

Christians learn what God is and what human beings can be from the career of Jesus.

According to the Dutch titles, the first volume of the trilogy was 'the story of a Living One'. The second volume was about 'justice and love, grace and liberation' : the New Testament language for Christian experience. And this final volume of the trilogy—"human beings as the story of God"—brings us back to the parable of God and the paradigm of humanity, the cosmic Christ and the image of God: 'In and through human action it must become clear that God wills salvation through humankind for all his creation' (page 245). Gloom about the internal mechanisms of the Catholic Church yields to a sense of urgent concern about God's world.

FERGUS KERR OP

**THE GLORY OF THE LORD, A THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS, VI : THEOLOGY: OLD COVENANT** by Hans Urs von Balthasar  
Edinburgh: *T. and T. Clark*, 1991. Pp. 443.

This volume, which is the penultimate of *The Glory of the Lord*, offers us an overview of the theology of glory as found in the Old Testament. Balthasar warns the reader not to expect an entire theology of the Old Testament, rather he reads the history of Israel specifically in the light of the notion of the *kabod* of God. More importantly, everything in this volume is ordered to the New Testament theology of glory, where God's glory is revealed in the flesh of Christ and most specifically in the abandonment and formlessness of the cross. Balthasar wants to show how the whole history of the old covenant is a preparation for this event.

An important feature of God's glory for Balthasar is that there is no such thing as a purely spiritual revelation of God. God's glory always has a sensuous dimension. Often the Old Testament stresses the dialectical character of the hidden and revealed God. Moses, for example, is said to enjoy a vision of God "face to face as a man speaks to his friend." (Ex.33:11). At the same time the sacred writer tells us that Moses can only see the back parts of God, for no one can see God and live. (Ex.33:20) Balthasar is fascinated by the sacramental character of Old Testament faith. Never does Israel dream of abstracting its faith from such concrete realities as the land, the temple, the sacrifices of the cult. All this points to fulfilment in the incarnate Christ.

At the centre of Balthasar's entire discussion of Israel's faith is the idea of the covenant. Although there are secular analogies for this concept, the reality in Israel is without analogy, for the Jewish covenant with God depends on the unilateral free decision of God to bind himself to a people. Once God has made this decision, however, he has a right to expect faithfulness from the covenant partner. Unilaterality gives way to mutuality.

Israel's faith is thus a response of love to God's initiative. The

greatness of Israel consists in its being able to give back to God the blessing received. Israel's obedience by its very nature contains an aesthetic dimension. The joy of Israel is to sing psalms of praise to God for benefits received.

The misery of Israel lies in its unfaithfulness. The covenant is broken through disobedience. Balthasar has a beautiful long chapter in which he deals with the history of the prophets, each of whom summoned Israel back to faith.

Reading the story of Israel in the light of Christ, Balthasar sees the history of the people of God as inevitably leading to a crisis from which no inner-worldly escape can be found. The failure of obedience leads to the exile. This seems to represent the end of the covenant or the death of Israel from which there is no resurrection. The period from the exile to Christ Balthasar calls the long twilight. Israel desperately seeks to remain faithful, clinging to the Torah and the temple sacrifices even though the prophets no longer speak. What has happened to God's Word? Israel learns to live with the silence of God, still always hoping that God will speak.

Balthasar sees three attempts on Israel's part to find a way out of the crisis: one, the hope in a future terrestrial messiah; two, the apocalyptic expectation that the heavens will open and God will intervene; three, the search for wisdom or the longing that God's glory be embedded in the whole cosmos. None of these attempts succeeds but all point to a synthesis which must be given from above, namely in the coming of Christ. Only in Christ does the history of Israel become clear as *figura* pointing to the fulfilment in the God-Man.

As always, Balthasar's control of his material is astonishing. Though not trained as an exegete, he passes in review the entire development of the Old Testament in masterly fashion. Each phase of the story is treated with such care that the reader is left with fresh insights. In short, the synthetic power of Balthasar's vision makes this one of his most original and fascinating contributions to theological aesthetics.

JOHN O'DONNELL SJ

**THE HOLY EUCHARIST** by Aidan Nichols OP *Veritas*, Dublin. 1991, pp.153; £8.95.

This book claims to present a comprehensive account of the Catholic Church's Eucharistic doctrine by tracing three principal themes—presence, sacrifice and ecclesiological relevance—from the New Testament, through the patristic, mediaeval and Tridentine periods, to the twentieth century. A glance at the very extensive footnotes and bibliography will reveal how wide a range of sources is here made available in the author's synthesised form. A final chapter offers a so-called systematic summary focussed on the writing of Pope John Paul II and Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

The intended readership seems unclear: treatment of such a vast