

# The Paradox of Freedom in the Theodramatic Reflection of Hans Urs von Balthasar against the Background of the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Józef Tischner

LECH WOŁOWSKI 

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków  
lech.wolowski@upjp2.edu.pl

**Abstract:** The article examines the paradoxicality of the notion of freedom in the theodramatic approach of Hans Urs von Balthasar. The main subject concerns the paradox of finite and infinite freedom and their relationship described in the second volume of *Theo-Drama*. The thought of the Swiss theologian is compared with the reflections of Henri de Lubac and Józef Tischner. The confrontation of their approaches in the context of the chosen topic made it possible to apply a new research method. Instead of the dialectical method, typically used in this context, a method concentrated on identifying the paradox and exploring the mystery behind it has been applied. This approach has led to a deeper understanding of the key role of the dynamical nature of finite freedom and has indicated the importance of proper identification of its source. It has allowed also displaying the inalienable nature of the Christological dimension to understand correctly the concept of infinite freedom and the most important feature of its essence. Finally, it has also helped to gain an in-depth insight into the conditions regarding the possibility of a genuine, though not symmetrical, relationship between the two freedoms.

**Keywords:** paradox, finite freedom, infinite freedom, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, Józef Tischner

The problematics of finite and infinite freedom as well as their relationship has been systematically elaborated by Hans Urs von Balthasar in the second volume of the central part of his *Trilogy*, called *Theo-Drama*.<sup>1</sup> Balthasar himself has admitted that

<sup>1</sup> The name *Trilogy* refers to the crowning work of Balthasar which is composed of the following three parts: *The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama*, and *Theo-Logic*, each of which constitutes a separate multi-volume work. The Swiss theologian describes the problematics of finite and infinite freedom and their relation in great detail in the second volume of *Theo-Drama*, see *Theo-Drama*, II, 189–334 (*Theodramatik*, II/1, 170–305). Balthasar's reflection on the issue of freedom, presented there, is often viewed as the key element of his theodramatic thought: "Freedom becomes for Balthasar the most important concept without which it is impossible to understand the mystery of the great drama that God plays in the scene of world history. One deals with a real drama only when actors who face each other are endowed with freedom. There is no theodrama without accepting the fact that apart from God's absolute freedom there is another, admittedly created, but true freedom that has the ability to stand for God as well as against him. God's interaction in man's life is possible only on the assumption that there is an *analogy libertatis*, a correspondence between

the drama which develops between these two freedoms is a topic which constitutes the beginning and the core of his theodramatic reflection:

The creation of finite freedom by infinite freedom is the starting point of all theodrama. Where finite freedom is seriously taken to be nondivine, there arises a kind of opposition to divine freedom and the appearance, at least, of a limitation of it. [...] God sets the limit in order to remove it, so that there may be no barrier between finite freedom and himself.<sup>2</sup>

The aforementioned drama of opposition possesses many faces: from the glorious to the tragic one. However, Balthasar emphasizes, in an exceptional way, yet another aspect of this dramatic reality, namely its paradoxicality:

But the main thing here is not the tragic aspect but the underlying paradox to which we have already referred: that finite freedom can only exist as participation in infinite freedom, as a result of the latter being immanent in it and transcendent beyond it.<sup>3</sup>

The Swiss theologian has endowed his reflections with a characteristic theodramatic linguistic garment that clearly distinguishes his thought from other authors. It is worth to remember, though, that the topic, which he has explored so perfectly, has been studied before him by other great theologians such as Henri de Lubac, and after him, generations of thinkers have contributed a lot to the subject of the drama of freedom.

Among Polish authors, who have contributed significantly to the field of dramatic reflection, a special attention should be paid to Józef Tischner. Moreover, the reflection of the abovementioned three thinkers have one very significant feature in common, i.e. their exceptional sensitivity to the paradoxical aspect of the subject, which will also become a key aspect of the present analysis.

At this point, it is worth noting that the general problem of the theodramatic relation of finite and infinite freedom has already been thoroughly elaborated in

---

created and uncreated freedom” (Budzik, *Dramat odkupienia*, 197–198) (Translation from the Polish is mine).

<sup>2</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 271–272. “Die Erschaffung der endlichen Freiheit durch die unendliche ist der Anfangspunkt aller Theodramatik. Wo endliche Freiheit ernsthaft als nicht-göttlich gesetzt wird, da entsteht so etwas wie eine Opposition und wenigstens der Anschein einer Beschränkung der göttlichen Freiheit. [...] Gott setzt die Schranke, um sie zu sich hin zu entschränken” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 246–247). The English citations from *Theodramatik* will be provided in the main body of the article, followed by the original German texts in the notes. The same rule will apply to citations from the works of de Lubac and Tischner.

<sup>3</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 272. “Aber nicht um das Tragische geht es hier vorerst, sondern um das Paradox, das hinter dem besagten Schein steht und von dem schon hinreichend die Rede war: daß endliche Freiheit nur sein kann als Teilnahme an der unendliche, durch ihre Immanenz in dieser und durch deren Transzendenz über ihr” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 247–248).

the available literature, especially in the Christological and soteriological aspects.<sup>4</sup> However, the existing studies do not focus on the aspect of the paradox present in the concept of freedom, which will be the focus of this study and which was strongly emphasized precisely by Balthasar, de Lubac and Tischner.

This common denominator of the reflection of these three thinkers will become the subject of the first part of the article, which will also include a discussion on methodological aspects, in particular, the difference between the paradox-perceiving method, applied in this study, and the usual dialectical method.

The following parts will be devoted to a detailed analysis of the key concepts regarding the subject of freedom in Balthasar's theodramatic thought in confrontation with the theological and anthropological reflections of de Lubac and Tischner.

In particular, the second part will deal with the paradoxicality of the concept of finite freedom and the problematics of its genesis. In the third part, an analogous analysis will be performed regarding the cognitive aspect of the paradox of infinite freedom and the characteristics of its essence. The fourth part will focus on the paradoxicality of the relationship between God's freedom and human freedom. Due to the key nature of the latter topic, it will be divided into three separate sections, focusing respectively on its anthropological, theological and theandric aspects.

## 1. The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Balthasar, de Lubac and Tischner

The abovementioned sensitivity of Balthasar to the problem of paradoxicality has its roots in the fascination with the idea of paradox of French theologian Henri de Lubac, his great master and friend at the same time. It was de Lubac who, as one of the first contemporary thinkers, pointed out, in methodological way, to the issue of paradoxicality in theological reflection in general, and in particular in the relationship between finiteness and infiniteness which will be discussed here.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Christological aspect has been elaborated by, for instance, in: Pyc, *Chrystus*, 241–263. The soteriological aspect has been studied, for instance, in: Budzik, *Dramat odkupienia*, 190–232. See also: Piotrowski, *Teodramat*, 51–69, 115–148. In addition to these monographic studies, it is worth to consult also general introductory works such as: Guerriero, *Hans Urs von Balthasar*; Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*.

<sup>5</sup> De Lubac's deep reflection on the place and the importance of paradox in theology is contained in two of his works devoted to the subject: Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith* and Lubac, *More Paradoxes*. It is worth noting that Balthasar himself has expressed an opinion that the considerations included in *Paradoxes* reveal the author's true soul: "The «*Paradoxes*», however, have yet another side. They let us into the author's soul; indirectly, perhaps, yet more deeply than other works. They give us a glimpse of his fundamental decision in both personal and intellectual matters" (Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 100).

De Lubac discussed this problem in terms of the relationship between natural and supernatural orders, as well as the relationship between freedom and grace.<sup>6</sup> He noticed the paradoxicality of these relationships in their elusiveness and in the apparent contradiction between the natural and supernatural goals of human life and cognition. He saw this clearly in the theological attempts to systematically formulate the truths of faith:

For every affirmation of faith is twofold; on our part it necessarily consists in two aims, the two apparent objects of which, at first, seem to oppose, if not to contradict each other; these two aims tend to converge in the infinity to a single object, but the intuition of this uniqueness escapes us.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Balthasar's theodramatical reflection has a lot in common—especially as long as the sensitivity to the idea of drama is concerned—with the thought of Tischner, although, for most of his life, the Polish thinker developed his dramatic thought largely independently of his Swiss predecessor.<sup>8</sup> What astonishes, however, is the convergence of basic ideas with the simultaneous diversity of the styles, tools, especially linguistic ones, and methods applied.

Tischner considered the problematics of the relationship between finiteness and infiniteness in a broader context of the relationship between anthropology and theology. He illustrated the problem by referring to the concept of a spiral (in analogy to the hermeneutic spiral), somewhat reminiscent in its nature to the “egg and chicken” paradox:

The development of thought about the Triune God resembles the image of a spiral. From understanding of human, one passes to understanding of God and from understanding of God, one moves again to understanding of human. However, it is unknown which of these came first.<sup>9</sup>

The more detailed topic of the paradox of finite and infinite freedom was considered by Tischner in the *par excellence* paradoxical context of the so-called dispute

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lubac, *Petite catéchèse*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> “Car toute affirmation de la foi est double; elle consiste nécessairement de notre part en deux visées, dont les deux objets apparents semblent d’abord s’opposer, sinon se contredire; ces deux visées tendent à se rejoindre à l’infini sur un unique objet, mais l’intuition de cette unicité nous échappe” (Lubac, *Petite catéchèse*, 53). All the translations from French are mine. Cf. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 225–226 (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 204).

<sup>8</sup> The issue of the independence of Tischner's and Balthasar's works was discussed in: Wołowski, “Problem niezależności,” 141–160.

