar does raise worries about Nietzsche’s dismissal of ethics (42-4; also chapter 4, 49-50). Overall, however, the slightly greater prominence of Kierkegaard is merely internal to the chapter in which they are paired. It is otherwise if we take in the dissertation as a whole. This is so largely because Nietzsche continues to be a presence in other chapters in a way that Kierkegaard is not. After chapter 3 Kierkegaard rarely gets mentioned. In contrast, Nietzsche is a major presence in chapter 4 which concerns the Dionysian mythos (49-84). This is as one would expect, since the Ur-text for setting up the Dionysian myth as the alternative to a decadent modernity is Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy. Dionysius is the cover term for a thought that mystically grasps life (67) and refuses to qualify/disqualify it as Schopenhauer is inclined to do (51-2). In addition, for Nietzsche time is the new absolute (53). Balthasar is particularly forceful here, and given the very non-declarative style of the text, the point must be of considerable importance for him.

Certainly, the emphasis on time marks a break with the Western tradition which privileges eternity and stable meaning, and even from Romanticism and Idealism marked by a searching in time for what exceeds it. This makes it all the more interesting that Balthasar does not get textually specific with regard to this point. He does not quote Thus Spake Zarathustra, which as a whole is a hymn to time, or mention Nietzsche’s famous essay on Heraclitus. And without necessarily saying it, ‘time’ and ‘life’ mutually define each other.

Although Nietzsche is the exemplar of a philosophy of life, the chapter is not a chapter solely about Nietzsche and his work. For Balthasar, Lebensphilosophie is necessarily plural. Still the chapter is in significant respects about Nietzsche, even if it is as much about contemporary reception of Nietzsche’s prophetic texts as the texts themselves. In addition to the two crucial ideas of ‘life’ and
‘time’ Balthasar mentions Nietzsche’s trope of the ‘death of God’ (81) and the trope of the superman (Übermensch) (55). In both cases, however, he does so in a matter of fact manner and without critical evaluation. In the former case, Balthasar does not read the trope as an atheist salvo, but rather as a piece of cultural diagnostics in which the transcendent as such and transcendent values have become incomprehensible. Since the chapter equally concerns Nietzsche-reception, this explains the importance Balthasar appears to give George Simmel who assimilates and disseminates Nietzsche’s thought and Stefan George who performs and mimes it and gives it prestige (55). Moreover George is not confined to the chapter. When Nietzsche’s view of the Anti-Christ briefly becomes an object of analysis in a later chapter (141), George’s ‘other Christ’ (Widerchrist) is in tow.

Interestingly, neither Nietzsche nor George is truly prominent in Balthasar’s reflection on the Anti-Christ. The two thinkers elevated are Soloviev and Dostoyevski, and Balthasar in particular elevates Soloviev’s “Tale of the Anti-Christ” (115-16). This is a text that forever links Soloviev with Dostoyevski. It remains important throughout Apokalypse, even if in Apokalypse 2 to a significant extent Soloviev gets folded into Dostoyeski, and enjoys a prominent place in Balthasar’s mature theological work, especially in Herrlichkeit and Theodramatik. Unlike the analysis provided in Apokalypse 2 Balthasar’s discussion of the Anti-Christ is not patently theologically reflected. At the same time, however, despite the obvious contribution made by the likes of Soloviev and Dostoyevski Balthasar reminds that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard remain decisive (125). Balthasar is, arguably, persuasive enough when he is talking about the relative cultural weight of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard vis-à-vis Soloviev and Dostoyevski. The question arises as to how persuasive he is with regard to another pair in the dissertation, that is, Heidegger and Rilke, who are two main thinkers covered in chapter 10 (164-89). This chapter carries the title of “Person und Tod.” Unsurprisingly, given the dissertation’s early date (1928/30), the crucial text of Heidegger under analysis is Sein und Zeit (1927). In the chapter Balthasar quotes voluminously but also with apology, suggesting that his selective style of quotation will fail to do justice to the text’s dense and
disciplined analyses of existential states (180-81). Balthasar is at once encouraged by Przywara’s engagement with the philosopher (179) who goes to the existential root of reason (178), and oriented in a significant way by Simmel’s article ‘Zur Metaphysik des Todes’ (177). Against the backdrop of the old ideational world that the new is displacing and replacing, Balthasar appropriately highlights a cluster of central concepts in Sein und Zeit, for example, ‘being in the world’ (in der Welt) (178), ‘care’ (Sorge) (182), the temporality of Dasein (183), and crucially, death as a possibility (Möglichkeit) of Dasein (178, 181) and a point of concentration and integration in a life not usually so marked (169). As one might expect, Balthasar acknowledges that the everyday life of Dasein is marked by inauthenticity (179). In acknowledging this fact, however, Balthasar is being more or less descriptive, just as he is about the entire network of Heideggerian concepts that he seems largely to treat as symptomatic rather than taking them seriously as claims to truth.

