

*Trinitarian Pro Nobis as the Foundation of the Cross and the Eucharist in the Theology of
Hans Urs von Balthasar*

Abstract for Doctoral Dissertation by Joan Morris Gilbert

Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of the *Pro Nobis* offers resources for a renewal of the understanding of the Eucharist as sacrifice. Balthasar grounds the *Pro Nobis* within the inner life of the Trinity as the free self-surrender of the divine Persons to one another: the mysteries of sacrifice, Cross and Eucharist all follow, as freely-bestowed gift. The trinitarian "decision" to create man in freedom includes from the beginning the "plan" to reconcile the world through the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7; 2 Cor 5:19). Uniting the two natures of God and man within himself, the incarnate Son is uniquely capable of the mission unto the Cross to which he has been sent by the Father under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because nothing can exist outside the Father's generation of the Son, divine inter-Personal "distance" encompasses all other distances, including the distance of sin. Balthasar discerns five steps of the mystery of atonement. First, Jesus gives *himself* up; second, he gives himself up *for us*; third, he thus frees us *from* something; fourth, he frees us *for* something; fifth, this entire mysterious drama is an act of trinitarian love. The first step requires an understanding of Jesus' own consciousness concerning his identity and his mission. His offering of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist is a clear manifestation of his conscious intention in the sacrifice of the Cross. Jesus' act *pro nobis* is a true exchange of places, made possible only by the mystery of his hypostatic union. As Son of God, Jesus acts in complete union with the Father and the Spirit: the sacrifice of the Cross is a trinitarian act of love. Both Cross and Eucharist are covenantal act: hence, Jesus asks the consent of the Bride to his sacrifice. Only the Handmaiden is free enough to give the adequate bridal Yes for all mankind to the sacrifice of Christ. In the Eucharist, the Father continues to offer his Son's

Body in the Holy Spirit for the life of the world. All are called to participate in the Marian Yes of sacrifice *pro omnibus*.