<sup>9</sup> “Rozwój myśli o Bogu w Trójcy Jedynym przypomina obraz spirali. Od rozumienia człowieka przechodzi się do rozumienia Boga i od rozumienia Boga do rozumienia człowieka. Aczkolwiek nie wiadomo, co było pierwsze” (Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 380). All the translations from Polish are mine.

on human existence, to which he devoted his last great work.<sup>10</sup> It can be said that the Cracovian thinker reduced the discussed issue to the question about the existence of human freedom (finite freedom) and, as we shall see, he found the answer in the reality of divine freedom (infinite freedom). This key question concerned the source of freedom in a seemingly completely deterministic world:

Where does the freedom and the belief that not everything exists in enslavement come from? After all, wherever we look, we discover enslavement almost everywhere. ‘The same cause under the same circumstances produces the same effect.’ The world is bounded by millions of dependencies. Everything that exists is encircled by the system’s web. Now, on the web there appears a human, in case of which the same cause, under the same circumstances, does not want to produce the same results.<sup>11</sup>

He completed the above question with the following ones: “Isn’t it a paradox that people are bothered by the idea of freedom? Where does it come from?”<sup>12</sup> It becomes more and more evident now that the ability to perceive the paradoxical nature of the problems discussed is a common feature of the three authors we are dealing with here.

At this point, it is necessary to make an important methodological distinction. The paradox-perceiving method, which emerges from the above considerations, significantly differs from the dialectical method, often used in the context of this type of problems. This difference has not been highlighted strongly enough in the literature.

Especially in the case of the analysis of Balthasar’s works, a very common approach—not only to the issue of the relationship between finite and infinite freedom—consists in attributing to him a dialectical approach.<sup>13</sup> Of course, there is no doubt that, for example, Hegel’s dialectics, and in particular Hegel’s reflection on the relation between finiteness and infinity, must have significantly influenced Balthasar’s thought.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the Swiss theologian

<sup>10</sup> *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy over Human Existence].

<sup>11</sup> “Skąd bierze się wolność i przekonanie, że nie wszystko istnieje w zniewoleniu? W końcu gdziekolwiek skierujemy spojrzenie, niemal wszędzie okrywamy niewolę. „Ta sama przyczyna w tych samych warunkach przynosi ten sam skutek”. Świat jest powiązany milionami zależności. Wszystko, co jest, osacza pajęczyna systemu. Na pajęczynie pojawia się człowiek, w przypadku którego ta sama przyczyna w tych samych warunkach nie chce przynosić tych samych skutków” (Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 377).

<sup>12</sup> “Czy to nie paradoks, że człowieka nawiedza idea wolności? Skąd przychodzi?” (Tischner, *Ksiądz na manowcach*, 95).

<sup>13</sup> In the literature one can find many adequate Polish and international studies: Urban, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (with a bibliography); Dadosky, “The Dialectic of Religious Identity,” 46–51; Lüning, “Facing the Crucified,” 439–442; Prevot, “Dialectic and Analogy,” 261–277.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed study regarding the relation between infiniteness and finiteness in Hegel can be found in: Stawrowski, “Związek nieskończoności i skończoności,” 47–53.

by no means copied Hegel's approach uncritically. Instead, he often developed his thought in opposition to the German philosopher.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, on many occasions, he distanced himself from the dialectical approach, opting rather for the evangelical model of John's contemplation of paradox:

The numerous paradoxes of the Johannine theology of experience, which cannot be resolved by rational means, are all the expression, not of a dialectic of concepts, but of a reposing in the (supra-philosophical) contemplation of Being in the beloved Thou, which is at once God and man and which is worthy of all possible believing and adoring love.<sup>16</sup>

As far as the influence on Balthasar's thought is concerned, one should not forget about the role of de Lubac, his long-time master and friend, in whose work and attitude one should look for much deeper layers of Balthasar's inspiration than in Hegel's philosophy. And it is well known that de Lubac spoke even more to the detriment of dialectics in favor of paradox:

Paradoxes are paradoxical: they make sport of the usual and reasonable rule of not being allowed to be *against* as well as *for*. Yet, unlike dialectics, they do not involve the clever turning of *for* into *against*. Neither are they only a conditioning of the one by the other. They are the simultaneity of the one and the other. They are even something more—lacking which, moreover, they would only be vulgar contradiction. They do not sin against logic, whose laws remain inviolable: but they escape its domain.<sup>17</sup>

The French theologian did not spare quite critical—albeit slightly softened with, typical of him, ironic tone—remarks about dialectics, especially when juxtaposed with paradox, which he used to call its “smiling younger brother”:

Paradox has more charm than dialectics; it is also more realist and more modest, less tense and less hurried; its function is to remind the dialectician when each new stage is reached in the argument, that however necessary this forward movement is no real progress has

<sup>15</sup> A critical confrontation of the thought of Balthasar with that of Hegel can be found in the following works: Levering, *The Achievement of Hans Urs von Balthasar*; Quash, “Between the Brutely Given,” 293–318.

<sup>16</sup> Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, I, 227.

<sup>17</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 11–12. “Le paradoxe est paradoxe: il se moque de l'exclusion commune et raisonnable du *contre* par le *pour*. Il n'est pourtant pas, comme la dialectique, savant renversement du *pour* au *contre*. Il n'est pas non plus seulement le conditionnement de l'un par l'autre. Il est simultanéité de l'un et de l'autre. Il est même quelque chose de plus, — sans quoi, d'ailleurs, il ne serait que la vulgaire contradiction. Il ne pêche pas contre la logique, dont les lois restent inviolables: mais il échappe à son domaine” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivis de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 143).

been made. As the scholars of old say, in a rather different sense, of eternal life itself, we are ever going from “beginnings to beginnings.”<sup>18</sup>

It is worth, therefore, to attempt a new—from the methodological point of view—approach to the problematics of the relationship between finite and infinite freedom. Based on inspirations taken from de Lubac’s works—instead of the usual reference to dialectical patterns—one can apply the method concentrated on perceiving the paradox and exploring the mystery hiding behind it. Thus, in further considerations, the main emphasis will be put on the analysis of the paradoxicality of the key concepts of the drama of freedom described by Balthasar, i.e., finite freedom, infinite freedom and their relation.

## 2. The Paradox of Finite Freedom

The problematics of the paradox of finite freedom has been considered—even before Balthasar—by de Lubac, so it will be appropriate to start with the analysis of his thought. Naturally, in his approach, the French theologian does not use all these Balthasar-specific terms and expressions. He speaks simply of the paradox of human existence as a creature stretched between two extremely distant worlds—the animal world and the spiritual world:

Human nature is complex. A human is both an animal and a spirit. Although he lives on earth, engaged in earthly fate, he has at the same time something that transcends all earthly horizons and looks for breath in eternity. This first fact makes us aware that an internal struggle takes place in a human being.<sup>19</sup>

It is precisely this tension between earthly and heavenly horizons that constitutes the source of paradoxicality of the human nature and causes this state of constant internal struggle. Its consequences are unavoidably faced by all humans in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, equipped with the grace of faith, they are capable of crossing their seemingly inexorable natural limitations resulting from the cold laws of logic,

---

<sup>18</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 9–10. “Frère souriant de la dialectique, plus réaliste et plus modeste, moins tendu, moins pressé, il rappelle toujours à sa grande soeur, en reparaisant à ses côtés pour chaque étape nouvelle, que, malgré le nécessaire mouvement qu’elle se donne, elle n’a pas réellement avancé. Comme le disent d’anciens docteurs, en un sens un peu différent, de la vie éternelle elle-même, nous allons toujours de «commencements en commencements»” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivis de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 71).

<sup>19</sup> “La nature de l’homme est double. Il est animal, et il est esprit. Vivant sur terre, engagé dans un destin temporel, quelque chose est en lui qui déborde tout horizon terrestre et cherche sa respiration dans l’éternel. Déjà ce premier fait nous montre la lutte installée dans l’homme” (Lubac, *Méditation sur l’Église*, 143).

biology and physics. They are capable of entering the area of “impossible,” and this, paradoxically, constitutes the essence of their vocation:

Life, in every realm, is the triumph of the improbable—of the impossible. So much the same for living faith. It moves mountains; it breaks open vicious circles. It gets its food from poisons and proceeds by dint of obstacles.<sup>20</sup>

Another aspect of the paradoxicality of human nature, signaled by de Lubac, is the problem of the relationship between individuals and society or, as the author himself prefers, men and humanity, which in a paradoxical way condition each other: “If there be no man without humanity, much less still is there any Humanity without men.”<sup>21</sup>

The issue touched upon in this enigmatic statement will be taken up and developed by Balthasar in a systematic and very profound way. At the same time, the Swiss theologian will redirect the focus of his analysis to the aspect of freedom. For this purpose, he introduces a specific terminology in which creation, and in particular a human being, is called *finite freedom*.<sup>22</sup>

In the problem formulated above by de Lubac, Balthasar sees a special case of the fundamental and deeply paradoxical, but general law of being:

All living beings (at least from the higher animals upward, including man) exhibit a puzzling fact: they share in a specific nature that is identical in all individuals, but they do so in a way that, in each instance, is unique and incommunicable. The individual is “for itself”; this is part of the distinctness of its species (and, over and above it, of the genus *animal*). It is not something that is eliminated either by communication between individuals or by the herd instinct or by the ability to multiply. Thus the concept of “species” cannot abstract from this incommunicable “each for itself” that characterizes the individuals in whom the species is embodied, even if the number and diversity of these individuals cannot be deduced on the basis of the species.<sup>23</sup>

---

20 Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 28; “La vie, en tout ordre, est le triomphe de l’improbable, – de l’impossible. Ainsi de la foi vivante. Elle transporte les montagnes, – elle rompt les cercles vicieux. Elle tire son aliment des poisons, et progresse à force d’obstacles” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 18).

21 Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 131. “S’il n’y a pas d’homme sans humanité, bien moins encore y a-t-il d’humanité sans hommes” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 121).

22 It is worth noting that in Balthasar’s approach the term *finite freedom* (*endliche Freiheit*) possesses two meanings: 1) the attribute of freedom with which a given being is endowed and has it at its disposal; 2) the subject possessing this attribute, i.e. this very being. In this study, the term will also be used in both of these meanings.

