

CHAPTER 1

"DER SEELEN WUNDERLICHES BERGWERK"

On the Subterranean and the Speculative

Rainer Maria Rilke's great mythological poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes," from which this chapter's title is drawn, conjures a ghostly scene of the abortive attempt to lead Eurydice through the liminal space between the underworld and the world of the living. As the myth goes, Orpheus cannot contain himself and casts a forbidden backward glance at the two "light-footed" travelers tracking him, and his beloved Eurydice must return with Hermes to Hades.¹ The following conjugation of Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) with several, far from homogenous figures of the nineteenth-century Orthodox Christian "Russian school," specifically Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), and Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), and their primary German Romantic interlocutor, F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), constitutes a subterranean excavation of its own, albeit with hopes of greater success.²

Resonant with Rilke's poetic rendering of the Orpheus myth, this book is likewise an excavation requiring not only a certain degree of coaxing in order to draw out Balthasar's un- or underacknowledged lines of pedigree from these theologians of the Russian diaspora, but also a delicacy in negotiating instances of the shadowy "in-between," whether between form and content, finite and infinite, body and spirit,

time and eternity, life and death, heaven and hell, fidelity to Christian tradition and robust engagement with modernity, and so on. Nor is it irrelevant that the dense symbolic image of the *Bergwerk*, or mine, with which Rilke opens his poem has a long literary heritage in German Romanticism (not least in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play *Das Bergwerk zu Falun*, or again in the tenth of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*) invoking variously the darkness of the psychic unconscious, wisdom, sexuality, the knowledge of history, and the descent into the human soul.³ Finally, construing Balthasar as we hope to do, especially with respect to his interest in rehabilitating a sense of the suppleness and fluidity of tradition, in no small part by his commitment to a dual engagement with the Fathers and the *Zeitgeist*, demands a declared embargo on nostalgic antiquarianism and its death-dealing backward glance.

Though content-rich with respect to the thinkers of the Russian school as well as Schelling, the gravamen of this book is a study of and apologia for Balthasar's own theological method, a task that perhaps ought to be held lightly in keeping with the Balthasarian ethos: "It is not our concern to get a secure place to stand, but rather to get sight of what cannot be securely grasped, and this must remain the event of Jesus Christ; woe to the Christian who would not stand daily speechless before this event! If this event truly is what the church believes, then it can be mastered through no methodology."⁴ Acknowledging with Balthasar that theology ought to resist the mode of the "exact sciences" that could only feign to circumscribe its object, these chapters venture to characterize Balthasar's method as constitutively orthodox, but thoroughly probative, phenomenological, literary-critical, aesthetic-hermeneutic, and—despite his perhaps unjustly earned reputation as arch-*conservateur*—quintessentially non-nostalgic. Balthasar may indeed be operating in a mode of retrieval, but he is a visionary, innovative theologian who is far from retrograde. He is decidedly not a simple repristinator of the Fathers. Acknowledging that the distinction has been somewhat overplayed, it is nevertheless crucial to note here that Balthasar aligns himself first with the Russian school of Soloviev and Bulgakov, which self-consciously engaged modern Western philosophy, rather than the Neopatristic school of Vladimir Lossky

and Georges Florovsky. The term *Russian school* traditionally designates one of the two major trends in Russian dogmatic theology prominent in the Paris émigré community after the Russian Revolution, a mode of theology that, while heartily affirming traditional sources, also sensed a need to go beyond the Fathers in a robust engagement with modern Western philosophy. The other trend, the so-called Neopatristic approach exemplified perhaps best by Florovsky and Lossky, was more straightforwardly a patristic retrieval.⁵ It is thus the definitive burden of this exercise to demonstrate, as evidenced by critical excavation of the Schelling–Russian line, that Balthasar’s theological method is, rather like Origen’s, fundamentally daring and experimental, structurally hospitable to expressly nontheological categories, noncanonical sources, and modes of speculative thinking that probe but, under Balthasar’s scrupulous watch and sense of moderation, do not exceed the elastic boundaries of tradition.

