Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) was one of the most prolific, original, and wide-ranging theologians of the twentieth century, and is now finally coming to the prominence he deserves. But because his speculations about the meaning of Christ’s descent into hell after the crucifixion are so daring, and because he draws so many resources for his theology from literature, drama, and philosophy, Balthasar has never been an easily categorized thinker. Neither liberal nor conservative, Thomist nor modernist, he seems to elude all attempts to capture the exact way he creatively reinterprets the tradition of Christian thought. For that reason this Companion is singularly welcome, for it brings together a wide range of theologians – Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant – both to outline and to assess the work of someone whom history will surely rank someday with Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and Karl Barth.

Edward T. Oakes, SJ, is Chester and Margaret Paluch Professor of Theology at the University of St Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author of the book Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1996).

David Moss is Adult Education Adviser at the Diocese of Exeter and Associate Lecturer at Exeter University. He is co-author of Balthasar at the End of Modernity (2001) and is currently completing a book on the place of friendship in the theological tradition.
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The Beyond in art. – With profound sorrow one admits to oneself that, in their highest flights, the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false . . . If belief in such heavenly truth declines in general, then that species of art can never flourish again which – like the Divine Comedy, the paintings of Raphael, the frescoes of Michelangelo, the Gothic cathedrals – presupposes not only a cosmic but a metaphysical significance in the objects of art. A moving tale will one day be told how there once existed such an art, such an artist’s faith.

Friedrich Nietzsche

*Human, All Too Human*
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Notes on contributors

Ed Block, Jr, is Professor of English at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His translations of, and essays on, Hans Urs von Balthasar have appeared in *Communio, Literature and Theology, Renascence, Claudel Studies*, and *European Romantic Review*.

Larry S. Chapp is Associate Professor of Theology and Chairman of the Department of Theology at DeSales University in Center Valley, Pennsylvania. He is the author of *The God Who Speaks: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Revelation* (Catholic Scholars Press, 1996). His articles on the theology of Balthasar have appeared in *Communio, Pro Ecclesia*, and the *Josephinum Journal of Theology*.

Corinne Crammer was ordained in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and is currently licensed in the Diocese of Atlanta where she is a Priest-Associate at All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta. At present she is a doctoral candidate in Theological Studies in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Emory University in Atlanta. Her dissertation will be on Balthasar’s theology of sexual difference.

Brian E. Daley, SJ, is the Catherine F. Huisking Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *The Hope of the Early Church: a Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge University Press, 1991; reprint, Hendrickson, 2003), and is the translator of Balthasar’s *Cosmic Liturgy: the Universe according to Maximus the Confessor* (Ignatius, 2003). He is a specialist in patristic theology and is the executive secretary of the Orthodox-Catholic Consultation for North America.

Oliver Davies is Professor of Christian Doctrine, King’s College, London. He has recently published *The Creativity of God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and *A Theology of Compassion* (Eerdmans, 2001); he has also edited, with Denys Turner, *Silence and the Word* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

W. T. Dickens is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Siena College. He is the author of *Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theological Aesthetics: A Model For Post-Critical Biblical Interpretation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), as well as articles on interreligious dialogue, premodern exegesis, comparative religion, and religious holidays. At present, he is writing a book on the hermeneutical import of participating in Christian liturgies.
xii Notes on contributors

Lucy Gardner has taught doctrine and ethics in Oxford for ten years, primarily as Tutor in Christian Doctrine at St Stephen's House. She co-authored Balthasar at the End of Modernity (T. & T. Clark, 2000) and has contributed essays to Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry (Ashgate, 1999) and Challenging Women’s Orthodoxies (Ashgate, 2000).

Nicholas J. Healy, III, is Director of the Austrian Program of Ave Maria College and associate editor of Communio. He is the author of Eschatology as Communion: an Interpretation of Hans Urs von Balthasar (forthcoming from Oxford University Press).

Fergus Kerr, OP, Regent of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford, and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, edits New Blackfriars. He is the author of Theology after Wittgenstein (Blackwell, 1986; second edn, SPCK, 1997); Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity (Notre Dame, 1997); and After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism (Blackwell, 2002).

Karen Kilby teaches theology at the University of Birmingham and is author of Karl Rahner (HarperCollins, 1997; reprint, Trafalgar Square, 1999) and Rahner: Philosophy and Theology (Routledge, 2004).

Mark A. McIntosh is Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois, and author of Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar (Notre Dame, 1996; second edn, paperback, 2000), Mystical Theology: the Integrity of Spirituality and Theology (Blackwell, 1998), Mysteries of Faith (Cowley, 2000), and Discerning Truth: the Spirituality and Theology of Knowledge (forthcoming from Crossroad/Herder). A priest in the Episcopal Church, he currently serves as Chaplain to the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church and is also Canon Theologian to the Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA.

David Moss is Director of Adult Education in the Diocese of Exeter and Associate Lecturer in the University of Exeter. He is co-author of Balthasar at the End of Modernity (T. & T. Clark, 1998). He has published essays in the area of Christian Spirituality including an essay in Radical Orthodoxy: a New Theology (Routledge, 1999).


Edward T. Oakes, SJ, is Chester & Margaret Paluch Professor of Theology at the University of St Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois. He is the author of Pattern of Redemption: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Continuum, second edn, 1997) and editor of German Essays on Religion (Continuum, 1995). His translations of Balthasar’s works include The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation (Ignatius Press, 1992) and Explorations in Theology, volume iv: Spirit and Institution (Ignatius Press, 1995).
Notes on contributors xiii

Ben Quash is Dean of Peterhouse, Cambridge. He has written extensively on Balthasar’s theology and is co-author of Balthasar at the End of Modernity (T. & T. Clark, 1999). His book on Balthasar’s concept of theodramatics and theology of history is to be published shortly. He is reviews editor of the journal Studies in Christian Ethics.

David L. Schindler is Dean of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC; and Editor-in-Chief of the English-language edition of Communio. He is author of Heart of the World, Center of the Church (Eerdmans and T. & T. Clark, 1996); co-editor (with Doug Bandow) of Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny (ISI Books, 2003); and editor of Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work (Ignatius Press, 1991).


John Webster is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen; previously he held chairs in divinity in Toronto and Oxford. Editor of The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, he is also the author of a number of books on the theology of Barth, such as Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Barth’s Moral Theology (T. & T. Clark, 1998). His most recent works include Word and Church (2001), Holiness (2003), and Holy Scripture (2003).

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David Moss
Edward T. Oakes, SJ
Abbreviations

Works written by Hans Urs von Balthasar


DWH Dare We Hope ‘That All May Be Saved’? With a Short Discourse on Hell, tr. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).


List of abbreviations


The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church, tr. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).


Wahrheit Gottes (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1985).

Der Geist der Wahrheit (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987).
xviii List of abbreviations


Essays in collections


Note: English translations are always cited when possible. When this book went to press, however, two volumes of the Theologik had not yet been translated. To avoid possible confusion once these translations do appear, Arabic numerals always refer to the English translation of the trilogy, Roman numerals to the German edition. Balthasar’s works are too numerous to list in their entirety in this table; all works not found here are cited in full at the location of the quotation. A full bibliography (running to a remarkable 174 pages) of all of Balthasar’s works, including all translations up to 1990, may be found in Hans Urs von Balthasar: Bibliographie, 1925–1990, ed. Cornelia Capol (Einsiedeln and Freiburg im Breisgau: Johannes Verlag, 1990).