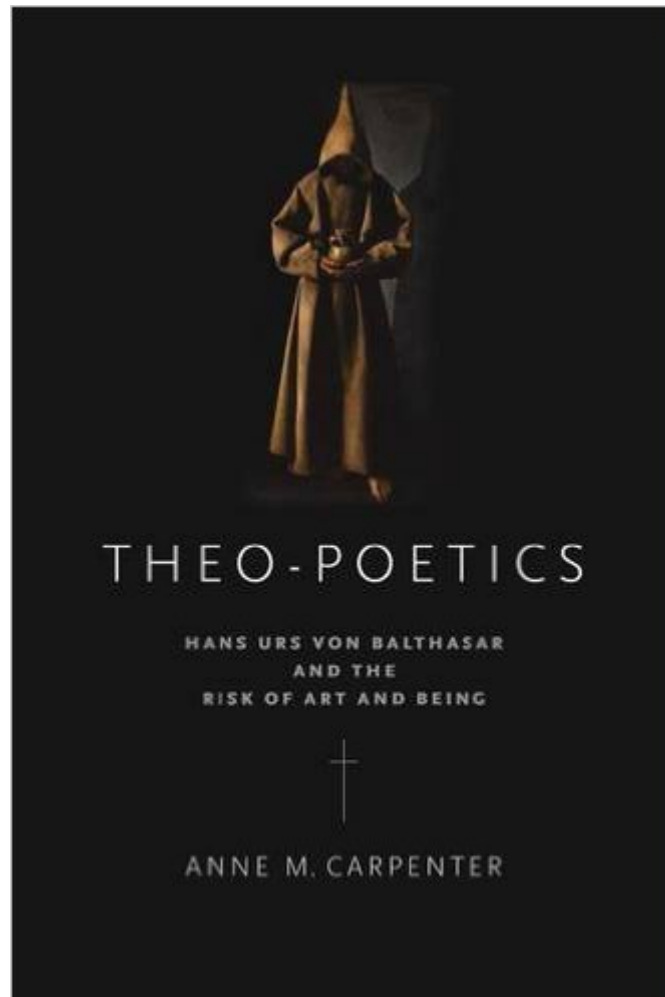


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# Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs Von Balthasar And The Risk Of Art And Being



## Synopsis

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) originated much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century theology’s renewed interest in aesthetics. Von Balthasar’s theology is both poetic and philosophical, and while this combination is often recognized, it calls for an explanation. In *Theo-Poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being*, Anne M. Carpenter explores von Balthasar’s use of poetry and poetic language, and she offers a detailed analysis of his philosophical presuppositions. Carpenter argues that von Balthasar uses poets and poetic language to make theological arguments because this poetic way of speaking expresses metaphysical truth without reducing one to the other. Carpenter begins with von Balthasar’s very early interests in music, literature, and philosophy, in particular his work, *Apocalypse of the German Soul*. She explores *Glory of the Lord* and the trilogy, moving through his despair over the possibility of reconciling art and theology. She uncovers the major characteristics of von Balthasar’s metaphysical thinking, discussing his interactions with Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth, and Martin Heidegger to firmly link Christology, metaphysics, and the expressiveness of language. The book concludes by marshaling its themes into a focused evaluation of von Balthasar’s “redeemed” theo-poetic as it comes to expression in the poetry of G. M. Hopkins. Carpenter resituates and reevaluates Hopkins’s poetry in a new context, placing him in the school of Aquinas rather than Scotus, and shows us how metaphysics is necessary for a vigorous understanding of language. “How do we value the theological in artistic works? In this book Anne Carpenter creates a significant map to the expansive landscape proposed by theological aesthetics. As she reenacts the interplay of poetry and philosophy yielding theology in von Balthasar and his interlocutors, Carpenter points toward the incarnated beauty of human creativity and the inherent unity of reason and heart. Through her careful untying of the role of the poetic in making theologizing possible, Carpenter confirms gravitas on the utterances of artists known and unknown, whose creative abundance overflows providing us new and important vistas into the in-breaking glory of God.” —Cecilia González-Andrieu, Loyola Marymount University “This is a beautifully written work engaging von Balthasar’s attempt to wed aesthetics back into the essence of theology. Carpenter presents a sophisticated and creative study of the importance of the aesthetics of the written word in order to reveal the importance of von Balthasar’s project but also to advance it. The work presents a clear overview of the heart of von Balthasar’s work, but also a fresh application of it through an analysis of poetry. The book provides a rich source for contemplating the eternal Word, God’s most creative act of poetry uttered eternally.” —John Dadosky, Regis College/University of Toronto “Anne M. Carpenter turns a lot of difficult and