This book proceeds by analysis that is both descriptive and constructive. That is to say, it considers not only Balthasar’s explicit mentions of Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov (which are not on balance numerous), but also constructively analyzes “anonymous” or “subterranean” instances of thematic, theological, and philosophical affinities, filiations, or repetitions, and assesses the principles according to which Balthasar adjudicates, allows, or excludes elements in them. This investigation into what is, for Balthasar, live or dead in the Russians takes place at the following sites of inquiry: (1) beauty and aesthetics, (2) freedom, theogony, myth, and evil, (3) thanatology and traditional eschatology from an anthropological point of view, and (4) apocalyptic Trinitarianism, or what Balthasar calls the “theocentric eschatological horizon.” While it might have been more straightforward to traverse seriatim the thought of each Russian thinker in relation to Balthasar, there are strong aesthetic and substantive grounds for this work’s thematic organization. The thought of Soloviev, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov is intricately related one to the other: quite simply, the method of analysis used here provides the most elegant means not only of presenting a thick cross section of inquiry, but also of indicating at least a provisional genealogy. Comparative studies often swerve too nearly toward overemphasis, either of affinity or difference. This study aims

not simply to catalogue one or the other, but rather comprises an examination of *how* these modes of intersection are modulated, received, changed, corrected, and so on. The working assumption is that, especially for the later Balthasar, Berdyaev almost certainly is postmortem, Soloviev possesses only a relative vitality, and Bulgakov—whose presence in Balthasar's theology is often undocumented but in some instances nearly isomorphic—remains fully viable.⁶

Despite the mining operations that may be required textually, the warrant to investigate the actual, cryptic, and potential dialogue between Balthasar and the thinkers of the Russian school is writ quite large. In a graceful little essay, "The Place of Theology," Balthasar speaks to his preferred method of theological reflection in a manner that seems to cast his lot with the Russian school religious philosophers rather than the Neopatristics: "What is required [in theology] is neither an enthusiastic revival of something or other (for example, the 'Fathers'), nor pure historical research, but rather a kind of Christian humanism that goes to the sources to find what is living and truly original (and not to a school of thought long since dried up) in a spirit of joy and freedom able to weigh the true value of things."⁷ Indeed, Balthasar's impressive command of Western philosophical and cultural tradition, along with a deep retrieval of the classical theological sources, has a strong analogue in the Russian school, which resuscitated Romanticism as the premier instance of modern intellectualism.⁸ Again, it is this shared broadmindedness in navigating between modern cultural and philosophical data and the ancient Christian tradition that brings Balthasar and the Russian school into natural dialogue, specifically with respect to their variously critical reception(s) of German Idealism and Romanticism.

RESISTING RATIONALISM: THE CONTEXT OF NEOSCHOLASTICISM

Balthasar's provocative theological methodology, hospitable to engagement with not only nontheological but also non-Catholic sources, ought to be considered with reference to Neoscholasticism, which,

according to Balthasar and other proponents of *la nouvelle théologie*, was a distortion of the legitimate method of Thomas, characterized by brittleness, dry syllogisms, and a narrow intellectualism that employed an impoverished, reductive, “closed-circle” logic that diminished the glory and mystery of revelation to rationalistic categories.⁹ His almost visceral reaction against this Neoscholastic conceptual rationalism decries the tendency to proceed theologically through an appeal to neutral, abstracted categories rather than the existing biblical, liturgical, mystical, and sacramental data of the living tradition. His intervention is far from shy: “In the end, [the hyperbolic rationalism of Neoscholasticism] leads to Hegel’s God, who is without all mystery: behold the door to atheism.”¹⁰ The problem with Neoscholasticism was that it had lost the shining sense of glory and mystery, the “sensorium for the glory of Creation,” that had enlivened the patristics and the theology of the early and high Middle Ages.¹¹