23 Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, III, 203–204. “Alle lebenden Wesen (wenigstens von den höheren Tieren an – bis zum Menschen einschließlic) zeigen die rätselhafte Eigentümlichkeit, daß sie an einer in alle Individuen identischen Artnatur teilhaben, diese aber immer in einer je einmaligen und unmitteilbaren Weise besitzen. Das Für-sich-Sein des Individuums gehört zur Eigentümlichkeit seiner Art (und darüber hinaus der Gattung *animal*), es wird weder durch die Kommunikation zwischen den Individuen, noch durch ihren

The Swiss theologian speaks of a paradox of inclusion of the individual into its species with its simultaneous exclusion from this species. What includes an individual in the species (individuals' features determine the features of the species), at the same time excludes it from the species (individuals' unique features distinguish them within their species).<sup>24</sup>

Balthasar comes to the conclusion that the paradoxical condition of a human being stretched between extremes is a consequence of a much deeper, ontological paradox that is shared by every finite being that interacts in the communicable-incommunicable way with its environment. He calls it the *fundamental paradox*:

We are concentrating on the fundamental paradox that both things are unveiled in my own presence-to myself: namely, the absolute incommunicability of my own being (as "I") and the unlimited communicability of being as such (which is not "used up" by the fullness of all the worldly existence in which it subsists).<sup>25</sup>

One can speak here of a specific bipolarity of finite beings, whose existence is stretched between the inner, intimate "I" of a given individual and the overall social "we" of the population and the environment in which it lives.

Only on the basis of the above general-philosophical reflection, one can move on to the theological aspects of the analysis of the specific concept of finite freedom, in the sense in which it is understood by Balthasar. In the light of the above considerations, it will come as no surprise that what will draw Balthasar's attention is precisely the paradoxical nature of this concept:

The concept of finite freedom seems self-contradictory, for how can something that is continually coming up against the limits of its nature (not only of its action) be free? How

---

Herdentrieb, noch durch ihre Fähigkeit zur Vermehrung aufgehoben. Der Artbegriff kann also von diesem inkommunikablen «Je-für-sich» der die Art verwirklichenden Individuen nicht abstrahieren, auch wenn deren Zahl end Einzelmarkmale aus der Art nicht deduzierbar sind" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/2, 186–187).

<sup>24</sup> The official English translation (cf. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, III, 204) fails to reflect faithfully Balthasar's original thought regarding this matter, thus in this particular case we refer the reader directly to the original text: "Das überall gleicherweise vorhandene Paradox dieses Ein- und Ausschlusses wird in der Redensart von der «Je-Meinigkeit» des Besitzes des Artwesens deutlich: das «Je» gehört zu allen Wesen der Art, kennzeichnet also diese letztere, während es gleichzeitig Einmaligkeit und Unmittelbarkeit der Individualität anzeigt" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/2, 187).

<sup>25</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 208. "Sondern nur das grundlegende Paradox, daß sich in der Selbstgegenwart beides gemeinsam enthüllt: die absolute Unmittelbarkeit meines Ichseins und die unbegrenzte Mittelbarkeit de Seins als solchen (das durch die Fülle alles weltlichen Seienden, worin es subsistiert, nicht «aufgebraucht» wird)" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 188).

can it be anything but a prisoner? Nonetheless our direct experience of freedom cannot be expressed in any other way but in this apparent contradiction.<sup>26</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that we are in fact dealing here with a paradox and not with a strict contradiction. For that reason, Balthasar emphasizes that the “contradiction” is only apparent. The precise formulation of this paradox is the following: how is it possible that something limited and totally imprisoned in finiteness can at the same time be genuinely free?

In order to find a way out of this apparent trap, Balthasar juxtaposes the above paradox with the earlier discussed paradox of the simultaneous communicability and incommunicability of an individual within its species or more general with its environment:

The one, identical experience of being discloses two things simultaneously: the utter incommunicability (or uniqueness) and the equally total communicability of being. As an “I”, as a person, I am not merely a part of a whole (the cosmos, for instance) but am ready to acknowledge that an unlimited number of others possess being (and the incommunicability that goes along with it).<sup>27</sup>

The way out will be found by realizing that finite freedom possesses this extraordinary ability to dynamically open up itself toward the above-mentioned others. In order to see this, one must first admit that in the case of the complete closure (complete incommunicability) of an individual in a static configuration of its internal and external limitations, it would be impossible to talk about any kind of genuinely conceived freedom.

However, the element of communicability, i.e. the openness to dynamic interaction with other individuals and with the entire environment, causes these limitations to become subject of change over time. What limits the individual today, as a seemingly insurmountable barrier, tomorrow may prove to be an obstacle which can be overcome. What blocks the freedom of an individual at a given stage of its development, can be fought down in the next stage. Moreover, as de Lubac suggested

---

<sup>26</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 207. “Der Begriff endlicher Freiheit scheint in sich widersprüchlich, denn wie kann ein an seine Wesens- (nicht nur Handlungs-) grenzen Stoßendes nicht gefangen, sondern frei sein? Trotzdem läßt sich unsere unmittelbare Freiheitserfahrung nicht anders als innerhalb dieses Scheinwiderspruchs ausdrücken” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 186).

<sup>27</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 209. “Die eine, identische Seins-erfahrung enthüllt gleichzeitig beides: die restlose Inkommunikabilität (bzw. Einmaligkeit) und die ebenso restlose Kommunikabilität des Seins. Als Ich-Person bin ich kein bloßer Teil eines Ganzen (etwa des Kosmos), bin aber bereit, unbegrenzt vielen Anderen das Auch-Sein (mit der entsprechenden Inkommunikabilität) zuzubilligen” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 188).

above, the piling up obstacles—paradoxically—may serve to some as motivation to conquer them.

In other words, finiteness and limitation would contradict the freedom of an individual only if the limits set by them were to be absolute and insurmountable. The possibility of gradual, dynamic overcoming or at least pushing the limits means that the individual has, an admittedly incomplete, but a genuine freedom. In this approach, finite freedom is always on the way from a current state of its limitation to an ever more complete state of freedom in the future:

For if, in the face of all objections, we still have an irrefutable awareness of our freedom, we are equally aware that our freedom is not unlimited, or more precisely that, while we are free, we are always only moving *toward* freedom.<sup>28</sup>

The above considerations will not be complete, however, if the basic objection raised by Tischner is not taken into account. Namely, under the assumption that we have some initial—even partial and very limited—freedom, one can agree with Balthasar that its authenticity will be guaranteed as long as we are able to develop it. But Tischner takes one step back and asks how we know that we have some kind of initial freedom at our disposal:

Where does the idea of freedom come from in our world? Where does this very word come from? Who and when came up with the idea of freedom? And is it even possible that someone from this earth invented it on this earth?<sup>29</sup>

In a more precise way, the thinker from Kraków reformulates this question—underlining at the same time its paradoxical character—in another work written shortly before his death:

Have we not wondered where the freedom came from in this world? In fact, the earth could be fine without it. There is no freedom among stones, waters, rain and hail, earthquakes and windstorms. There is no freedom in the beautiful world of butterflies and in fearful snake nests. How about man? Isn't it a paradox that people are bothered by the idea of

---

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 207. “Denn wenn wir, allen Einwänden zum Trotz, ein unwiderlegliches Bewußtsein unserer Freiheit haben, so ein ebenso gewisses davon, daß unsere Freiheit nicht unbeschränkt ist, genauerhin: daß wir als Freie zu unserer Freiheit immer erst unterwegs sind” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 186).

<sup>29</sup> “Skąd w naszym świecie idea wolności? Skąd to słowo? Kto i kiedy wpadł na pomysł wolności? I czy to w ogóle możliwe, by na tej ziemi wymyślił ją ktoś z tej ziemi?” (Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 377).

freedom? Where does it come from? Some fight for freedom, others flee from it, but freedom remains a problem. Can the freedom in this world be of this world?<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly enough, Tischner realizes that the correct path toward the answer will pass through seemingly distant considerations regarding the immanent relations within the Holy Trinity. He explores the problem by reaching out, among other authors, to Balthasar's works:

Urs von Balthasar writes about it in an excellent way, although he is not the only one. Freedom turns out to be God's inner dimension. It is not about the fact that God is free in relation to creatures, because how could it be otherwise? The point is that God is "free within": the Father toward Son, the Son toward the Father, the Spirit in relation to the Father and to the Son, the Father and the Son in relation to the Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

From this observation Tischner draws a fundamental conclusion about the genesis of finite freedom. Namely, we can speak of an authentic "leaven" of freedom in a human being despite this apparent deterministic environmental setup which surrounds it. Even if nowhere else one can speak of freedom, in man, created in the image and likeness of God, who is authentically and infinitely free, the image of this freedom — even if partial and far from complete — must also be authentic:

This discovery sheds light on our earthly affairs. [...] Because if God is free, everything changes. Created in the image and the likeness of God, man must carry within himself this wind that blows within the Holy Trinity.<sup>32</sup>

And even if, after the first fall, that image was seriously distorted, causing this freedom to become subject of the bonds of sin, de Lubac reminds us that in Christ it has been set free anew and even more strongly implanted in human spirituality:

---

<sup>30</sup> "Czy nie zastanawialiśmy się czasem, skąd na ziemi wzięła się wolność? Właściwie ziemia mogłaby się bez niej obejść. Nie ma wolności w wśród kamieni, wód, deszczów i gradów, trzęsień ziemi i wichrów. Nie ma wolności w pięknym świecie motyli w groźnych gniazdach węży. A u człowieka? Czy to nie paradoks, że człowieka nawiedza idea wolności? Skąd przychodzi? Jedni biją się o wolność, drudzy uciekają od wolności, ale wolność wciąż jest problemem. Czy wolność na tym świecie może być z tego świata?" (Tischner, *Ksiądz na manowcach*, 95).

<sup>31</sup> "Znakomicie pisze o tym Urs von Balthasar, choć nie on jedyny. Wolność okazuje się wewnętrznym wymiarem Boga. Nie o to chodzi, że Bóg jest wolny w stosunku do stworzeń, bo jak mogłoby być inaczej? Chodzi o to, że Bóg jest «wewnętrznie wolny»: Ojciec wobec Syna, Syn wobec Ojca, Duch w stosunku do Ojca i Syna, Ojciec i Syn w stosunku do Ducha" (Tischner, *Ksiądz na manowcach*, 95).