Occasionally, however, a more evaluative and critical line of inquiry opens up. This seems to happen, for example, when Balthasar refers to the connection made by Przywara in his Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards (1929) between Heidegger and Kierkegaard on this point. Although Balthasar could hardly be said to drive home the point, he repeats it with respect to Heidegger’s dependence on Kierkegaard when it comes to death (185) and Angst (187). Of course, Przywara was pretty much stating the obvious when he suggested that that Heidegger’s articulation of existentials in Sein und Zeit depended on prior articulations by Kierkegaard. This was, of course, something that Heidegger desperately attempted to neutralize by means of the distinction between the ‘ontic’ and ‘ontological’ levels of discourse, Kierkegaard’s operating on the superficial level of the ‘ontic’ and Heidegger at the deeper, indeed, deepest level of the ‘ontological.’ While not raising explicitly the question of the value of Heidegger for theology, Balthasar seems content to suggest after Przywara that in some essential respects Sein und Zeit might be construed as a non-theological doublet of theology (187). “Suggest” rather than “argue” is the best word for Balthasar’s assessment at this early stage of Balthasar’s career. Yet, Balthasar is clearly
on the way. In *Apokalypse* 3 the point about Heidegger’s purloining is a mainstay. And one way of reading *Wahrheit der Welt*’s later and far more critical engagement with Heidegger is to think of Balthasar generalizing in 1947 a point that in his earlier texts he makes mainly with respect to *Sein und Zeit*.

Heidegger, however, is not the only thinker unveiling time and death covered in chapter 10. He shares space with Rilke whose poetry seems to play the role of echo and offset to Heidegger’s analytic of *Dasein*. The epigraph for the chapter is from the ninth *Duino Elegy*, the first line of which “Hier ist des Säglichen Zeit, hier seine Hiemat” (Here is the time of the sayable, here is its home” (164)), gives the clue for what Heidegger and Rilke have in common. This is nothing else than the neglected order of time and mortality that we must own (187), but even more particularly must bring to speech. This necessarily will be a language of extraordinary delicacy and discretion since one has to speak those things that are ephemeral, or in the language of the ninth elegy speak those things that “falling away” (fallen).

Balthasar does not range broadly over Rilke’s work, and certainly does not provide the comprehensive analysis of Rilke’s poetic work that he later provides in the third volume of *Apokalypse* (100 pages). He prioritizes the *Duino Elegies* and with respect to them the ninth, which focally concerns the transformation of the visible (sichtbar) into the invisible (unsichtbar) (172), although he also gives voice to important passages in the fifth (186) and the seventh *Duino Elegies* (170-71). The only exception to the rule is a brief presentation of Rilke’s early *Das Stunden-Buch* (*The Book of Hours*) (169-70), which involves a translation of a fully wrought Christian discourse into a post-Christian idiom understood by Rilke to be at once more true to the world and more true to contemporary experience that cannot pretend to stand on its old foundations. Heidegger and Rilke are gathered together in this chapter because on Balthasar’s account they pronounce the same new world of finitude, death, and uncanniness, yet do so in different registers and with different ratios of claim and question. Yet they are not reductively the same, when it comes to the inflection, which may be variously heroic or accepting.
Love and death are intimately connected in Rilke in a way they are not in Heidegger. Balthasar commends the note of love in Rilke that Guardini will later problematize as insufficiently dialogical. If he finds it embedded in the passage in the seventh elegy, which speaks to the transformation (Verwandlung) of the outer into the inner (170), he finds it loudly declared in the fifth elegy which invokes the place (Ort) of the heart (Herzen) bearing the heavy weight of what presumably has been transformed. This can only mean that on the other side of the horizon of the transcendent being wiped away there is the transcendence of the inner space that manifests the weight of love. The evocation of the innerscape of Augustine’s self that illustrates the pondus amoris is here extraordinary, although it is not certain that at this stage in his theological development that Balthasar registers it. Przywara is a few years into the future, and so also his wonderful anthology of Augustine’s works that incite Balthasar’s appetite for Augustine.