abstruse research about Hans Urs von Balthasar in the scholarly literature into a lively and readable book. The volume achieves the goal of explaining the poetic form of von Balthasar's writing, tracing it back to the centrality of the concept of expression in his philosophical theology. The special value of the book is that it explains new developments of von Balthasar and recent objections to von Balthasar in a way that makes them accessible, gathering a lot of diverse scholarship into a single quite short book." —Francesca Murphy, University of Notre Dame

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Obviously, this is a text for an academic readership and also for people who regard Christian revelation as true in some sense. That said, Carpenter writes clearly enough that anybody who would already have an interest in Hans Urs von Balthasar will be able to follow without too much difficulty. As a non-Balthasarian, I read this to learn about him, since I admit to having an initial prejudice against him. What I learned from this book is a better understanding of that old chestnut, the analogy of being (*analogia entis*), a better understanding of the importance of Chalcedonian Christology in relationship to the *analogia entis*, and, finally, a deeper appreciation of the interplay between reason and artistic expression, and how they need each other. I think.

Anne Michelle Carpenter's book seeks to establish the importance of poetry and poetic logic within the writing and thinking of Hans Urs von Balthasar. This Carpenter most definitely achieves. Using primarily the poets Rilke, Hopkins, and Dante as they appear in the writing of Balthasar, as well as the theological and metaphysical foundations of his work, Carpenter takes from early to later

Balthasar showing the importance of poetic logic for him. For Balthasar, Carpenter argues, poetry and poetic logic (primarily in the use of images) hinges on person of Jesus Christ, God-incarnate. Christ as the Image of God provides a logic by which we may also seek to do theology, to understand God, through images and language which will ultimately lead us beyond these images into deeper reality. Carpenter makes short work of summarizing Balthasar's thought, at least as it relates to the topic at hand, so that a Balthasarian neophyte such as myself is not left in the dust, but is left with a desire to dive even deeper into the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Adorning each chapter is poem by Carpenter which attempts to perform the very theology she is discussing. She clearly plays with Balthasar's own terminology in calling this a theo-poetic, a theological poetic, that is not to be confused with the theo-poetics of process theology, nor is it quite synonymous with a theo-poetry that seeks to relate these themes to theopoesis or deification/theosis. Nevertheless, her use of theo-poetics highlights the depth of Balthasarian theology by using terminology similar to that of Balthasar to give us a new way of engaging with one aspect of how Balthasar does theology. This book is a must read for anyone who has interest in Hans Urs von Balthasar and/or interest in the relationship of poetry to theology.

Interpretations (especially comparative ones) of Balthasar's theology often suffer from an inattention to the varied registers of his writing. As Carpenter shows, he is, at different times, synthesizing--but without confusing--the theological and the poetic. This Chalcedonian tactic enables Balthasar to make of the poetic another resource to be utilized in the articulation and expression of a metaphysics and a Christology. But because the poetic is not elided into theology or metaphysics, Carpenter gives us a hermeneutical key to read Balthasar's seemingly more excessive flourishes without getting distracted by images or phrases that seem to grate against a classical metaphysics. At the same time, by relating rather than eliding poetry and theology, Carpenter effectively rules out any precious, sentimental readings of Balthasar as merely a lover of pretty things. With an analysis that spans the whole range of Balthasar's writing, from his master's thesis through the different stages of his trilogy, Carpenter's text is incisive, comprehensive, and charts new territory in the English-language reception of Balthasar's work.

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