

Kenosis vs. La Bella Figura

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Introduction

Beppe Severgnini, an Italian who lived in the United States before moving back to Italy, has recently published *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind*. This book, a kind of counterpart to his earlier *Ciao America: An Italian Discovers the U.S.* (Broadway, 2002), is a droll and wistful appreciation of his native land and the curious and sometimes deleterious emphasis that is everywhere placed on beauty, on looking good and keeping up external appearances, even when the internal realities are often deteriorating.¹

In his important 2004 study *All the Pope's Men*, the veteran Vatican analyst John Allen demonstrated the extent to which the Catholic Church, especially at the centre, remains very Roman and indeed Italian throughout. One crucial component of Italian culture, Allen also tells us, is the emphasis on the *bella figura*, "meaning literally 'beautiful figure,' and translated loosely as the importance of always looking good. The bottom line is that no matter what happens one has to keep up appearances." The *bella figura* is,

¹ Given the emphasis on appearances, Severgnini has admitted that trying to understand what is really going on in Italy is a difficult task. His counsel, when faced with such difficulties, is apt for our purposes here: "if you want to understand Italy, forget the guide books. Study theology." Beppe Severgnini, *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind* (New York: Broadway, 2006), 6.

Allen says, “undeniably influential in Vatican psychology,”² and this is seen in several examples: the reluctance to replace incompetent people or even to criticize their work; the preference for dealing with scandal outside the spotlight; and the fact that “if there’s a choice between doing something quickly and doing it beautifully, beauty is going to beat speed every time.”³

Now beauty, of course, has increasingly been recognized, especially in the last two centuries, as one of the so-called transcendentals capable of revealing God. Dostoyevsky’s famous “aesthetic kerygma” has been given extensive and brilliant reflection in the *magnum opus* of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, and more recently in David Bentley Hart’s *The Beauty of the Infinite*,⁴ Each of these densely argued and immensely learned treatises makes it clear that the neglect of beauty as a category especially in Western theology has had very detrimental consequences.⁵

There is nothing wrong with being concerned about the beautiful, and indeed it has been argued by many that much of what is wrong with the Church in the West today has to do with its lack of attention to beauty, especially liturgical beauty.⁶ Beauty, then, is a gift of and conduit to God, and is not, per se, a problem. The problem, rather, comes when the exploitation of a concern for *la bella figura* has been used to cover up mistakes, justify inaction, or rationalize a refusal to change bad policies. Consider an ecumenically damaging example that has recently generated a great deal of controversy.

² John Allen, *All the Pope’s Men: the Inside Story of How the Vatican Really Thinks* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 100.

³ *Ibid.*, 103-04.

⁴ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982-1991); Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). One must also not overlook the earlier work of Paul Evdokimov, *L’Art de L’Icôn: Théologie de la Beauté* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972).

⁵ For an overview of some of these consequences as well as an introduction to von Balthasar’s thought, see Raymond Gawronski, “The Beauty of the Cross: The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 5 (2002): 185-206.

⁶ See, inter alia, Aidan Nichols, *Looking at the Liturgy. A Critical View of its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), and *Idem.*, *Christendom Awake: On Reenergizing the Church in Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 21-40.

“Patriarch of the West” Abandoned

In March 2006, Rome quietly decided to abandon the title “Patriarch of the West” as it appears in the *Annuario Pontificio*.⁷ This decision was an enormous shock to virtually everyone.⁸ Orthodox reactions, in fact, have been extremely negative. Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev, of the Russian Orthodox Church, was first off the mark to say that

it is not at all clear how the removal of the title could possibly ameliorate Catholic-Orthodox relations. It seems that the omission of the title “Patriarch of the West” is meant to confirm the claim to universal church jurisdiction that is reflected in the pope’s other titles, and if the Orthodox reaction to the gesture will not be positive, it should not be a surprise.⁹