The reason for analyzing chapter 10 of the dissertation is not it gives a better sense of the pluriform nature of the representation of crisis, nor to underscore the prominence of two figures who continue to be hugely important in Apokalypse. It is, first, that this particular chapter indicates that there may already be more than one center in the text which supposedly is being defined by the Kierkegaard-Nietzsche nexus, and which, accordingly, might have repercussions regarding the fundamental shaping of Apokalypse. Second, there is the question whether the relative advantage that Nietzsche enjoys as a cultural commentator in a text that refuses the theological voice may well set the terms for the eclipse of Nietzsche, not insofar as Kierkegaard becomes dominant, but rather that in a new interpretive environment in which Christian vision now has weight, Heidegger or Heidegger and Rilke can essentially do double duty, that is, speak for themselves and also for Nietzsche and his tradition. Balthasar claims no such thing in Apokalypse, but on the basis of Wahrheit (1947) it seems obvious that Heidegger and Rilke function as the witnesses of time and life and thus have come to represent the ‘Dionysian.’
Before proceeding to my discussion of Apokalypse I should point out one obvious effect of how the form Germanist genre of the dissertation has on the content. Balthasar has a real sense of the abyss of nihilism (24-5) and commends those who speak to it. But he cannot be said to have the same sense of the difficulties that now beset language in being adequate to it. There are no reflections on Nietzsche’s style or styles; nothing about the function of pseudonymity in Kierkegaard; nothing about the form of questioning, mode of address, and dynamic of symbols in the Duino Elegies; and finally nothing about the tormented prose of Sein und Zeit in which Heidegger felt called on to create an entirely new philosophical vocabulary to match what he took to be an entirely new grammar of experience this side of our discovery of Nichts. The comparison of Balthasar with Heidegger is particularly illuminating given the Davos conference (1929) and Erich Przywara’s attendance at it. Heidegger’s distain for Ernst Cassirer’s view of the continuity of intellectual traditions should not surprise. Cassirer’s failure is the failure of all theories of culture that attempt to capture the new in an interpretive scheme that necessarily domesticates it. The new, what is truly radical, escapes any and all form of periodization even those forms that recognize the reality of a fundamental shift. On Heidegger’s thinking event is hardly event if it is assimilated to other major movements in thought such as the Enlightenment and its refocusing in Kant and German Idealism, or for that matter the war. In the dissertation Balthasar has chapter – albeit not very inspiring chapter -- on discursive responses to the war as fundamental mark of crisis. In Heidegger himself there is almost no acknowledgement that the war as a historical event demands radical change in discourse, thought, and form of life. That would be to periodize and thereby capture in a humanistic economy. For Heidegger the new is a scission that does not have a precise linguistic-conceptual correlative. If it is apocalypse, it exceeds actual or even possible eidetic coordinates.