In his early study of theology, Balthasar found traditional Neoscholasticism arid and stultifying, not only personally—he described his study at this time as “languishing in the desert”¹²—but also with regard to the ways in which the glory and the mystery of divine revelation were depicted so dispassionately. Partially in reaction to this perceived aridity, Balthasar attempted to open up theology by a two-pronged recovery: first—influenced deeply by Henri de Lubac—by the patristic and medieval retrieval of figures such as Maximus the Confessor, Evagrius of Pontus, Bonaventure, Pseudo-Dionysius, and other mystical literature, and second—no doubt influenced at least in part by his early interest and training in German literature—by an appeal to sources that were not properly “theological,” namely art, literature, and theatrical drama. In fact, Balthasar considered certain novelists, playwrights, and poets to be valuable theological sources, equal in importance in their own right to the patristics and scholastics. Moreover, he considered the literature itself to be theological: for Balthasar, the transformative effects of the Incarnation enable the best of human culture to communicate a theological truth of being. In keeping with this twin recovery project, Balthasar completed monographs in patristics (on Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor) and literature (on Georges Bernanos, as well as translations

of works by Charles Péguy, Paul Claudel, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, among others). His lengthy theological trilogy of *The Glory of the Lord*, *Theo-Drama*, and *Theo-Logic* (*Herrlichkeit*, *Theodramatik*, and *Theologik*) corresponds respectively to the three transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth, making use of aesthetic categories and cultural sources of such integrative breadth that de Lubac referred to Balthasar as "perhaps the most cultivated [man] of his time."¹³

Balthasar should thus be broadly landscaped as a certain type of *nouvelle théologie* theologian, informed deeply not only by de Lubac, who provides an antidote to Neoscholasticism by rehabilitating the plurivision of a rediscovered patristic theology, but also by Erich Przywara, who deepens the concept of the *analogia entis*.¹⁴ Balthasar's theological style, consonant with *nouvelle théologie* thinkers and the proponents of the Catholic Tübingen school who influenced them (Johann Adam Möhler's *Die Einheit in der Kirche* in particular), insists that theological speculation and the tradition must be organically integrated.

BALTHASAR AND HIS CRITICS

This judgment of the felicitousness of Balthasar's speculative theological method is by no means the universal opinion. Indeed, instances approaching hagiography notwithstanding, the general reception of Balthasar in the theological academy has been somewhat tepid, prompting Balthasar himself to lament, "So be it; if I have been cast aside as a hopeless conservative by the tribe of the left, then I now know what sort of dung-heap I have been dumped upon by the right."¹⁵ Excavating the buried genealogy of Schelling and the Russians who read him helps to address a number of these issues in critical reception, and to pose and address questions of a more general and methodological nature. In this respect, then, this book functions in two ways: first, negatively, it intervenes in a number of common contemporary criticisms and (mis)interpretations of Balthasar, and second, it makes a number of positive claims about the nature of the Christian theological tradition and the tasks and methods of theology. Attention

to the neglected Schelling–Russian line in Balthasar thus helps to contextualize and make sense of some of the seemingly strange theological claims that he makes—the passive descent into hell on Holy Saturday rooted in the notion of Ur-kenosis, for example, which he imports directly from Bulgakov—and also to construct an interpretation of the dynamic, elastic nature of tradition that encourages a creative theological method.

Reading Balthasar through an excavation of this particular *Bergwerk*, which in its depths has the Russian thinkers and, at even lower strata, Schelling and Jakob Böhme, suggests by what it unearths that certain criticisms of Balthasar’s work may be more superficial than not. First, construing Balthasar as a particular sort of speculative theologian certainly challenges the relatively common notion that Balthasar’s thought typifies a stodgy, backward-looking conservatism. The factors behind Balthasar’s reception in the Catholic theological academy as a “conservative,” “traditionalist,” “restorationist,” or “fideist” theologian have been rehearsed elsewhere.¹⁶ That reception is not surprising, given not only Balthasar’s stance on certain progressive causes, but also the fact that—even as late as his death in 1988—most of his longer, complex theological works (including the majority of the trilogy) remained untranslated while his shorter, controversial, sometimes patently acerbic pieces were available in English and thus more widely read. A close examination of the particular way he sifts through the often-mixed speculative contributions of these Russian thinkers, however, challenges the reading of Balthasar as simply regressive.