Hilarion went on to say that the now abolished title was one that the Orthodox most clearly recognized. The other titles are the problematic ones: “In this context unacceptable and even scandalous, from the Orthodox point of view, are precisely those titles that remain in the list, i.e. Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church.” The first is unacceptable because “according to the Orthodox teaching, Christ has no “vicar” who would govern the universal Church in his name.” The second “has been criticized in Orthodox polemical literature from Byzantine time onwards.” And the third title,

“supreme pontiff of the Universal Church” points to the pope’s universal jurisdiction which is not and will never be recognized by the Orthodox

⁷ The story was picked up by several electronic news outlets. See, inter alia, the following links, all accessed on March 2 2006: <<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0601225.htm>> <http://ansa.it/main/notizie/awnplus/english/news/2006-03-01_981469.html> <<http://news.scotsman.com/international.cfm?id=315172006>> <<http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=42711>>

⁸ I have elsewhere critically analyzed this decision. See my “On the Patriarchate of the West,” *Ecumenical Trends* 35 (June 2006): 1-7.

⁹ <<http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/14/89.aspx#4>>. Alfeyev’s comments were posted in French and then English, and repeated by some other news agencies including, e.g., Interfax for March 3 2006 at <<http://www.interfax.com/3/135572/news.aspx>>.

Churches. It is precisely this title that should have been dropped first, had the move been motivated by the quest for "ecumenical progress" and desire for amelioration of the Catholic-Orthodox relations.¹⁰

Many of the same arguments were advanced in a letter written on March 17 2006 by Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and all Greece, and in an announcement from Constantinople in June 2006. In the cordial letter of "deep concern" written to Pope Benedict "with the profoundest benevolent respect and in the spirit of fraternal love and mutual concern for the promotion of Christian unity," Archbishop Christodoulos speaks of the "unease of many who feel that by dropping the title of 'Patriarch of the West'" the joint Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, about to begin again in 2006, "will be deprived of a common basis upon which they could build the reunification of our Churches, a reunification that we all desire. For us Orthodox, the Pope of Elder Rome has always been the Patriarch of the West."¹¹ Given this long-standing history and recognition of the pope as patriarch, the archbishop underscores the point that "the title of Patriarch of the West is fundamentally important for the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church," and then goes on to advance the argument that this title is also "important even in terms of the Catholic Church alone" and her polity and structures. The letter concludes by disputing one of the reasons given by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) in its clarification: "the argument that the title hinders the establishment of several patriarchates in the West and therefore should be suppressed is groundless."¹²

In early June 2006, some of these arguments were put forth anew in a declaration from the synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The letter is Protocol 1343 (Dispatch no. 173) and is posted on the official website of the Greek Church: <http://www.ecclesia.gr/English/archbishop/letters/archi_to_benedict.html>.

¹² Ibid.

Constantinople.¹³ This longer, more detailed statement reiterates certain points from the two above-mentioned Orthodox responses, including the point that

the removal of the title "Patriarch of the West" from the Pontifical Yearbook of this year, as well as the retention of the above mentioned titles, have a particular importance for the relations between the Orthodox and the Roman-Catholic Churches, especially now in view of the reopening of the official Theological Dialogue between the two Churches, given that this Theological Dialogue will also deal with the issue of Primacy in the Church.¹⁴

That this title has been abolished while others remain is a "point...of extreme importance to the Orthodox Church"; these titles "create serious difficulties to the Orthodox, given that they are perceived as implying a universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over the entire Church, which is something the Orthodox have never accepted."¹⁵

The statement goes on to note that "of all the titles that are used by the Pope, the only one that goes back to the period of the Undivided Church of the first millennium, and which has been accepted in the conscience of the Orthodox Church is the title of "'Patriarch of the West.'" The statement offers some historical examples of the use of this title and the rationale for it before arguing that "the consciousness of the geographical limits of each ecclesiastical jurisdiction has never ceased to be a basic component of Orthodox ecclesiology."¹⁶ This emphasis on what could be called "sacred geography" is stated differently a little later in the document, where the synod first insists that it would "be unthinkable for the Orthodox ecclesiology to denounce the geographical principle, and to replace it with a 'cultural' one