Although 1929 is still early in Heidegger’s star-crossed career, Davos represents merely the exclamation point to a break with a philosophy of culture and its presupposition of continuity that is
long in coming. With knowledge of Heidegger’s early texts not possible for Balthasar, one might date such a break to Heidegger’s interpretations of First and Second Thessalonians in 1921. In light of the Germanist methodological commitment of Balthasar’s dissertation, arguably, it is more valuable to track Heidegger’s relationship to the historicism of Wilhelm Dilthey. In Sein und Zeit Dilthey is honored as a conversation partner, although he suffers the fate of most of Heidegger’s conversation partners, that is, someone who is right in what he denies, and wrong or worse than wrong, that is, superficial in what he affirms. Heidegger’s fundamental criticisms of Dilthey’s articulation of ‘historicality’ (Geschichtlichkeit) in Sein und Zeit (#77) had already received something approaching a definitive expression in Heidegger’s 1925 essay ‘Wilhelm Dilthey’s Research and the Struggle for a Historical World View (1925). In terms of posture -- if not necessarily content -- Heidegger is in one sense being Nietzschean in his casting aside of a method of history that operates in terms of the protocols of science. In another sense, however, Heidegger is even being more radical than Nietzsche in bringing to light the incomparable venture of time that in principle resists conceptualization. The point of this brief excursus is that it helps to illuminate the effect of the Germanist method adopted by Balthasar – which is not uninfluenced by Dilthey -- in controlling the veritable cyclone of witnessing to the abyss. Relative to Heidegger’s apocalypse, which ruptures time as the vehicle for eternal values, Balthasar’s apocalypse is a story of cultural change, even if massive cultural change. He assumes that rupture and the glimpses into and beyond the abyss can be narrated in a conventional idiom albeit with markings of change. One could suggest that this assumption begins to get questioned in Apokalypse and that with the maturing of the theological voice that has emerged, Balthasar has discovered that the narratability of the abyss is predicated of the apocalypse of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Apokalypse der deutschen Seele and the Arc of Eclipse
The three volumes of *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* were published by Pustet between 1937-1939, although we know that Balthasar has been rewriting and expanding the dissertation for almost a decade. Volume 1, the longest of the three volumes, is made up of entirely new material and concerns the emergence of the Promethean principle in German thought from Lessing to German Idealism. The Promethean principle is marked by the displacement of the transcendent and transcendent values and their replacement by a new form of human being who aspires to plumb the mysteries of nature and history. This volume also opens up in a truly essential way Balthasar’s never-ending conversation with German Idealism in general and Hegel in particular (196-98), who in the dissertation functions simply as a foil to the existential revolt of Kierkegaard against conceptual disincarnation. It is no exaggeration to say that this particular conversation is crucial for understanding Balthasar’s trilogy: without elevating this conversation above all other conversations that Balthasar had with the philosophical and genealogical traditions, *Theodramatik* and *Theologik* remain essentially closed to interpretation.

Volumes 2 and 3 of *Apokalypse* represent a vast expansion of the material covered in the dissertation. New figures have emerged in the meantime, and almost all the major figures covered in the dissertation are treated in far more detail, but still formally at least in the Germanist manner. As has been pointed out by Jonathan King, there are, however, a number of changes rung on the Germanist program operated by Balthasar. One of the most crucial is the preference in the title for the word “Seele” over “Geist” to indicate a change that fundamentally alters a human being’s existential orientation in and towards the world. Going beyond King, one might think of “Seele” as bearing a relation to Charles Taylor’s ‘social imaginary’ in which feeling and action as well as thought are crucial elements of historical self-expression and self-understanding. The other major change within the Germanist genre is that Balthasar’s reflections on Nietzsche and his reception, together with his reflections on Dostoyevski and Soloviev (mainly Dostoyevski), definitely constitute the backbone of *Apokalypse 2*. Correspondingly,
together with Balthasar’s reflections on Karl Barth, the 120 page reflection on time, death, and nothing in Heidegger and Rilke and what -- if anything -- might be in excess of these three fundamental realities - - constitutes the backbone of *Apokalypse 3*. Although figures who in the dissertation were connected are now separated, the second volume goes under the figure of Dionysus, and the third volume, in continuity with chapter 10 of the dissertation, advertises ‘death’ as its basic theme. Overall, the two-volume distribution of material elevates the status of Heidegger and Rilke by suggesting that as a pair they constitute one of the two fundamental horizons of non-Idealist visionary discourses in the modern period. The second major change is that Balthasar shows evident signs of being more critically evaluative and theological, the one because the other. At the time of writing *Apokalypse 2* and *Apokalypse 3* Balthasar is making a determined ‘theological turn,’ which demands that all culture-critique discourses themselves become objects of critical sifting in light of the definitive apocalypse of the crucified Christ. The subtitle of *Apokalypse*, that is, “*Studien zu einer Lehre von letzen Haltungen,*” speaks to the continuity between the three-volume behemoth and the more economic one-volume dissertation. At the same time “apocalypse” is laden with meaning. It signifies that all the discourses, either analyzed or mentioned over the course of the three volumes, are visionary rather than argumentative, ultimately symbolic rather than apophantic, whatever the stated commitment to philosophical discourse. While there are notable exceptions, most of the modern eschatological discourses operate within the immanent frame and represent a refusal of classical eschatology and its reflections on, as well as its hope in, the postmortem state. In addition, there is the difficulty of marking ultimacy in time and history, as well as the difficulty in providing genealogical protocols that plot the ‘new’ against the backdrop of an old that, nonetheless, cannot serve as a condition of its emergence. And, finally, there is a reflexive element in the title ‘apocalypse’: the three-volume work is itself an unveiling of a welter of unveilings, which testify to, because the embody, the incoherence of which these apocalyptic discourses
speak, and refers all of them to over-mastering apocalypse of the Lamb who alone can give each of these apocalyptic discourses their due.