While Balthasar’s theology is judged on the one hand to be “hopelessly conservative,” evaluations made on the other hand tend to locate aspects of his thought well beyond the Catholic pale. This category of criticism might best be represented by Alyssa Lyra Pitstick’s rather prosecutorial *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ’s Descent into Hell*, which finds his more speculative contributions so eccentric to traditional Catholicism that they enjoin “a *de facto* rejection of the Catholic Tradition and its authority.”¹⁷ Characterizing a theologian of Balthasar’s sophistication and subtlety as on either the “right” or the “left” is not a particularly constructive enterprise, and furthermore, projects that concern themselves

largely with such rigid classifications are perhaps both spent and mispent. These lines of criticism matter, however, even to theologians not particularly invested in the theological reception of Balthasar, because a broader view of tradition that governs the content of the critique is often latent in them. For instance, Pitstick's dismissal of Balthasar because of his minority speculative view of Christ's *descensus* into hell is connected with her particular construal of the nature of tradition. When considering the assessment of the descent into hell, she writes, "Hence, necessarily either we rely upon Tradition as an infallible guide to revealed truth and upon the ability of reason enlightened by faith to identify that Tradition under the magisterial guidance of the Church's hierarchy—or we *de facto* reject such Tradition in whole or in part. In the case of such rejection, theology becomes subjected to fallen reason's fancy, which inevitably leads to heresy, i.e., the picking and choosing of beliefs in which unaided reason cannot fail to err because the subject matter is beyond its capabilities."¹⁸ For Balthasar and the Russians upon whom he relies, however, tradition is conceived of in far less mechanical, monochromatic terms.

Other forms of critique include those that assert Balthasar is overdetermined by German Idealism, particularly the contribution of Ben Quash, which suggests in Balthasar a thoroughgoing Hegelianism and tendency toward the epical, especially given the formal similarities of their thought.¹⁹ Karl Rahner has similarly registered hesitation with Balthasar's radically kenotic vision of Christology and Trinity, noting that it seems to evoke "a theology of absolute paradox, of Patripassianism, *perhaps even a Schelling-esque projection into God of division, conflict, godlessness and death.*"²⁰ In this book's thick description of Balthasar's adjudications at the various strata of influence vis-à-vis Schelling and the Russians, it will become clear(er) that, though sometimes in close but always corrective proximity, Balthasar is not Hegel, nor is he Schelling.

Another related critique is levied in Karen Kilby's *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (2012), which registers anxieties that Balthasar's theology assumes a "God's eye view" in which everything fits together according to his own sense of fittingness, without giving sufficient attention to epistemological fallibility.²¹ Her text, being intro-

ductory in nature, is deliberately less concerned with genealogy and questions of influence, but this particular criticism can still fall under the general ambit of a comprehensive rationalism (Hegelian or otherwise) that presumes to see and to know too much. According to Kilby, this “God’s eye view” is not simply an unfortunate but occasional lapse, but rather “*the* characteristic mode of his theology.”²² She reads Balthasar’s aesthetic analogy of “seeing the form” as requiring perception of the *totality* of revelation, objecting to any claim to an accomplished perspective of the whole. According to her analysis, the authorial posture Balthasar adopts “presupposes an impossible knowledge” such that even or especially when he indicates otherwise, he is always already “engaged in a performative contradiction.”²³

Because a near-obsession with wholeness is one of the most immediately apparent points of convergence between Schelling, Balthasar, and the Russian religious philosophers, it will be necessary to consider whether or not this posture actually necessitates a “God’s eye view.” The interest in the whole is particularly evident in the Russians after Soloviev, whose spirited advocacy of “all-unity” as the single, indivisible point of integration for all human knowledge and experience—which deeply influenced Berdyaev and Bulgakov and was affirmed heartily by Balthasar—is an appeal to the truth of the whole, or the unity of all things (*vseedinstvo* for the Russians; *Alleinheit* for Schelling).²⁴ This appeal, however, in Balthasar and the Russians is incentivized in no small measure by a shared and determined resistance to the deficiencies of an overly rationalistic and abstracted mode of thinking philosophy or theology. When the notion of *vseedinstvo* appears in Soloviev’s doctoral dissertation, “A Critique of Abstract Principles” (1880), he argues that because abstract principles are, shall we say, “abstracted” from this whole, they have a false character and require an infusion of the unifying divine ground of all being.²⁵ Bulgakov likewise resists abstraction: “Our thought and knowledge always fragment their object, abstract from it its separate sides and thus inevitably take the part for the whole.”²⁶ Berdyaev, though far from affirming Solovievian all-unity full stop, locates multiplicity and division in the (doomed) realm of objectified nature; personal (not monistic) wholeness and integration are the mark of the realm of the spirit. Likewise