<sup>32</sup> "Odkrycie to rzuca snop światła na nasze ziemskie sprawy. [...] Jeśli jednak Bóg jest wewnętrznie wolny, to wszystko ulega zmianie. Stworzony na obraz i podobieństwo Boga człowiek musi nieść w sobie ten wiatr, który wieje we wnętrzu Trójcy Świętej" (Tischner, *Ksiądz na manowcach*, 95).

Without a doubt one can advance to say that already by the very fact of having revealed to the man that he was made for a higher world, for a place “where Justice dwells,” Jesus put in him a principle of spiritual freedom, a fruit of an inner demand stronger than all tyrants.<sup>33</sup>

The subject of finite freedom turns, this way, gradually into that of the infinite one.

### 3. The Paradox of Infinite Freedom

This time, it is worth to begin with Balthasar. The concept of *infinite freedom*,<sup>34</sup> in his understanding, is also not free from the element of paradoxicality. The difference consists only in its nature.

In the case of finite freedom, one had to deal with the apparent internal contradiction of this concept. This type of problem will not be encountered in the analysis of the concept of infinite freedom. The problem, however, lies in our, i.e. human, ability to perceive and describe this elusive reality.

The theologian from Basel wonders how finite freedom, i.e. a being struggling with such drastic limitations and equipped with very limited cognitive means, but still aware of God’s interference in the history of the world, can gain any insight into the mystery of infinite freedom:

The influences unleashed upon world history as a result of the intervention of infinite freedom are irreversible. Since the making of the biblical Covenant, however, the truth of the world and of man is indissolubly bound up with the truthfulness of God (who looks for a similar response from man). It is now impossible to produce a *raison d’être* for the world without going through this narrow gate. But can anything be said about *infinite freedom in itself*?<sup>35</sup>

Father de Lubac, in his turn, looks from two different angles at this paradox of trying to know the unknowable and notices two possible dangers associated with

<sup>33</sup> “Sans doute on peut bien avancer que déjà, par le seul fait d’avoir révélé à l’homme qu’il était fait pour un monde supérieur, pour une terre «où la Justice habite», Jésus a mis en lui un principe de liberté spirituelle, fruit d’une exigence intérieure plus forte que tous les tyrans” (Lubac, *Méditation sur l’Église*, 145).

<sup>34</sup> Similarly to the previous case, the term *infinite freedom* (*unendliche Freiheit*) can as well be understood in a twofold way: it can mean the freedom which is at God’s disposal, but it can also mean God himself.

<sup>35</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 255–256. “Die aufgezeigten weltgeschichtlichen Wirkungen des Einbruchs unendlicher Freiheit sind unumkehrbar. Seit dem biblischen Bundesschluss aber ist die Wahrheit de Welt und des Menschen unlöslich mit der Wahrhaftigkeit Gottes (der eine ebensolche Antwort vom Menschen erwartet) verbunden: keine Begründung des Sinnes von Welt ist mehr möglich außer durch diese enge Pforte hindurch. Aber läßt sich etwas aussagen über *die unendliche Freiheit in sich selbst*?” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 231).

them. The first concerns the risk of disregarding the enormity of the mystery and reducing it to flat human imaginations (heresies). The second regards the temptation of abandoning the seemingly impossible task:

We do not want a mysterious God. Neither do we want a God who is Some One. Nothing is more feared than this mystery of the God who is Some One. We would rather not be some one ourselves, than meet that Some One!<sup>36</sup>

In the case of the first danger, i.e. the possibility of falling into heresy, de Lubac draws attention to the paradox of the theological “insensitivity” characteristic of contemporary Christians. Unlike ancient Christians, who formally had much less theological sophistication and knowledge than we do, the heresies that flourish today seem to be either unnoticed or even openly endorsed by us—something simply unthinkable in early Christianity. In order to dispel any doubts, the French theologian emphasizes that it is not about a higher culture of dialogue or a possible sense of mercy toward adversaries:

If heretics no longer horrify us today, as they once did our forefathers, is it certain that it is because there is more charity in our hearts? Or would it not too often be, perhaps, without our daring to say so, because the bone of contention, that is to say, the very substance of our faith, no longer interests us? Men of too familiar and too passive a faith, perhaps for us dogmas are no longer the Mystery on which we live, the Mystery which is to be accomplished in us. Consequently, then, heresy no longer shocks us; at least, it no longer convulses us like something trying to tear the soul of our souls away from us.... And that is why we have no trouble in being kind to heretics, and no repugnance in rubbing shoulders with them.<sup>37</sup>

That is why, undertaking a serious reflection on the paradox of infinite freedom, Balthasar reaches back to the aforementioned “forefathers,” but not only within

---

<sup>36</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 214. “On ne veut pas d’un Dieu mystérieux. – On ne veut pas non plus d’un Dieu qui soit Quelqu’un. – On ne redoute rien tant que ce mystère du Dieu qui est Quelqu’un. Plutôt n’être pas soi-même quelqu’un, que de rencontrer ce Quelqu’un!” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 170).

<sup>37</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 226. “Si l’hérétique ne nous fait plus horreur aujourd’hui comme il faisait horreur à nos ancêtres, est-ce à coup sûr parce que nous avons au cœur plus de charité? Ou ne serait-ce pas peut-être trop souvent, sans que nous osions nous le dire, parce que l’objet du litige, à savoir la substance même de notre foi, ne nous intéresse plus? Hommes de foi trop habituée et trop passive, peut-être les dogmes ne sont-ils plus pour nous le Mystère dont nous vivions, le Mystère qui doit s’accomplir en nous. Alors, en conséquence, l’hérésie ne nous choque plus; du moins ne nous bouleverse-t-elle plus comme ce qui tenterait de nous arracher l’âme de notre âme... Et c’est pourquoi nous n’avons pas de peine à être bons pour l’hérétique, ni de répugnance à frayer avec lui” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 181).

Christian domain, as he also refers to the ancient extra-biblical reflection. The Swiss theologian points out two competing and seemingly irreconcilable aspects distinguished by this ancient thought:

In the extra-biblical world, two views struggle for dominance, unable to find common ground for understanding. On the one hand, there is a personal freedom that is ascribed to God but (even in the case of Zeus) remains anthropomorphic and limited, however much it may be refined. On the other hand, there is a superpersonal freedom, applied to the idea of the Good that is elevated above all finite being; lacking all envy, it can pour itself out and enable those who seek it to participate in its freedom from all entanglement. But it is not the latter that decides the ethical value of the individual life (like Plato's mythical judge of the dead).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the ancients encountered in their attempt to grasp the essence of infinite freedom an insurmountable dichotomy: either God possesses personal freedom, but at the expense of compromising and incriminating him anthropomorphisms, or he is an absolute idea of freedom, but then completely detached from the drama of this world.

The Swiss theologian emphasizes, however, that also in this case the dichotomy is in fact only apparent. Nevertheless, it is true that the solution to this dilemma lies far beyond the capacity of purely philosophical human endeavor. The possibility of overcoming this dichotomy came only with the fullness of Christian Revelation:

Infinite freedom, in the sense of personal command of oneself, dawns only in the New Testament. It is anticipated in many ways, both in philosophy and in the Old Testament, but the fragments of meaning do not form a whole.<sup>39</sup>

Perceptible access to the mystery of the full unification of the abovementioned aspects—i.e. the individual and universal dimension of infinite freedom—humanity obtains only in the person of incarnated absoluteness, i.e. in the divine-human mystery of the incarnation of Christ:

---

<sup>38</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 243. "In der außer biblischen Welt kämpfen zwei Sichten um die Vormacht, ohne zueinander zu finden: eine personale Freiheit, die dem Gott zugeschrieben wird, aber (sogar bei Zeus) trotz aller Überhöhung anthropomorph begrenzt bleibt, und eine überpersonale Freiheit, die der über alle endliche Sein erhabenen Idee des Guten zukommt; sie kann sich neidlos verströmen und den ihr Nachstrebenden Anteil geben an ihrem Ledigsein von aller Verstrickung aber nicht sie ist es, die (wie die mythischen Totenrichter Platons) über den sittlichen Wert der Einzelleben entscheidet" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 220).

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 243. "Unendliche Freiheit im Sinne personalem Verfügens hat ihren Ausgang erst im Neuen Testament. Vieles bereitet sie vor, sowohl in der Philosophie wie im Alten Testament, aber die Sinnfragmente schließen sich nicht zum Ganzen" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 220).

This barrier, this lack of reciprocity, is broken down in Jesus Christ, who “penetrates all things” in quite a different way from the wisdom of “Solomon”. In his being “made to be sin” and bearing the “curse”, infinite freedom shows its ultimate, most extreme capability for the first time: it can be itself even in the finitude that “loses itself”—a capability which neither Jews nor Greeks could have imagined. For them it remains a stumbling block and foolishness.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that the only key allowing us to penetrate the mystery of God’s freedom is Christ himself, who, on one hand, permeates everything and on the other, unifies divinity and humanity in his unique person was also emphasized by Tischner, who, commenting on Balthasar’s reflections, wrote:

The “classic place” in which the encounter between finite and infinite freedom is accomplished is the figure of Jesus Christ. The meeting and mutual penetration of divinity and humanity, fulfilled in Christ, is the culmination of the history of salvation.<sup>41</sup>

We will return to the subject of the encounter between both freedoms in the next part of the article. At this moment, we will focus on the Christological cognitive aspect. Tischner approaches this particular topic from the axiological point of view, which is characteristic of his attitude in general. According to the Polish thinker, the key cognitive element is the act of assertion, understood as the recognition of the value that Christ represents and exhibits in his life and behavior:

The entirety of Revelation is permeated with the fundamental radiation of the assertory act of Jesus, who sees the Father, knows man and testifies through himself that he is not lying. The Christian faith follows this radiance closely. Jesus is the center—he constitutes its content and its argument.<sup>42</sup>

---

40 Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 244. “Die Schranke der fehlenden Reziprozität wird in Jesus Christus überwunden, der ganz anders als die «salomonische» Weisheit «alle durchdringt»: Indem er «zur Sünde gemacht wird» und den «Fluch» trägt, erweist die unendliche Freiheit erst ihre äußerste Möglichkeit: auch in der sich-verlierenden Endlichkeit sie selbst zu sein: eine Möglichkeit, an die weder Juden noch Griechen denken konnten: für sie bleibt sie ein Ärgernis und eine Torheit” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 221). A systematic study of Balthasar’s vision of the Christological key to the knowledge of infinite freedom can be found in: Pyc, *Chrystus*, 241–263. A breakthrough role of Christ with respect to the pre-Christian cognitive efforts is described there in terms of the opposition between the negative and positive *elusiveness*: “However, when God, whom no one has ever seen, is «revealed» (Jn 1:18) by his Son in human words and deeds, the negative elusiveness turns into a positive one,” cf. Pyc, *Chrystus*, 244.