There are a number of more specific changes in *Apokalypse* that bear more directly on Balthasar’s interpretation of Nietzsche. The first concerns the modulation of the Nietzsche-Kierkegaard relation. As already indicated, in Balthasar’s dissertation the emphasis falls on what Nietzsche and Kierkegaard have in common. In contrast, in *Apokalypse* the emphasis falls on what divides them. Content-wise there are now two major points of contrast, the first, phenomenological-anthropological, the second, theological. United in resisting the speculative syntheses of Idealism, nonetheless, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard articulate two different anthropologies, in the case of Nietzsche an anthropology of human self-transcendence that leads him to erase transcendence as such, and in the case of Kierkegaard a dialectical anthropology that refers the self as a particular with aspirations towards universality to a divine Other who alone can constitute its subjectivity as a unique singularity. Arguably, more interesting than the discussion of contrast is the actual site of discussion. It occurs at the end of *Apokalypse 1* that is largely focused on Romanticist and Idealist figuration of the end. As was the case previously in the dissertation, Kierkegaard, or better Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, present a rebuttal of Romantic and Idealist pieties that underscore human elevation beyond the all too human condition. The Nietzsche-Kierkegaard pair insists on the ineluctables of finitude, temporality, and death against the pretences of human divinization. The rebuttal is essentially a postscript in a critical idiom to the multiverse ways in which in the aftermath of the demise of classical eschatology surrogate forms of immortalization get constructed. The postscript of *Apokalypse 1* represents something like a last hurray for Kierkegaard in the three volume exploration of visionary reflections on last things that mark the modern age in a fundamental way, although the Danish religious thinker is recurred to a number of times when Balthasar reflects on Barth and other Protestant theologians in *Apokalypse 3*. This is not the case with Nietzsche. *Apokalypse 2*, which proceeds under the figure of Dionysus, is introduced as being under ‘the sign of
Nietzsche. Although this volume is crowded with figures, as are the other volumes, nonetheless, Nietzsche not only is central as both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as a pair once was, but now has standalone status. To the extent to which Nietzsche now is paired with another figure within the chthonic modality of apocalyptic, it is with Dostoyevski. Moreover, Dostoyevski is more foil than complement to Nietzsche within this interpretive economy. If the dissertation talked of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Apokalypse 2 is talking about Nietzsche or Dostoyevski and vice versa.

A second specific change wrought by Apokalypse concerns two other relations between discursive figurations, first, the relation between the pair Heidegger-Rilke with Nietzsche and, second, the more nearly internal relation between Heidegger and Rilke. As already indicated, in Apokalypse 3 the hyphenated Heidegger-Rilke pair comes to play a role that is every bit as prominent as the role played by Nietzsche in Apokalypse 2. This suggests, for Balthasar at this stage of his intellectual development, that Heidegger-Rilke’s ‘seeing’ of finitude, time, death, and authenticity is not reducible without remainder to Nietzsche’s aggressive Dionysianism, even if all transcendence, precisely as self-transcendence, is necessarily a function of immanence, or better, to avail of a construct of Jean-Luc Marion, all transcendence as self-transcendence involves a warping or ‘anamorphosis’ of immanence.