¹³ See "Announcement of the Chief Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod Regarding the Denouncement by Pope Benedict XVI of Rome of the Title 'Patriarch of the West'" available on the official website of the Ecumenical Patriarch: <<http://www.ec-patr.gr/docdisplay.php?lang=en&id=679&tla=en>>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paragraph no. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no.5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no.2.

in the structure of the Church. The unity of the Church cannot be conceived as a sum of culturally distinct Churches, but as a unity of local, namely geographically determined, Churches." Given such a geographic base,

the removal of the title "Patriarch of the West" must not lead to the absorption of the clearly distinct geographical ecclesiastical "jurisdictions" by a "universal" Church, consisting of Churches which are distinguished on the basis of either "culture" or "confession" or "rite". Even in today's historical circumstances, the one Church must, from an ecclesiological point of view, be considered as a unity of full local Churches.¹⁷

The statement concludes by expressing the hope that, in this year of the recommencement of the official international dialogue, this decision will not jeopardize the progress toward unity: "the Ecumenical Patriarchate expresses its wish and prayer that no further difficulties may be added in the discussion of such a thorny problem, as that of the primacy of the bishop of Rome."¹⁸ In a final twist, the statement concludes by finding it

appropriate to recall the view of Professor Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, published some years ago, that "Rome cannot demand from the East regarding the primacy issue more than what has been expressed and applied during the first millennium". If such a principle is accompanied by an ecclesiology of "koinonia—communion" through placing every aspect of primacy within the context of the synodical structure of the Church, this would greatly facilitate the effort to solve a very serious issue for the unity of the Church of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no.6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Roman Reaction

It is clear, then, that the decision to abolish the title unwittingly unleashed a very great deal of ecumenical anxiety among the Orthodox in particular.²⁰ The Orthodox have made it clear that this decision has major implications for the recently re-commenced dialogue with an agenda of the papacy at the top, and for the relationship as it now exists: the synodical statement argues that “by retaining these titles and discarding the ‘Patriarch of the West’ the term and concept of ‘sister Churches’ between the Roman-Catholic and Orthodox Church becomes hard to use.”²¹

In the face of such strongly argued and detailed criticism, pleading for a reconsideration of the decision, how has Rome reacted? The decision, by deleting the most ecumenically important and recognized of all the papal titles, has clearly been seen as a substantial ecumenical blunder – as not only Orthodox but also Catholic ecumenists have suggested.²² In the face of such a misstep, what has the Roman response been?

The reaction has, I fear, been an embodiment of the concern to preserve *la bella figura* above all. Given very strong (and likely wholly unexpected), and public reactions to the decision, nobody in Rome came out to explain it publicly or, better, to apologize for the abrupt manner of its promulgation and the lack of consultation with ecumenical partners. Instead, Rome cobbled together two responses, both wholly unsatisfactory and

²⁰ For a further, somewhat less sanguine Orthodox reaction, see Michel Stavrou, “L’abandon par Rome du concept de ‘Patriarcat d’Occident’ augure-t-il un meilleur exercice de la primauté universelle?” *Istina* 51 (2006): 19-23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no.5.

²² See, e.g., Michel Dymyd, “Les enjeux de l’abandon du titre de ‘patriarche d’Occident’,” *Istina* 51 (2006): 24-32. Dymyd’s article is the most hopeful of any I have read to date on this issue, and he ends by hopefully sketching out nine possible scenarios whereby Rome’s decision could work for the good of Orthodox-Catholic relations and internal Catholic polity.

thoroughly unconvincing.²³ The first response was posted to the Vatican website in an attempt to justify the decision.²⁴

The second response was a vacuous and formulaic letter of April 12 2006 sent from the papal apartments in response to Archbishop Christodoulos's earlier letter. The letter blithely assured Christodoulos that the pope had "given careful consideration to the observations contained in your letter," and that he had asked "Cardinal Walter Kasper...to make contact with you to explain this decision in more detail." Benedict's letter was posted on the website of the Church of Greece, but has not, to my knowledge, been otherwise published by the Vatican.²⁵ Both this letter and the earlier PCPCU statement give every impression of being ad hoc and hasty justifications of a decision that was itself inadequately considered before being sprung on everyone unaware.