41 “«Miejscem klasycznym», w którym dopełnia się spotkanie wolności skończonej i nieskończonej, jest postać Jezusa Chrystusa. Spełnione w Chrystusie spotkanie i wzajemne przenikanie bóstwa i człowieczeństwa stanowi szczytowy punkt dziejów zbawienia” (Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 387).

42 “Całość Objawienia jest przeniknięta fundamentalnym promieniowaniem asertorycznego aktu Jezusa, który widzi Ojca, zna człowieka i świadczy sobą, że nie kłamie. Wiara chrześcijańska idzie ściśle po linii

From our present research perspective, the most important aspect of the above observation regards the access to the mystery of the Father, in particular, to the mystery of his infinite freedom, through Christ, who is the only one who “sees the Father.” But not only, he also “testifies through himself” in such a way that “knowing man” he knows how to present this testimony in an accessible and understandable way.

Balthasar and Tischner agree, therefore, that the paradox of trying to know the unknowable is largely resolved in Christ. Certainly, this does not mean that this paradox has been completely overcome. The same pertains to the possibility of exhausting the mystery behind it. Mindful of de Lubac’s warnings in this regard, Balthasar strongly emphasizes that mankind will never be able to fully explore this mystery: “God is the ground [*Ungrund*: “groundless ground”] of all freedom, but while he can be known as such by some other knower [...], his proportions can never be grasped, for that same reason.”<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, thanks to the acquisition of the Christological key, which allows us to penetrate the problem of infinite freedom, we are able to dig quite deeply into this mystery, getting access to a deeper layer of the discussed paradox. Balthasar describes it as follows: “in God’s self-proclamation in Jesus Christ the more blessed mystery is revealed, namely, that love—self-surrender—is part of this bliss of absolute freedom.”<sup>44</sup>

The total and, above all, voluntary surrender of Christ both to the Father (“into your hands,” Luke 23:46) and to humanity (“he loved them to the end,” John 13:1) indicates the deepest aspect of freedom, which has already been archetypically realized by the Father in the intra-Trinitarian act of giving himself to his only begotten Son.

The key point here is the observation that intra-Trinitarian freedom does not consist only in possessing infinite possibility and range of choice or unlimited power over everything and everyone. A much deeper characterization of infinite freedom regards the possibility of infinite and unlimited self-giving to another, in an absolute and complete way, i.e. not only in some external manifestations of one’s existence, but in the entirety of one’s essence:

God is not only by nature free in his self-possession, in his ability to do what he will with himself; for that very reason, he is also free to do what he will with his own nature. That is,

---

tego promieniowania. Jezus jest centrum – jej treścią i jej argumentem” (Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, 232).

<sup>43</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, V, 406. “Gott ist der Ungrund alle Freiheit, der zwar [...] von einem andern Erkennenden wohl als solcher erkannt, aber eben deshalb nie ausgemessen werden kann” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, IV, 372). This thought has been paraphrased in an interesting way by Pyc who pointed out to a paradox concealed in it: “Despite the fact that certain contents are revealed in the most precise way, they turn out to be all the more elusive” (cf. Pyc, *Chrystus*, 244).

<sup>44</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 256. “[I]n der Selbstkundgabe Gottes in Jesus Christus enthüllt sich das seligere Mysterium, daß zu dieser Seligkeit der absoluten Freiheit die Liebe als Selbsthingabe gehört” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 232–233).

he can surrender himself; as Father, he can share his Godhead with the Son, and, as Father and Son, he can share the same Godhead with the Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

The paradox lies here in the fact that in common understanding, total self-giving and sacrifice for another, without reserving absolutely anything for oneself, is usually interpreted as a sign of weakness, submission and dependence, but not freedom. The latter, in human terms, is more often associated with the attitude of rebellion, with the quest for independence and the tendency to secure and exercise one's autonomy.

To the contrary, as Balthasar emphasizes, within the Holy Trinity the maximum of freedom is achieved in the absolute and unreserved mutual self-giving and surrender of Persons. First, eternally, i.e. immanently, the Father gives himself to the Son through the paradox of complete surrender of his Godhead without any loss of it on his part. Then, economically the Son gives himself up through the act of redemption, which is through the paradox of incarnation and the paradox of the cross.<sup>46</sup>

Another paradox, that looms now on the horizon, is the fact that human beings are also invited to participate in this divine reciprocity.

#### 4. The Paradox of the Relation between Finite and Infinite Freedom

In the context of the paradox of infinite freedom, discussed above and considered from the Christological perspective, the events of the incarnation and the cross constituted an important factor in deepening our understanding of this concept. Approaching the problem of the relationship between infinite and finite freedom, de Lubac extends this perspective by considering two other key aspects, i.e. the events of the resurrection and ascension:

But, as we are terribly and almost incurably carnal, the very resurrection of the Savior risked being misinterpreted by us. Accordingly, the resurrection is succeeded by the ascension, to show us what it meant and to force us finally to turn our eyes upward, to go beyond the earthly horizon and all that pertains to man in his natural state. Thus the lesson

<sup>45</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 256. "Gott ist nicht nur wesenhaft frei in seinem Selbstbesitz, seiner Selbstverfügung: er ist gerade deshalb auch frei, über sein Wesen im Sinne einer Selbsthingabe zu verfügen: als Vater die Gottheit dem Sohn mitzuteilen, als Vater und Sohn dieselbe Gottheit mit dem Geist zu teilen" (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 232).

<sup>46</sup> The paradoxical character of infinite freedom constitutes one of the main examples of Balthasar's perceived need to transcend the rigid frames of dialectics. This fact has been emphasized by Pyc: "Our author [Balthasar] is aware that here we are outside the dialectics of contingency and necessity. The absolute freedom to possess oneself should be understood, with respect to the essence of God, as a gift without limits. It is not determined by anything else than itself, but determined in such a way that without the continual gift of self it would not be itself" (Pyc, *Chrystus*, 242).

of the ascension does not contradict the lesson of the incarnation: it prolongates it, deepens it. It does not set us beneath or apart from life; it obliges us to assume it fully while aiming beyond.<sup>47</sup>

“Almost incurable”—as de Lubac says—human carnality seems to be in total opposition to the other pole of human existence, i.e. its vocation to live in intimacy with God.

The basic question here is the following: how can something finite enter into a non-trivial relationship with something truly infinite and not fall into the proverbial absurdity of an ant trying to establish a relationship with an elephant? The abovementioned vocation of finite freedom to “look above and beyond” and to try to establish a relationship with infinite freedom seems not only paradoxical, but simply impossible, once we realize how glaring are the disproportions.

Reflecting on this issue, Balthasar reformulates the above question and asks how both these freedoms must behave in order to establish an authentic relationship despite all the adversities. These behaviors will be considered separately in the following three sections.

#### 4.1. The Paradox of Poverty and Wealth in Opening up to Others

The earlier discussed fact of involvement of finite freedom in the paradox of simultaneous inclusion-exclusion or equivalently communicability-incommunicability became the basis for Balthasar’s assertion regarding the bipolar structure of finite freedom.

According to this assertion, finite freedom is stretched between two poles. The first one receives the name of *self-possession* and represents everything which concerns the inner autonomy of the individual (*autexousion*). The other pole regards the ability to enter into relationships with others and with the environment and is usually called by Balthasar the *universal opening*:

Present to ourselves in the light of being, we possess an inalienable core of freedom that cannot be split open. [...] However, this primal, secure self-possession is not a self-intuition or grasp of one’s essence; it articulates itself only *in and with* the universal opening to all being, leaving itself behind to embrace the knowledge and will of others and other

<sup>47</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 68–69. “Mais, comme nous sommes terriblement et presque incurablement charnels, la résurrection même du Sauveur risquait d’être par nous mal comprise. A la résurrection succède donc l’ascension, destinée à nous en montrer le sens et à nous forcer enfin à porter nos regards en haut, à dépasser l’horizon terrestre et tout ce qui est de l’homme en son état naturel. Ainsi, la leçon de l’ascension ne contredit pas la leçon de l’incarnation: elle la prolonge, elle l’approfondit. Elle ne nous place pas en deçà ou à côté de la vie humaine: elle nous oblige à l’accomplir en nous faisant viser au-delà” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivis de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 45).

things, particularly in shared being [*Mitsein*], whereby the original opening is always so great that no individual being (which is never the whole of being) can fill it.<sup>48</sup>

It is precisely this structure that underlined Balthasar's solution of the paradox of finite freedom, which was discussed earlier in the paper. All the limitations of finite freedom, represented by and inscribed in its first pole, can be exceeded over time thanks to the dynamic and interactive element associated with the second pole.

Thanks to this structure, finite freedom is always on the way to some greater and wider freedom. Balthasar adds that this journey never ends in this world—regardless of the height of the level of freedom one can achieve in given earthly conditions, there is always much more out there to pursue. The ultimate goal of this path can only be fulfilled in the reunion with infinite freedom:

The first pole of finite freedom, the “*autexousion*”, is posited unrestrictedly as the prime datum; only in the second step is it demonstrated that freedom, thus given, must also realize itself, within the overall context of divine freedom, in a process that, on earth, is never-ending.<sup>49</sup>

In the first step of this process, the second pole is responsible for reaching out to other finite freedoms. This way, an equal dialogue begins and the freedoms involved in it become the subjects of gradual and mutual development. At this stage, the paradox of the aforementioned disproportion has not shown up yet. However, Balthasar perceives another paradox which has already emerged at this early stage, the understanding of which is crucial in order to pass consciously to more advanced stages. This intermediate paradox is meant to prepare finite freedom to overcome the “incurability” of its carnality and to rise to a higher degree of openness, allowing it to entrust itself no longer to another human, but this time to God himself.