Turning to the internal relation between Heidegger and Rilke, the reader of Apokalypse will observe the following: (1) Relative to the dissertation in Apokalypse 3 there is a fourfold expansion of the covering of Heidegger-Rilke; (2) The anomaly in terms in proportion of coverage. It risks understatement to say that the proportion is 4:1 in favor of Rilke. Perhaps scale makes for other anomalies, since discussions of individual figures often go where they will and follow the interests of the moment. And it should be pointed out that the explosion in terms of coverage of Rilke is matched by other explosions in coverage in the text, for example, the extraordinarily detailed treatment of Dostoyevski in Apokalypse 2. Certainly, Balthasar’s treatment of Rilke suggests an elective affinity and a strong interest in providing a more comprehensive picture of the great poet whose achievement continued to be critically assimilated
between the wars. Balthasar was convinced that there is much more to say about the Duino Elegies than he wrote about in his dissertation (5, 7, 9), just as there were other Elegies to speak to. Surely Sonnets to Orpheus required teasing out, and also the relation between this group of poems and the Duino Elegies. Is the difference between them adequately captured by conceiving the modality of one as praise, the other as lament? And again, is there not more to say about the transmogrification of a premodern prayerfulness into its modern correlate in Das Stunden-Buch? Again, what about the animal poems, which are not only great art, but also discloses the fateful – perhaps fatal – difference of consciousness and self-consciousness that defines the human? And then there are the major themes of Rilke’s poetry, for example, the nature of beauty, the form and meaning of poetic existence, belonging in the world as goal and origin, the fragility of the mortal human, the responsibility of language, and the angel as a daimonic guide to transcendence that will not so much evacuate time as introduce a bulge within it.

Why are the same courtesies of comprehensiveness, tarrying with, and finessing not extended to Heidegger in Apokalypse 3? Obviously, this would not be a real question if Balthasar did not think so highly of Heidegger. Heidegger, who is covered in a little over twenty pages, is regarded more than favorably. Balthasar judges him to be the greatest of the phenomenologists. This is not faint praise given Balthasar’s huge attraction to the personalism and axiology of Max Scheler and his admiration for Husserl’s achievement in getting thought back to the things themselves. To be the greatest phenomenologist is to be a great philosopher, albeit a great modern philosopher. Apokalypse 3 does not attempt to take the measure of modern philosophy by means of a comparison with the classical metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, as Przywara did in Analogia Entis (1932). This is not the task that Balthasar sets himself as the world – now the whole world – is preparing to go to war. Nor, truth be told, does Balthasar the Germanist at this stage of his intellectual development have the requisite level of philosophical acumen or for that matter the required knowledge of the history of philosophy. The task,
however, turns out merely to be deferred. It is taken on a number of years later in *Wahrheit der Welt* (1947) which is not only the most sophisticated piece of philosophy that Balthasar ever wrote, it is best conceived as a re-do of Przywara’s classic text. After all he had learned in and through a critical sifting of the Romantics, Idealists, Vitalists, and their laying out of truth and its dynamics, Balthasar felt able to put it into conversation with classical philosophy. The aim was not so much to reconcile the classical with the modern, but rather in and through the challenges presented by modern thought to refresh and expand classical thought’s phenomenological range, as well as to make more worldly, but also more ecstatic, its orientation to the mysterious ground of its searching.

Returning to our discussion of Balthasar’s treatment of Heidegger in *Apokalypse 3*, now it is true that there is some expansion of coverage relative to the dissertation, but not a great deal. The focus is still mainly *Sein und Zeit*, although the *Kantbuch* (1929) has come into view. In any event, Heidegger’s revisionist masterpiece is regulative with respect to defining the ontological nature of phenomenology, *Dasein* and its orientation towards Being (*Sein*), as well as the various existential structures of *Dasein* that displace/replace both the categories of metaphysics and transcendental thought. Still, even if the relatively brief treatment of Heidegger does not relegate his contributions to understanding the philosophical significance of fundamental orientation and also moods, in his continued linking with Rilke Heidegger is essentially enveloped by the richer, more hesitant and interrogative Rilke. This enveloping guarantees that Heidegger’s far more aggressive form of finitism and temporality is contained and his more heroic form of being-towards-death mollified by Rilke’s musings on the intimacy of love and death. One can think of this containment finding signatures later throughout *Wahrheit der Welt* in that the dynamism of the finite self, which significantly recalls Heidegger’s description, finds its ground in a gift of self and a sense of a mysterious other implied in all our experience. Moreover, the enveloping of Heidegger by Rilke and thus the containment of Heidegger carries over to the much later *Herrlichkeit*. In the volume devoted to metaphysics in the modern age, Heidegger is once again paired with Rilke,
although this time the distribution of pages is less anomalous. In this crucially important text of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics Heidegger becomes a free radical only at the very end of volume when, after Gustav Siewerth, Balthasar performs a critical dialogue between Heidegger and Aquinas in which Aquinas’ esse seipsum has the second to last word and Aquinas’ articulation of Trinitarian difference, which both circumvents and circumscribes the ontological difference, the very last word. Of course, this last word is the original word and the word of origin.