Such responses are not untypical of Rome's *modus operandi*, at least at the lower levels of the Curia. Decisions are summarily and often impersonally promulgated and then obstinately defended in the face not merely of a generic outcry, but of painful reactions and then carefully reasoned counterarguments from that Orthodox Church whom Rome has for decades considered her "sister." Such a way of proceeding is greatly to be regretted in this ecumenical age.

Kenotic Ecumenical Theology

Such a way of proceeding is not only ecumenically infelicitous, but also at odds with a relatively new "school" of theology today. In the last two decades, there has been a growing movement among theologians, ecumenists, and even canonists to understand both the nature and purpose

²³ Elsewhere I analyze in some detail the inadequacies of the PCPCU response. See my "On the Patriarchate of the West," especially pp. 1-2.

²⁴ The statement was issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and was posted in Italian and then French on the Vatican website: <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060322_patriarca-occidente_it.html> (accessed on March 22 2006).

²⁵ See the letter at <<http://www.ecclesia.gr/English/archbishop/letters/benedictus.html>>.

of the Church and of the ecumenical movement as being one of *kenosis*. Such an approach aims to purify the Church by emptying her of all inclination to sinful division and self-aggrandizement, and to encourage Christians to draw closer to one another and to that unity for which we all hope by means of a confession of weakness and admission of faults. Without such confession and purification, the quest for Christian unity will be fruitless.

This approach, in practice, was pioneered in some ways by the late Pope John Paul II and his numerous requests for forgiveness and “healing of memories” over the course of his long pontificate, culminating in the Day of Pardon on the first Sunday of Lent, March 12 2000.²⁶ On a more theoretical level, this understanding of ecumenism in kenotic terms has been developed by such Orthodox theologians as Christos Yannaras²⁷ and John Jillions,²⁸ by such Roman Catholic theologians as Catherine Clifford²⁹ and Robert Kress,³⁰ and by the Jesuit canonist Ladislav Örsy.³¹

An ecclesiology and ecumenism of *kenosis* begins, Yannaras says, with confession. “I dream of an ecumenism which will begin with a confession of

²⁶ Many of these requests have been summed up by Luigi Accattoli, *When A Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpas of John Paul II*, trans. Jordan Aumann (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998). I have elsewhere systematically analyzed these requests in my “On the ‘Healing of Memories:’ An Analysis of the Concept in Papal Documents in Light of Modern Psychotherapy and Recent Ecumenical Statements,” *Eastern Churches Journal* 11 (2004): 59-88.

²⁷ See his “Towards a New Ecumenism,” *Sourozh* 70 (1997): 1-4; it is also available on-line in several places, including http://orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/ecumenical/yannaras_new_ecumenism.htm.

²⁸ See his “Prospects for Catholic-Orthodox Relations: Towards a New Beginning,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 46 (2005): 501-512.

²⁹ “*Kenosis* and the Path to Communion,” *The Jurist* 64 (2004): 21-34. Clifford helpfully documents the extent to which this new kenotic ecclesiology and ecumenism is grounded in *Lumen Gentium* (no. 8) of the Second Vatican Council and indebted to earlier work by the Groupe des Dombes and in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s “Kénose (de l’Eglise)” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974) 8:1705-1712.

³⁰ “Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity: Toward an Ecumenical Perichoresic Kenotic Trinitarian Ontology,” *Dialogue and Alliance* 4 (1990): 66-70.