The paradox in question concerns the amazing feeling of simultaneous poverty and wealth experienced in the process of opening up to others. On one hand, the very need to turn toward “the other” reveals the awareness of one's own insufficiency and the feeling that something is lacking. On the other hand, the same turning is the only

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 210–211. “Im Sichgegenwärtigsein im Licht des Seins überhaupt liegt ein nicht aufzubrechender Kern von Freiheit als unentwendbarer Selbstbesitz. [...] Der ursprüngliche und sichere Selbstbesitz ist aber keine Selbstintuition oder Wesenserfassung, sie artikuliert sich nur *mit* der universalen Öffnung zu allem Seienden, im Ausgang aus sich selbst zum Erkennen und Wollen von anderem, insbesondere im Mitsein, wobei dich die ursprüngliche Öffnung stets so groß ist, daß kein Seiendes (das nie das ganze Sein ist) sie auszufüllen vermag” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 190).

<sup>49</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 215. “Der erste Pol endlicher Freiheit, das «*autexousion*» wird uneingeschränkt als erstes Datum gesetzt, und erst im zweiten Schritt gezeigt, daß die so gegebene Freiheit sich zugleich in einem irdisch unabschließbaren Prozeß innerhalb des Raumes der göttlichen Freiheit verwirklichen muß” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 194).

way to share with others the wealth that they may be in need of. Having established that, Balthasar goes on and asks:

Going out of ourselves and into “the other” is a sign both of poverty and of wealth, and this twofold character precipitates a further choice: will finite freedom use the wealth of its being open to enrich itself further, or will it regard its being open as the opportunity to hand itself over to infinite free Being, to the Being who is the Giver of this free openness?<sup>50</sup>

It is really interesting that, in completely independent way—in the context of Mariological considerations—Tischner came up with an almost identical idea. He focused on the aspect of meeting and dialogue—two of the main subjects of his research interest. Examining the scene of the Annunciation, i.e. the meeting and the dialogue between Mary and Archangel Gabriel, and backing it up with the analysis of *Magnificat*, he spotted the Mariological paradox of simultaneous poverty and wealth. First, he discussed the poverty that anyone (not only Mary) must experience during the encounter of that type:

I am reading the words of the *Magnificat*: “... he has looked upon the humility of his handmaid.” These words speak about encounter and poverty. They point to a very particular poverty—the poverty which results from an encounter. The greater the encounter, the greater the poverty. [...] The miracle of encounter is that only at that moment we discover how poor we are with respect to whom we have met. We met someone and we have nothing to give. What can a human being give the Angel for his coming and bringing a gift? With what can it be reciprocated? [...] It was only this greatness of the encounter that showed humans how small they were. This annunciation impoverished them so much.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 228. “Der Ausgang aus sich ins Andere ist Anzeige sowohl einer Bedürftigkeit wie eines Reichtums, und diese Doppelheit fordert nochmals eine Entscheidung heraus: ob die endliche Freiheit den Reichtum ihres Offenseins dazu benützen will, sich selbst anzureichern, oder ob sie ihr Offensein als die Möglichkeit ansieht, sich an das unendliche Freisein und Freigeben des Seins zu überantworten” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 206). It is worth adding that for Balthasar, the archetypal model of the experience of simultaneous wealth and poverty experienced by finite freedom is the intra-Trinitarian experience of happiness in the mystery of mutual exchange of gifts: “In other words, this happiness is expressed in the identity between «to have» (*haben*) and «to give» (*weggeben*), that is, between wealth and poverty. In God, neither poverty precedes wealth, as if He were compelled to go out in the Trinitarian process in order to gain himself (as it is held by idealism), nor is wealth preceding poverty, as if the Father had existed alone for himself before the Son was begotten (as Arianism understands)” (Pyc, *Chrystus*, 242).

<sup>51</sup> “Czytam słowa *Magnificat*: «... wejrzał na uniżenie służebnicy swojej...». W słowach tych jest mowa o spotkaniu i o ubóstwie. Wskazuje się tu na szczególne ubóstwo – ubóstwo płynące ze spotkania. Im większe spotkanie, tym większe ubóstwo. [...] Na tym właśnie polega cud spotkania, że człowiek dopiero teraz odkrywa, jak bardzo jest ubogi wobec tego, kogo spotkał. Spotkał i nie ma nic do dania. Cóż może człowiek dać Aniołowi za to, że przyszedł i przyniósł dar? Czym może się odwzajemnić? [...] Dopiero wielkość spotkania ukazała mu niskość. To zwiastowane tak go zubożyło.” (Tischner, *Książeczka pielgrzymka*, 14).

Secondly, the Cracovian thinker observes that, on the other hand, the same encounter becomes a source of overwhelming wealth which overpasses any expectations. In fact, this is the only true wealth:

The real treasure of a pilgrim is a human being he meets—someone who will show him the way and give him a helping hand, even for a moment. That person will be like the Angel of Annunciation—he will be the grace, happiness, signpost, delight, silence, and the belief that no one is a lonely island. The Man of the Annunciation is the herald of the true wealth.<sup>52</sup>

The attitude that finite freedom must assume in order to open itself for a relationship with infinite freedom is the ability to accept and experience the paradox of simultaneous poverty and wealth. This has to be experienced first in the encounter with other finite freedoms, but eventually, it is meant to enable us (finite freedoms) to open ourselves for something much greater.

#### 4.2. The Paradox of God “Latent” Yet “Accompanying”

In previous section, the anthropological side of the paradox of the relationship between finite and infinite freedom has been discussed. It turned out that—from the perspective of a finite being—the possibility to establish a relationship with infinite freedom results from its bipolar structure. This structure equips finite freedom with never-ending ability to open up itself to ever greater and deeper encounters during which it learns to experience its ever-deeper poverty and hence becomes able to receive and share ever greater wealth.

However, on the other side of the story, there is this infinite freedom, which, regardless of how far finite freedom broadens its horizons, deepens its perception and increases its ability to enter into relations, will always surpass it in an absolutely inconceivable and unimaginable way (*Deus semper maior*).<sup>53</sup>

52 “Prawdziwym skarbem pielgrzymy jest spotkany na drodze człowiek – człowiek, który mu wskaże drogę i poda pomocne ramię, choćby na chwilę. Człowiek ten będzie jak Anioł Zwiastowania – będzie łaską, szczęściem, drogowskazem, zachwytem, ciszą i wiarą, że nikt nie jest samotną wyspą. Człowiek Zwiastowania jest zapowiedzą prawdziwego bogactwa” (Tischner, *Książeczka pielgrzymy*, 15).

53 De Lubac brought attention to this issue by pointing out to the message from the first chapter of the Constitution *Dei Filius*: “in the year 1870 the First Vatican Council reminded some too audacious theologians that God will always be *super omnia quae praeter ipsum sunt vel concipi possunt ineffabiliter excelsus*” (“il fut encore en 1870 celui du I<sup>er</sup> concile du Vatican, rappelant à des théologiens téméraires que Dieu sera toujours «*super omnia quae praeter ipsum sunt vel concipi possunt ineffabiliter excelsus*»”, Lubac, *Petite catéchèse*, 48). Balthasar went even further in this direction—touching again on the paradox—by claiming that “God himself is always greater than himself on the basis of his triune freedom.” See Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 259 (“Gott selbst immer größer ist als er selbst aufgrund seiner dreieinigen Freiheit,” Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 235).

Thus, Balthasar looks now at the same problem but from another, i.e. theological, perspective and asks how God behaves that, despite all that infinite disproportion, finite freedom is granted the entry into an authentic relationship with him. It will not come as a surprise that this behavior must exhibit a highly paradoxical nature. Balthasar calls it the paradox of God who is latent and accompanying (or revealing himself).<sup>54</sup>

In order not to dominate finite freedom with its presence, infinite freedom—in its generosity—“hides” itself or “withdraws” to the background, lending space for creatures so that they can develop their own autonomous freedom. It is not difficult to notice the paradoxicality of the situation—all of that must happen despite obvious omnipresence of God and the undeniable fact that all creation, whether it wants it or not, is always completely immersed in him. Balthasar is fully aware of it:

They only gain room for freedom, however, if God, in allowing them freedom, withdraws to a certain extent and becomes latent. He who cannot be absent from any place thus adopts a kind of incognito, keeping many paths open for freedom, not only in appearance but in reality, for he is always at work and continually liberates his creation for freedom.<sup>55</sup>

God, who never ceases in the history of salvation to be the One who reveals himself, decides to “hide himself” not from humans, but for them. For, unlike the biblical Adam, God does not need to hide from anyone. However, if he wishes, he can hide for the good of someone, when he sees that they are not yet ready to receive his revelation.

That is why God never imposes himself and never converts anyone by force. Those who are open to him, he lets them know about his gentle, accompanying presence. Those who close themselves to this presence are allowed to live as if God did not exist at all. God has no need of an immediate success. Father de Lubac understood it perfectly, justifying this apparent passivity of God with, concealed in it, deeper wisdom:

We must not be impatient. [...] The craftsman respects the resistance of matter; he knows he would gain nothing by “forcing”. Still more is it necessary to respect the resistance of persons. Better an order which is less easy, a less coherent universe, a more arduous

---

<sup>54</sup> In Balthasar’s thought, this paradox plays one of the key roles. In addition to the theodramatic aspect discussed here, the theologian from Basel devotes much space in the first part of his *Trilogy* to the study of the aesthetic aspect of the problem. Readers interested in this aspect are referred to: Pyc, *Chrystus*, 127–144.