Apokalypse enacts a third major change over a dissertation. This change has been intimated throughout. It concerns the operation of a theological criterion that in the earlier text under consideration played no role. Now, it is important to distinguish between the operation of a theological criterion and the presence of theological subject matter. If the latter gets emphasized, then the two texts we are comparing do not differ essentially in that the dissertation does include theological subject matter (ch. 11) as one set of signs among other signs of rupture and advent. Theology remains an object of analysis; it does not serve as a criterion of judgment. Theology does come, however, to have this function in Apokalypse. Neither doctrine nor ethics provide the means to judge German Idealism as representative of the Promethean principle, Nietzsche as representative of the Dionysian principle, and Heidegger as the philosopher who renders what the Irish philosopher William Desmond speaks of as “postulatory finitism.” Only apocalypse can judge apocalypse, only vision can judge vision. With regard to Nietzsche something, therefore, like an apocalyptic decision, the equivalent of a ‘last judgment’ is required: Dionysus or the Crucified? Despite Nietzsche’s piling up of objections against Christ, or perhaps precisely because of them, it is the self-emptying Christ who alone is capable not only of resisting the will to power and preventing the obscenity of the superman, but who communicates the grace to divert and subvert, reroute and reformat a dynamic nature that can be repaired and elevated only from outside the immanent order. Christ the Crucified is the other to Dionysus, but importantly non-other. They occupy fundamentally different levels of reality. Throughout Apokalypse 2 Dostoyevski
is put to work as the Christian foil to Nietzsche, albeit operating within the chthonic frame in which one can see Dostoyevski's attraction as well as repulsion regarding characters who aim at apotheosis. There is also Dostoyevski's objectionable temptation towards Slavophilism, happily not present in other Russian thinkers such as Soloviev and even Berdyaev who compensate for him in this respect. If Dostoyevski matches Nietzsche for depth of experience, he surpasses him in his refusal to foreclose on grace, the power of goodness, and the reality of the holy fool (Myskin) and the saint (Zossima, Alyosha Karamazov), who is not only a disciple of Christ, but someone who mysteriously participates in Christ's self-emptying, his compassion for our frailty, and his solidarity with our suffering. Importantly, Dostoyevski is more than a contingent foil to Nietzsche's commitment to will-to-power, a foil which itself is in need of correction. Dostoyevski, together with Soloviev, provides the quintessential modern Christian translation of distinction between Christ and Anti-Christ that is pivotal in the book of Revelation. The choice has to be made between two forms of apocalypse, that is, the Lamb who reveals all that we can know and feel about what is truly divine and human, and the simulacrum, a rhetorically elevated counterfeit whose name is legion, Zarathustra simply being one of the many.

We can make a similar point regarding Heidegger, who separated from Nietzsche in *Apokalypse* has come to assume considerably greater importance, if not such at this point sufficient to displace and replace Nietzsche. Beyond the strategic enveloping of Heidegger by Rilke, there is a determined theological judgment of Heideggerian unveiling that refuses Christ and the figuration of saints, while insisting on forms of authentic existence whose basic protocols had been provided by Kierkegaard Augustine. A question that arises is whether Balthasar is judging Heidegger's miming of Christianity to be as discouraging as Nietzsche's principled rejection of it? Since Balthasar does not address the issue directly, what there is there in terms of evidence can be at best indirect and not fully demonstrative. There are two indications that Balthasar's verdict is considerably less harsh. First, while surprisingly Balthasar does not make as much of Nietzsche's substantive atheism as other Catholic thinkers in the
same period, for example, Przywara and de Lubac, the fact that Heidegger does not claim the actual mantle of atheism allows Balthasar at this stage not to inquire too deeply into the ‘methodological atheism’ of Heidegger’s phenomenological-ontological project. Second, the proximity of some of key existential constructs in Sein und Zeit to important biblical symbols and theological concepts on balance is deemed to be a plus, even if it merely deferred the questions of disingenuousness and parasitism. And, as mentioned, the enveloping of Heidegger by Rilke makes less urgent sharp questioning of Heidegger, for Heidegger’s hospitality to Christianity is helped enormously by Rilke’s far greater proximity to Christianity or at least to a Christian anthropology that puts human vulnerability and fragility on display.