³¹ See his “Towards Christian Unity through the *Kenosis* of the Churches,” *Ecumenical Trends* 22 (1993): 6-10; “‘*Kenosis*:’ the Door to Christian Unity,” *Origins* 23 (1993): 38-41; and “The Conversion of the Churches: Condition of Unity-A Roman Catholic Perspective,” *America* (30 May 1992): 478-487.

sins on the part of each Church... We are full of faults, full of weaknesses which distort our human nature... I dream of an ecumenism that begins with the voluntary acceptance of that weakness."³² The point of such confession is not, of course, to wallow in guilt or to try and rid ourselves of everything. As Clifford has put it, "when the notion of *kenosis* is applied to the Church, it is not intended to imply any emptying of its *esse*."³³ A kenotic approach, rather, seeks to embody and encourage that "self-emptying...required within the Catholic Church if we are to...grow in communion with other Christian churches."³⁴ Without such a *kenosis*, Clifford, drawing on Johann Adam Möhler, argues that we will continue to suffer from "ecclesial egotism" and ongoing division.³⁵

How could such a kenotic approach to ecumenism and ecclesiology manifest itself in the aftermath of the decision to abandon the title "Patriarch of the West"? There is one seemingly very clear answer to that: Rome could, and I would make bold to insist, *should* simply recognize that a mistake, certainly in method and very arguably in substance, was made with this decision, which it has, upon further consideration of ecumenical arguments and sensitivities, agreed to rescind. For Rome to do that, however, would require setting aside the usual concern for *la bella figura* which, as Severgnini admits, is difficult: "Italians' signature quality – our passion for beauty – is in danger of becoming our number-one defect. All too often, it prevents us from choosing what is good....People still prefer good looks to good answers."³⁶ It seems, given the dearth of serious explanation in answer to the question "Why was the title 'Patriarch of the West' abandoned?" that there is more concern with preserving the *figura* of the Church than anything else. It is rarely easy for one person to admit that a mistake has been made, and it is usually even more difficult for an institution to do so. When that institution happens to be the Catholic Church, the difficulties are only magnified, seemingly.

³² Yannaras, "Towards a New Ecumenism," 4.

³³ Clifford, "*Kenosis* and the Path to Communion," 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁶ Beppe Severgnini, *La Bella Figura*, 5.

These difficulties, let us recall again, are far from insurmountable, and many of the arguments used against such action have been effectively countered by both theologians,³⁷ and then by the innumerable acts of the late Pope John Paul himself.³⁸ To the anxious, and in this instance, incredible argument that the faithful will be scandalized by the Church seemingly reversing herself on a matter pertaining to the papal office, it should be abundantly evident to everyone by now, especially in North America, that it is precisely the *failure* to admit faults, to publicly accept responsibility for them, and to seek to overcome them that does far more damage to the *figura* of the Church. Proceeding thus invariably costs the Church not just more money but also her reputation. Moreover, such a way of dealing with problems is fundamentally at odds with the Church's most central claim that "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). In addition, it should come as some consolation that where hierarchs and other leaders are open in acknowledging faults and publicly seeking to clean up problems, the lay faithful strongly rally around and support such truthfulness in action.

Avery Dulles, in another context that, *mutatis mutandis*, is relevant here, offers an effective rejoinder to the putative concern over scandal by arguing that admitting fault, and reversing course do not constitute "confessions of doctrinal error... The proposal does not call into question the

³⁷ See, inter alia, Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Should the Church Repent?" *First Things* 88 (December 1998): 36-41; Mary Ann Glendon, "Contrition in the Age of Spin Control." *First Things* 77 (November 1997): 10-12; Antonio Maria Sicari, "The Purification of Memory: The 'Narrow Gate' of the Jubilee," *Communio* 27 (2000): 634-42; Robert F. Taft, "The Problem of 'Uniatism' and the 'Healing of Memories: Anamnesis, Not Amnesia,'" *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 41-42 (2000-2001): 155-96; and Patrick Henry, "Reconciling Memories: Building an Ecumenical Future." *Ecumenical Trends* 26 (April 1997): 1-8. In a special way, see the remarkable document of the International Theological Commission, "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past," <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html>.