for Balthasar, apart from a consideration of the totality of the whole, analysis becomes only a forensic affair. As he puts it, rather colorfully, "We can never again recapture the living totality of form once it has been dissected and sawed into pieces, no matter how informative the conclusions which this anatomy may bring to light. Anatomy can be practiced only on a dead body, since it is opposed to the movement of life and seeks to pass from the whole to its parts and elements."²⁷ Similarly, Balthasar remarks that "there is simply no way to do theology except by repeatedly circling around what is, in fact, always the same totality looked at from different angles. To parcel up theology into isolated tracts is by definition to destroy it."²⁸

Furthermore, the ascription of a status of arch-synthesizer to Balthasar is undercut by the very early expression of Balthasar's theological epistemology in his 1947 *Wahrheit*, which—significantly for establishing a continuity of thought—was reprinted without change in 1985 as volume 1 of *Theo-Logic* and ratified in *Theo-Logic* volumes 2 and 3. Even cursory attention to Balthasar's epistemology indicates a thorough and explicit resistance to any presumption of a "God's eye" view of wholeness. According to *Wahrheit*, the characteristic nature of truth is always the promise of more truth, even ad infinitum; thus it is for Balthasar a "scandal" to foreclose the alethic by making any finite perspective absolute, by "making the fragment self-sufficient to the detriment of the totality."²⁹ No single individual is privy to a view of total truth, which infinitely provides the horizon and background for what are always historically and situationally conditioned partial truths. For Balthasar, finite truth is thoroughly perspectival and symphonic. In his own words, "In no case . . . can a viewpoint afford a comprehensive grasp of the whole, a sort of bird's-eye view of the overall lay of the land."³⁰ Thus, an individual cannot assert any finite truth without acknowledging that it must be supplemented by other perspectives, and one individual's viewpoint can never be made identical with the absolute. Here we see intimations that the fragment is not a lamentable deficit; rather, its embrace has salutary effects. It is meant to disrupt, to unsettle totalizing theological discourse, since it requires the admission that all perspectives are finite and thus partial, even Balthasar's own.

The suggestion that Balthasar is interested in maintaining a vision of the whole, while true, does not necessarily countenance the critique that Balthasar operates according to a kind of naïve, totalizing impulse of systematization run amok. As demonstrated in the following pages, his notion of the whole does not necessarily exclude the notion of the fragment. His interest in an organic wholeness is not of a piece with a (Hegelian) rationalistic philosophy that attempts to fit every element of human experience into a logically necessary grand system. As is evident in his rejection of Neoscholasticism, Balthasar is motivated by his conviction that the “exact sciences” are not at all the appropriate mode of theological reflection. Rather, it is necessary to prescind from the specificity of exact discourse, “which can only pertain to one particular sector of reality, in order to bring the truth of the whole again into view — truth as a transcendental property of Being, truth which is no abstraction, rather *the living bond between God and world*.”³¹ Indeed, Balthasar’s nervousness about the overstepping rationalism of Hegel may even help to explain his somewhat ambiguous gravitation toward Schelling and those Russians influenced by his thought.

WHY SCHELLING?