Harsh criticism will come in due course, and there is plenty of it Wahrheit der Welt (1947) which repeats Przywara’s pointed attack on Heideggerian foreclosure regarding the ground of Being and his elevation of the errancy of Dasein as a project. Even more noticeable, however, is Heidegger’s elevation. Balthasar is obviously is much more up to date on his reading of Heidegger. He pays his respects to the worldly and ecstatic nature of Dasein, but more revealingly embraces Heidegger’s view of truth as aletheia, that is, disclosure and unveiling rather than correspondence or formal correctness. He also takes on board the Heideggerian and mystical trope of Gelassenheit, while complicating and modifying it by pairing it with Ignatius Loyola’s trope of indifference. In addition, the enveloping effect of Rilke is on display when, in what appears to be a Heidegger-laced discussion of ecstatic orientation towards reality, Balthasar invokes Rilke’s ‘gnat’ as a key locus of the mystery of being, why there is something rather than nothing. Heidegger’s determined anti-epistemic stance is modified by the enveloping by Rilke who, however much he speaks to the world coming to appearance in thought, speaks within a post-Kantian epistemic frame and is embarrassed in speaking about knowing and feeling subject. In Wahrheit Balthasar can rightly be understood to present a non-identical repetition of the correspondence of the ontic and noetic approaches to reality spoken to so eloquently in Analogia Entis. Whereas, however,
Przywara directly argues for the correspondence, albeit in a highly condensed and schematic manner, Balthasar achieves the same result in and through a complex hermeneutic protocol in which he continues to twin Rilke and Heidegger.

Crucially, there is no such ascending arc in the case of Nietzsche. In Wahrheit Nietzsche is mentioned a few times, and always critically. In this threshold text, Nietzsche has ceased to be for Balthasar a productive interlocutor. Thereafter he essentially disappears from Balthasar’s writings. Nietzsche is mentioned a few times in the volume on modern philosophy in Herrlichkeit, but in the text he is more stroke than sketch. Is this falling incremental, or abrupt, abrupt enough to be itself apocalyptic? There seems good reason to suggest that it was incremental. Balthasar did publish a piece on Nietzsche in 1945, and in 1942 he published an anthology of Nietzsche in which, while there is some hint of distanciation from Nietzsche’s views of being beyond good and evil, overall his presentation seems to be very much in the horizon of the dissertation in thinking it important to bring Nietzsche to attention. Arguably, however, the times of publication, which argue for Balthasar’s continuing engagement with Nietzsche after Apokalypse paint a misleading picture. The 1945 essay essentially recycles earlier material, and 1942 Anthology, published by Johannes Verlag with a Preface by Alois Haas, turns out to be the republication of an Anthology that Balthasar had self-published in 1934. There seems to be some reason to think Apokalypse brings the curtain down on Nietzsche, that the de-cision in 1939 is apocalyptically abrupt. Overall, there seems to be something cruciform to Balthasar’s interpretation of Nietzsche: the height of Nietzsche’s ascent in Apokalypse seems to coincide more or less with his descent. The God who replaces God seems himself to go down. How to explain? Explanation may present too much of a challenge. Yet is it true that the descent of Nietzsche coincides with the ascent of Heidegger. Balthasar makes an enigmatic comment in a letter in 1946 to the effect that in hindsight he would reorganize Apokalypse. Volume 3 as well as volume 2 would proceed under the figure of Dionysus, although now obviously not entirely under the sign of Nietzsche. Despite or
because of the differences, does this mean that in a sense that Dionysian proceeds now under the sign of Heidegger? In the Darwinism between chthonic forms Heidegger has survived. Thereafter, the contest between the apocalypse of the Lamb and chthonic apocalyptic will be a contest between Christian apocalypse and Heideggerian apocalypse. This is a battle that Christianity must win. Heidegger’s chthonic form of apocalypse is more complex than that of Nietzsche, more chameleon, much harder to distinguish from genuine Christianity, thus more truly in the figure of the Anti-Christ than the honest God-destroyer that is Nietzsche’s Antichrist. Nietzsche goes down, Heidegger rises. This is not to say that, for Balthasar, Nietzsche does not cast a shadow on his replacement, one visible enough to ask the question whether despite the differences Balthasar goes to great pains to articulate, Heidegger is not in the end a true son of Nietzsche.

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