³⁸ Recall the Day of Pardon in 2000, about which the Office of Papal Liturgical Celebrations issued a document, *First Sunday of Lent "Day of Pardon Presentation,"* <http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/documents/ns_lit_doc_20000312_presentation-day-pardon_en.html>. See also the "Homily of the Holy Father, 'Day of Pardon,'" <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000312_pardon_en.html>.

holiness of the Church or the reliability of its message." Dulles goes on to argue that "while some Catholics are perhaps scandalized by admissions of fault, others are scandalized by the refusal to admit such faults. They reproach their fellow Catholics for what they see as their tendency to justify everything that has been done by their coreligionists, especially by persons purporting to act in the name of the Church."³⁹ (I fall into the latter category on this question of the patriarchal title).

The anxiety about preserving *la bella figura* is not merely sinful or, at the very least, an "occasion of sin," and ecumenically destructive: it is also, as we have seen, increasingly at odds with both the theology and the practice of the Church in the last two decades. Moreover, such a fixation is often highly costly and counter-productive. There is, finally, one other reason why this fixation must be abandoned, and it has been highlighted for us in the work of von Balthasar, to which we turn by way of conclusion.

The simplest problem with a fixation on *la bella figura* is perhaps made clear in the Scholastic aphorism that *pulchritudo est splendor veritatis*.⁴⁰ What is beauty but the definition, the manifestation, the *splendour* of truth? And yet a focus on preserving *la bella figura* often comes at the expense of that truth without which there can be neither freedom in the Church nor life in the ecumenical movement.⁴¹ *La bella figura*, then, is, in addition to all the foregoing reasons, highly dangerous and deceptive because it fails to understand the nature of beauty properly, and it fails to appreciate that confession, contrition, kenosis, and even death often contain and convey a beauty that the world can neither give nor understand. As von Balthasar has put it, beauty "embraces the most abysmal ugliness of sin and hell by virtue of the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into

³⁹ Avery Dulles, "Should the Church Repent," 40.

⁴⁰ An important caution about the "aesthetic movement" in contemporary theology, especially with reference to the Fathers and Aquinas, has been introduced by Daniel B. Gallagher. See his "The Analogy of Beauty and the Limits of Theological Aesthetics," *Theandros: An Online Journal of Orthodox Christian Theology and Philosophy* 3 (2006): <<http://www.theandros.com/beauty.html>>.

⁴¹ As Severgnini, put it, a fixation on *la bella figura* "induces us to confuse what is beautiful with what is good." Beppe Severgnini, *La Bella Figura*, 6.

that divine art for which there is no human analogue."⁴² For this reason, as Jeffery Kay, one of the early commentators on von Balthasar's aesthetics, has said, "[beauty's] appearance is not restricted to "beautiful" forms but can reveal itself in the greatest ugliness....The criterion of the true splendor is the ability to express itself in such ugliness... Out of the smashed shell only divine beauty can emerge like a ripe fruit."⁴³

For Christians who really follow the crucified Christ, *kenosis* is an act of beauty, and the figure who is most *bella* is precisely the crucified one. As Mark Bosco has argued, "it is precisely in brokenness that the Cross is the witness of a kenotic, self-emptying transparency, drawing the beholder up into a hidden Beauty, the self-sacrificing communication of the Absolute."⁴⁴ Is it too much to ask that communications from Rome – as, indeed, across the entire Church and ecumenical movement – give witness to such self-sacrifice and so to the beauty of Him who is also the true and the good, to Him who emptied himself, taking not *la bella figura* as we would understand it, but instead "the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" and becoming "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross?" (Phil. 2: 7-8).

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⁴² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, I: 124.

⁴³ Jeffery Ames Kay, *Theological Aesthetics: The Role of Aesthetics in the Theological Method of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Frankfurt: Herbert Lang Bern, 1975), 11-12.

⁴⁴ Mark Bosco, "Seeing the Glory: Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* through the Lens of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 4 (2001): 39.