<sup>55</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 273. “Raum für Freiheit aber erhalten sie nur, wenn der freilassende Gott in eine gewisse Latenz zurücktritt, wenn er, der von keinem Ort abwesend sein kann, ein gewisses Inkognito annimmt, worin er nicht nur scheinhaft, sondern wirklich der Freiheit viele Wege offenhält, indem er, der immer Wirkende, die Freiheit immerfort freisetzt” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 248).

harmony, a slower building up, than success which, though better in appearance, is secured at the price of stifling what is best.<sup>56</sup>

Despite that, as Balthasar clearly states, infinite freedom always acts, even if most of this action takes place in the background. God equips finite freedom with appropriate gifts and encourages it to dispose of them freely. To illustrate this situation, the Swiss theologian refers to the biblical parable of the talents:

The parable of the talents which the merchant or king distributes to his servants before going abroad shows us how God is latent: he gives them an acting area in which they can creatively exercise their freedom and imagination; but what he gives them is *his* wealth, which they can use wisely or fritter away. First of all they are endowed with the talents; they possess something with which they can act and play—their finite freedom. But between the giving of this gift and the use and exercise of it lies a certain interval that belongs to the human *autexousion*.<sup>57</sup>

De Lubac, in his turn, notices that this attitude of the latent God is often imitated by the saints. That is why they are so accessible to others. True saints will never “crush” their neighbors with their “greatness” or “effectiveness,” but rather will attract them with their modesty, captivating “old-fashionedness” and beauty of the fruits they left behind themselves in their hidden lives:

Many saints are not known until after their death, and many, even after their death, remain unknown. [...] Now most of them hardly wonder, even today, if their faith is “adapted”, or if it is “effective”. They are content to live on their faith, which for them is reality itself, ever the reality of the actual moment, and the fruit that proceeds from their faith, though often hidden, is no less fine for that, nor less nourishing.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 147–148. “Il ne faut pas être impatient. [...] Le praticien respecte les résistances de la matière: il sait qu’il ne gagnerait rien à «forcer». Plus encore est-il nécessaire de respecter les résistances des personnes. Mieux vaut un ordre moins facile, un univers moins cohérent, une harmonie plus laborieuse, une édification plus lente, qu’un succès, meilleur en apparence, obtenu au prix de l’étouffement du meilleur” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 111).

<sup>57</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 273. “Was mit der *Latenz* gemeint ist, zeigt das Gleichnis von den Talenten, die der in die Fremde ziehende Kaufmann oder König seinen Dienern einhändig: er gibt ihnen Spiel-Raum, worin sie ihre Freiheit und Phantasie schöpferisch betätigen können; er gibt ihnen aber *sein* Vermögen, das sie erspielen oder verspielen können. Sie werden zunächst mit den Talenten begabt, sie besitzen etwas, womit die spielen können – ihre endliche Freiheit –, aber zwischen dieser Begabung und deren Verwendung und Aktuation liegt ein Intervall, das zum menschlichen *autexousion* gehört” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 248).

<sup>58</sup> Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 198–199. “Beaucoup de saints ne sont connus qu’après leur mort, et beaucoup, même après leur mort, demeurent inconnus. [...] Or la plupart ne se demandent guère, aujourd’hui même, si leur foi est «adaptée», ni si elle est «efficace». Il leur suffit d’en vivre, comme de la réalité même, la plus

Nevertheless, the concept of the latent God, carries with it some further paradoxical dangers. For when entrusting freedom to creation and withdrawing himself to the background, or rather apparently hiding himself, God must take into account the possibility of a bad use of this freedom on the part of creation, and of “depriving himself” of the possibility of a direct intervention at the moment when finite freedom, acting on its own, enters a wrong path.<sup>59</sup> This is an unavoidable consequence of the authenticity of the gift of freedom:

The gift of man’s area of freedom, with God latent within it, implies and accepts the possibility of going astray, with all the consequences this may bring: *one* false step may lead in the wrong direction; the first mistake may lead right up to the last.<sup>60</sup>

Tischner adds, however, that even at such moments, God remains always present, and his voice will always be audible, although finite freedom will retain the right to follow a different voice according to its choice. The thinker from Kraków upholds that this situation is an indispensable element of the divine-human drama and constitutes its eternal horizon:

The biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve still remains the horizon of the philosophy of drama. [...] In the story of the fall, the voice of good that resounds between Adam and Eve is the voice of God. The voice of evil is the voice of the tempter (in this case the serpent).<sup>61</sup>

If finite freedom chooses the voice of good, i.e. the offer of infinite freedom, then the way leading to their mutual participation can be considered open.

---

actuelle toujours, et les fruits qui en découlent, fruits eux-mêmes souvent cachés, n’en sont pas moins beaux, ni moins nourrissants” (Lubac, *Paradoxes suivis de Nouveaux paradoxes*, 159).

<sup>59</sup> Balthasar describes this situation in terms of the possibility of “profound error in the realm of the finite,” see Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 274 (“das tiefe Irrenkönnen im Endlichen,” Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 249).

<sup>60</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 275. “Das Geschenk des Freiheitsraumes und die darin liegende Latenz Gottes nimmt die Möglichkeit der Irre in Kauf, mit alle Folgen, die diese nach sich ziehen mag: daß ein falscher Schritt vermutlich in falsche Richtung abführt, die erste Irre bis zur letzten fortleiten kann” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 250). It is worth adding that in Balthasar’s thought this aspect is deeply connected with the mystery of Holy Saturday: “The behavior of uncreated freedom is described by Balthasar not only as latency (*Latenz*), but also as accompaniment (*Begleitung*). The absence of God, as in the biblical parable of the talents (cf. Mt 25:14–30), creates an occasion for erroneous behavior on the part of finite freedom. However, in the light of the mystery of Holy Saturday, God’s absence appears as full of loving respect for created freedom, accompanying man in all, even the most complicated moments of life” (cf. Budzik, *Dramat odkupienia*, 200).

<sup>61</sup> “Horyzontem filozofii dramatu pozostaje wciąż biblijna opowieść o upadku Adama i Ewy. [...] W opowieści o upadku głos dobra, jaki brzmi między Adamem a Ewą, jest głosem Boga. Głos zła jest głosem kusiciela (w tym wypadku węża)” (Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, 296).

### 4.3. The Problem of Mutual Participation

In the previous sections, the attitudes of finite and infinite freedom were analyzed respectively, so as to identify the conditions for the possibility of their fruitful encounter. Finite freedom enters the path of gradual opening up to others and strives for more and more freedom. At a certain stage of this self-transcendence, it begins to perceive, feel and open up itself to infinite freedom, which has opened itself previously, emerging gradually from its state of latency. Following de Lubac, Balthasar clearly distinguishes these two stages (natural and supernatural), while pointing to their inseparable connection, integrity and complementarity:

What begins, at the “natural”, personal level, as our having to believe in another’s freedom and love, is perfected at the “supernatural” level, where human freedom (which includes insight) is challenged to make an ultimate act of faith in absolute freedom and love.<sup>62</sup>

Here emerges the first, very important aspect of the paradox of mutual participation. Finite freedom—being objectively always completely immersed in infinite freedom—gradually begins to realize it subjectively. Thus, it undertakes efforts toward self-transcendence. From a purely human perspective, however, these efforts seem doomed to failure. From this perspective, finite freedom seems to be completely immersed in the depths of corporeality, materiality and all kinds of limitations of this world, but not in God. Balthasar ironically recalls that an attempt to break free from these shackles may be reminiscent of Baron Münchhausen’s grotesque efforts:

Would this not call for a vantage point outside history? And surely no man can take up such a vantage point without surrendering his very existence (Unless, like Münchhausen, he can extricate himself by climbing up his own pigtail).<sup>63</sup>

At this point, Tischner draws attention to yet another aspect of the discussed paradox. Apparently, finite freedom does not have to undertake all these efforts which seem to exceed its natural capabilities and may expose it to failure, embarrassment and discredit. After all, one could try to live as if God did not exist at all. The Cracovian researcher, however, immediately notices that such a life brings human existence to the shallows of mediocrity:

---

<sup>62</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, III, 459–460. “Was auf der «natürlichen» persönlichen Ebene als Glauben-Müssen an fremde Freiheit und Liebe beginnt, vollendet sich auf der «übernatürlichen», wo der menschlichen (und damit einsichtsvollen) Freiheit ein letzter Glaube an absolute Freiheit und Liebe abgefordert wird” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/2, 423).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, IV, 77. “Bedürfte es dazu nicht eines Standorts jenseits der Geschichte, den kein Mensch, ohne sich aufzugeben, beziehen kann, er müßte sich den wie Münchhausen am eigenen Zopf aus der Verstrickung herausziehen können?” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, III, 73).

Finite freedom without the encounter with the Infinite Freedom fades away. But the encounter with the Infinite Freedom is possible only in Christianity. [...] The fact that only in Christianity the intercessory meeting between the finite and the Infinite freedom is possible made Christianity play such an important role in the history of human freedom.<sup>64</sup>

The key observation, common for Tischner, Balthasar and de Lubac,<sup>65</sup> regarding the condition of the possibility of the encounter between both freedoms, is the emphasis on the gratuity of grace, an element that is absolutely indispensable and characteristic of the Christian Revelation. No matter how great the efforts of finite freedom were, they would always fail if not for the absolutely free act of openness on the part of infinite freedom:

Finite freedom must transcend itself, but it cannot annex to itself the realm of the infinite. [...] Even if it regards its faculty of self-transcendence as inherent in its nature, every act it performs in the direction of transcendence can only be performed because the realm of infinite freedom has disclosed itself.<sup>66</sup>

Next, we come to the second and the most profound aspect of the paradox of the reciprocal relation between finite and infinite freedom. It should be stressed that we are talking here about authentic reciprocity. Thus, it is not only finite freedom that is invited to participate in the inner life of infinite freedom. Paradoxically and inconceivably, infinite freedom is also invited by finite freedom to participate in its interior life, and it accepts this invitation in the mystery of the Eucharist. Of course, also in this case, the giver is still the infinite freedom: “by definition, infinite freedom is free to impart itself to others; it is not in the power of finite freedom; it remains grace, that is, the freely given indwelling of infinite freedom in finite freedom.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> “Wolność skończona bez spotkania z Wolnością Nieskończoną marnieje. Ale spotkanie z Wolnością Nieskończoną jest możliwe wyłącznie w chrześcijaństwie. [...] Okoliczność, że jedynie w chrześcijaństwie możliwe jest zapośredniczające spotkanie wolności skończonej z Nieskończoną, sprawia, iż w dziejach ludzkiej wolności chrześcijaństwo odegrało tak ważną rolę” (Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, 386–387).