Schelling—who, like Balthasar and the Russians, had much to say about art, time and eternity, nature, history, freedom and necessity, evil, myth, and eschatology—operates as something of a third premise for this project. Schelling constantly reinvented his philosophy throughout his career, and thus we may contend with many Schellings in subsequent pages. Nonetheless, for Balthasar it is Schelling rather than Hegel who represents the culmination of German Idealism.³² He is not just a stepping-stone on the way from Johann Gottlieb Fichte to Hegel. Schelling functions, arguably, as the “bridge” between Idealism and Catholicism, as well as the “gateway from the Romantic view of art to the Catholic tradition of mysticism and symbol.”³³ Balthasar’s intricate negotiation with aspects of Schelling’s thought, however, has not been treated to the same degree as his engagement with Hegel and Heidegger, and thus warrants particular scholarly attention.³⁴

Balthasar's evaluation of Schelling is critical, but not tantamount to a straightforward and total denunciation. Though his critiques may seem to wound Schelling beyond any kind of theological serviceability, Balthasar's blows ought not to be taken as totally fatal for Schelling. Indeed, in his early *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, Balthasar characterizes Schelling tantalizingly as "an apocalyptic figure for whom all is arranged around revelation, around the disclosure of mystery, around breakthrough into the mysteries of God. From this magical and visionary style, so different from the ascetical Fichte and the cool Hegel, emerges the fact that he is a prophet and a poet."³⁵ The value of this philosophical discourse for Balthasar is not simply in its function as a foil for the proper mode of theologizing responsibly: German Idealism and Romanticism—though far from blameless—have value in themselves particularly as *religious* counterpoints to the predominating rationalism of the (post-)Enlightenment project. For instance, Balthasar lauds the "*religious* force" of a German Idealism that maintains the unity of the beautiful and the religious, a force weighted against Kierkegaard's rejection of aesthetics epitomized in *Either/Or*. Soloviev, with several others, is mentioned approvingly in this context as being representative of the same impulse:

The spirituality of the Christian artists and esthetic philosophers of the last century (from 1860 to the present) is strongly brought out by their preserving a sense of the unity of beauty and religion, art and religion, when they had hardly any support from theology, and notwithstanding the breakdown of the old tradition and the prevalence of materialistic and psychological views incompatible with theirs. In this they were in accord with the original tradition of the West, as well as with the sentiment of the learned in various countries. For behind them lay, despite the solvent effect of Kierkegaard, the religious force of German idealism, of Goethe, Schelling and Novalis, and this exerted its influence on the England of Coleridge, Newman, Thompson and Hopkins, which in turn was connected by hidden but strong ties with the France of Péguy . . . Soloviev in Russia . . . maintain[s] the same general outlook.³⁶

Schelling and Böhme are named right alongside Dante, Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus, Luther, Pascal, Hamann, Kierkegaard, Péguy, Bloy, Bernanos, Soloviev, Hopkins, and Newman, among others, as belonging to the company of those who are representative of a valuable “opposition” movement that demands “an understanding of revelation in the context of the history of the world and the actual present.”³⁷

Further, the rehabilitation of Romanticism—and, more particularly, the Schellingian strand of concrete Idealism as an explicit alternative to Hegel—as a hugely influential philosophical source characterized by freedom, spirit, wholeness, subjectivity, organicity, process, imagination, and life, proved a natural fit for Slavic thinkers intent on opposing Western positivism and rationalism as well as their Catholic counterparts, particularly Johann Sebastian Drey (1777–1853) and his student Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) of the Tübingen school, who likewise engaged Romanticism with Catholic thinking in the early nineteenth century.³⁸ Indeed, an anecdote is reported about literary critic and Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856), who studied with Schelling in Munich, that upon his return to Russia, his wife related to him that the philosophical ideas of Schelling “had long been familiar to her from the works of the Church Fathers,”³⁹ actually prompting Kireevsky to rediscover Orthodoxy. To reiterate, Schelling’s philosophical profile as visionary, dynamic, and organic is attractive to theological discourse not least because it contravenes the dryness of purely rationalistic systems.

It is perhaps precisely the fact that figures such as Drey and Möhler—as well as the Russians—articulated their theology against a backdrop of Romantic philosophy that funds and supports the notion of a living, dynamic tradition that can admit developments without loss of integrity. The crucial role of the language of the “positive” in Schelling⁴⁰ suggests not a reiteration from the archives of the past as a static deposit, but—consonant with the model of the Romantic Catholic Tübingen school—the ongoing and dynamic negotiation between old and new that motivates imaginative theological construction rather than reiterative representation alone. John Thiel suggests that the Romantic paradigm of doing theology is characterized precisely in these terms: that is, it is not mimetic, but a creative construction that,

while faithful to the classical understanding of God as divine Author, relies in large part upon the individual theologian’s talent, authority, and authorship.⁴¹

In the theological appropriation of Romanticism, this negotiation takes place between traditional religious ideas and the ongoing generative force that animates them: thus, religious data, given their peculiarly thick character in terms of both history and existential significance, resist exhaustive logical analysis.⁴² As Paul Valliere rightly notes, the Schellingian philosophical tradition can veer too easily into “a mysticism which dissolves the multiplicity of positivities into a singular Positive [that] defeats the program of positive philosophy as surely as Hegelian rationalism,”⁴³ an ill that can be remedied only by “honoring the concrete idiom in which faith expresses itself, thereby limiting the degree to which dogma can be rationalized.”⁴⁴ To translate this principle into analogous theological terms, we might turn to the notion — associated with John Henry Newman, but appearing earlier and significantly in the work of Drey — of the organic development of doctrine, which allows for the pneumatologically inspired and Christologically constrained evolution of new contributions to established theological concepts.

In Drey’s articulation of the historicity of revelation and the development of doctrine, the authentically living tradition has a “fixed” aspect and a “mobile” aspect,⁴⁵ and both must be attended to with care: neglect of the former is a speculation unmoored and susceptible to heterodoxy, and neglect of the latter is by “hyperorthodoxy” to hazard the hypertrophy of tradition, the hardening of bedrock into slag.⁴⁶ It is clear that Balthasar, as well as Bulgakov, at least peripherally shares Drey’s concerns with respect to the mummification or absolutizing of (particularly specific historical or cultural iterations of) the tradition.⁴⁷ Creative fidelity to tradition for Balthasar is precisely that: creative, even audaciously so. On his own telling,

Being faithful to tradition most definitely does not consist . . . of a literal repetition and transmission of the philosophical and theological theses that one imagines lie hidden in time and in the contingencies of history. Rather, being faithful to tradition consists much

more of imitating our Fathers in the faith with respect to their attitude of intimate reflection and their effort of audacious creation, which are the necessary preludes to true spiritual fidelity. If we study the past, it is not in the hope of drawing from it formulas doomed in advance to sterility or with the intention of readapting out-of-date solutions. We are asking history to teach us the acts and deeds of the Church, who presents her treasure of divine revelation, ever new and ever unexpected, to every generation, and who knows how, in the face of every new problem, to turn the fecundity of the problem to good account with a rigor that never grows weary and a spiritual agility that is never dulled.⁴⁸

In another telling bon mot, Balthasar writes that traditional thought—even that from which conciliar definitions have sprung—is “never a pillow for future thought to rest on”;⁴⁹ rather, the theologian must actively engage it as with a living thing, renewing and moving it forward through diligent efforts to grapple with that which has been handed down, not in cold storage, but as an organism that ought to be tended well and carefully.

However, our interest in inviting Schelling to the theological table and allowing his legacy, albeit greatly domesticated, to stay on (largely under the hospitality of the Russians) requires qualification, as he—both before and after his late-coming theological turn—can be something of an unruly guest. Schelling’s thought contains unequivocally and irremediably dark seeds that run counter to the mainline theological project, not least of which is a deeply rooted materialism and the inheritance of Böhme’s irrational, ungrounded abyss of an originary will.⁵⁰ Schelling’s philosophical aesthetics cannot be thought otherwise than a secular “aesthetic theology,” which cannot be welcomed as it stands as an authentic (and thoroughly Balthasarian) theological aesthetics of “glory.” Moreover, as Cyril O’Regan notes, German Idealism and Romanticism (genetically bound to Böhme) are thoroughly implicated by Balthasar with respect to their latent Gnosticism in his *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*.⁵¹ Balthasar mines German Idealism and Romanticism for possible precious stones (though the rocks fall where they may), and yet he also mimes aspects of them: still,