<sup>65</sup> In these considerations, Balthasar follows in general the path outlined by de Lubac in his analysis of the relation between nature and supernature (grace). The subject is very wide and cannot be treated here in detail. In this regard, it is worth to consult the following studies authored by Balthasar himself: *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 267–325 and *The Theology of Henri de Lubac*, 91–104.

<sup>66</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 313–314. “Endliche Freiheit muß sich selbst transzendieren, kann aber nicht von sich her den Raum der unendlichen für sich beschlagnehmen. [...] Auch wenn sie die Anlage zur Transzendenz als zu ihrem Wesen gehörig bezeichnet, wird doch jeder Akt, den sie in Richtung auf das Transzendente setzt, nur kraft der Selbsteröffnung de unendlichen Freiheitsraumes geleistet werden können” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 286).

<sup>67</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 232. “anderseits ist unendliche Freiheit definitionsgemäß frei, sich zu gewähren, sie liegt deshalb nicht im Verfügen der endlichen Freiheit, sie bleibt Gnade: freigeschenktes Einwohnen der unendlichen in der endlichen Freiheit” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 210).

It must therefore be remembered that although the relationship of both freedoms is mutual, it can never become symmetrical. The infinite disproportion has always been, is, and will always be present here, although paradoxically—but only under the above-mentioned conditions—it does not interfere with genuine reciprocity.

These considerations allow Balthasar to understand how it is possible that, on the one hand, infinite freedom can “fit” into finite freedom, and, on the other, finite freedom will not get lost and will not be “crushed,” but on the contrary, it will be able to realize itself and come to its full identity inside infinite freedom:

Thus, finally, it becomes clear why finite freedom can really fulfill itself in infinite freedom and in no other way. If *letting-be* belongs to the nature of infinite freedom—the Father *lets* the Son be consubstantial God, and so forth—there is no danger of finite freedom, which cannot fulfill itself on its own account (because it can neither go back and take possession of its origins nor can it attain its absolute goal by its own power), becoming alienated from itself in the realm of the Infinite.<sup>68</sup>

This does not mean that the paradox has been resolved and the mystery—explored. The paradoxicality of the mutual participation of the two freedoms is irremovable, and the related mystery will remain forever unfathomable. The above considerations convince us, however, that despite all this paradoxicality and mystery, here we are dealing neither with internal contradiction nor with absurdity, but as Balthasar aptly puts it, with a miracle:

Only on the basis of this miracle can finite freedom, endowed with the gift of self, know itself to be addressed as a “thou” and so designate itself an “I” vis-à-vis the Giver. Indeed, it must draw the appropriate conclusion from being thus addressed and go on to call infinite freedom “Thou.”<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 259. “Und damit wird schließlich klar, weshalb endliche Freiheit sich in der unendlichen wirklich erfüllen kann und es nirgends sonst vermag. Wenn das Sein-Lassen zum Wesen der unendlichen Freiheit gehört – der Vater *läßt* den Sohn gleichwesentlicher Gott sein usf. –, dann besteht keinerlei Gefahr, daß die endliche Freiheit, die sich aus sich selbst nicht vollenden kann (weil sie weder ihre Herkunft einzuholen noch ihr absolutes Ziel aus eigenen Kräften zu erreichen vermag), im Raum der Unendlichen sich selbst entfremdet würde” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 235).

<sup>69</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, II, 287. “Nur von diesem Wunder aus kann die zu sich selbst begabte endliche Freiheit such als ein Du angesprochen wissen und dem Begabenden gegenüber als ein Ich bezeichnen. Ja, sie muß aus diesem Angesprochensein die Folgerung ziehen und die unendliche Freiheit ihrerseits mit Du ansprechen” (Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, II/1, 261).

## Conclusion

Henri de Lubac, one of the main precursors of the modern renewal of theological thought, in addition to the postulate to return to the sources and to exhibit a greater sensitivity to the anthropological approach in its relation to the supernatural, also put forward the postulate of recognizing the importance of the phenomenon of paradox in theological research.

The method used in this work, the essence of which is to perceive the paradox and explore the mystery behind it, is an attempt to provide a constructive answer to de Lubac's appeal. This method, combined with the confrontation of Balthasar's thoughts with the reflections of de Lubac and Tischner, has allowed us to obtain a number of conclusions, the most important of which will be briefly summarized below.

In the field of research regarding the concept of finite freedom, the main result concerns a deepened understanding of the essence of the dynamical nature of this freedom in the context of—as postulated by Balthasar—the bipolarity of its structure. This in turn helps to overcome the apparent contradiction between freedom and its limitation (finiteness).

A secondary result, in this respect, pertains to the identification of the ultimate source of finite freedom. Based on Balthasar's and Tischner's reflections one can track down this source directly to infinite freedom by appealing to the protological truth that finite freedom is created in its image and likeness. This allows us to explain the possibility of any manifestation of any kind of freedom in an apparently completely deterministic world.

As for the concept of infinite freedom, it is important to notice the inalienable role of the Christological dimension in order to gain an insight into the reality of this concept, which reveals the inadequacy of purely philosophical considerations (from ancient pagan thought to modern systems based on Hegel's approach). The resulting in-depth analysis of the essence of infinite freedom allows us to shift our cognitive efforts in this field from the aspect of the limitlessness of choice and power to the aspect of total ability and readiness to give oneself to others.

Considering the relationship between both of the two freedoms, a new look at the conditions of the existence of the seemingly impossible non-trivial relationship between finiteness and infinity has been presented in the light of the paradox of the latent and accompanying God. An important element, examined here, is the subtle combination of the gratuity of grace and simultaneous action and latency of infinite freedom with the readiness of finite freedom to open up itself to the paradox of simultaneous poverty and wealth resulting from the encounter.

In this context, the key observation is that the authenticity of reciprocity of this relationship can never be understood in terms of symmetry. One should always remain

aware of the extreme disproportion between both concepts. This in turn explicates the undecidable nature of the paradox associated with it and the unfathomable depth of the mystery hiding behind it. As suggested by Balthasar, the only relevant category in which this relation should be considered is that of a miracle.

## Bibliography

- von Balthasar, H.U., *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics. I. Seeing the Form* (trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 2009).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theodramatik. II. Die Personen des Spiels. 1. Der Mensch in Gott* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1976).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. II. Dramatis Personae. Man in God* (trans. G. Harrison; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1990).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theodramatik. II. Die Personen des Spiels. 2. Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1978).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. III. Dramatis Personae. The Person in Christ* (trans. G. Harrison; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1992).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theodramatik. III. Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1980).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. IV. The Action* (trans. G. Harrison; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1994).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theodramatik. IV. Das Endspiel* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1983).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory. V. The Last Act* (trans. G. Harrison; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1998).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (trans. S. Clements; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1991).
- von Balthasar, H.U., *The Theology of Karl Barth* (trans. E.T. Oakes; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1992).
- Budzik, S., *Dramat odkupienia. Kategorie dramatyczne w teologii na przykładzie R. Girarda, H.U. von Balthasara i R. Schwagera* (Tarnów: Biblos 1997).
- Dadosky, J.D., "The Dialectic of Religious Identity: Lonergan and Balthasar," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 31–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F004056399906000102>.
- Guerriero, E., *Hans Urs von Balthasar. Eine Monographie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes 1993).
- Levering, M., *The Achievement of Hans Urs von Balthasar. An Introduction to His Trilogy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press 2019).
- de Lubac, H., *Méditation sur l'Église* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1985).
- de Lubac, H., *Petite catéchèse sur Nature et Grâce* (Paris: Fayard 1980).
- de Lubac, H., *Paradoxes suivi de Nouveaux paradoxes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1959).
- de Lubac, H., *Paradoxes of Faith* (trans. P. Simon – S. Kreilkamp; San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press 1987).
- de Lubac, H., *Autres Paradoxes* (Namur: Culture et vérité 1994).
- de Lubac, H., *Surnaturel. Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier 1946).

- Lüning P., "Facing the Crucified: the Dialectics of the Analogy in an Ignatian theology of the Cross," *The Heythrop Journal* 50/3 (2009) 425–447. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00433.x>.
- Nichols, A., *A Key to Balthasar. Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2011).
- Piotrowski, E., *Teodramat. Dramatyczna soteriologia Hansa Urso von Balthasara* (WAM: Kraków 1999).
- Prevot, A.L., "Dialectic and Analogy in Balthasar's 'The Metaphysics of the Saints,'" *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 26/3 (2017) 261–277. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/106385121702600302>.
- Pyc, M., *Chrystus: Piękno – Dobro – Prawda. Studium chrystologii Hansa Urso von Balthasara w jej trylogicznym układzie* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM 2002).
- Quash, J.B., "Between the Brutely Given, and the Brutally, Banally Free': Von Balthasar's Theology of Drama in Dialogue with Hegel," *Modern Theology* 13/3 (1997) 293–318. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00042>.
- Stawrowski, Z., "Związek nieskończoności i skończoności w systemie Hegłowskim," *Logos i Ethos* 1 (1992) 47–53.
- Tischner, J., *Filozofia dramatu* (2 ed.; Kraków: Znak 2012).
- Tischner, J., *Ksiądz na manowcach* (2 ed.; Kraków: Znak 2007).
- Tischner, J., *Księżeczka pielgrzyma* (Warszawa: Libellus 1996).
- Tischner, J., *Myślenie według wartości* (6 ed.; Kraków: Znak 2011).
- Tischner, J., *Spór o istnienie człowieka* (2 ed.; Kraków: Znak 2011).
- Urban, M., *Hans Urs von Balthasar wobec idealizmu niemieckiego. Myśl chrześcijańska a refleksja filozoficzna* (Kraków: Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie. Wydawnictwo Naukowe 2017).
- Wołowski, L., "Problem niezależności refleksji dramatycznej J. Tischnera od myśli teodramatycznej Hansa Urso von Balthasara," *Analecta Cracoviensia* 51 (2019) 141–160. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15633/acr.3637>.