

Prayer as the Ladder to Heaven: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Trinity and Prayer

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This essay aims to explore the fruitful relationship between the doctrine of the Trinity and the theology of prayer by constructively interpreting Hans Urs von Balthasar's doctrine of prayer within the context of his trinitarian theology. The modern philosophical and theological turn to the human subject has arguably made the investigation of the human side of prayer a main task of understanding prayer.¹ As the pray-er's psychology, the language of prayer and the philosophical implications of prayer have become central issues in modern theories of prayer, God has been improperly marginalized as the passive addressee of prayer, to whom human beings express their desire, wish, and thinking. Although this is a crucial aspect of prayer as the God-human dialogue, this rather simplistic view may risk reducing God as the mirror through which the pray-er views and purifies his/her inner soul, eventually impoverishing both the understanding of God and theology of prayer.

Going against this stream, von Balthasar not only brings prayer back into contact with the doctrine of the Trinity, but also demonstrates that a theology of prayer is the study of God's continuing dealings with humanity and of human beings' participation in God. Unlike a certain type of modern thought which detaches us from the all-embracing context of God's salvific act in history, prayer is now understood as our thinking, practice and existence, placed within and reflected by God's being and act in the world. By putting prayer in a wider discourse on

1. See the following recent works on prayer: M. D. Faber, *The Magic of Prayer: An Introduction to the Psychology of Faith* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); J. L. Barrett, "Petitionary Prayer and the Cognitive Science of Religion," in *Current Approaches in the Cognitive Science of Religion*, ed. Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Veikko Anttonen (New York: Continuum, 2002); Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley ed., *Psychological Perspectives on Prayer: A Reader* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001); Laurence B. Brown ed., *The Human Side of Prayer: the Psychology of Praying* (Birmingham, Ala: Religious Education Pr, 1994).

trinitarianism, von Balthasar questions the conventional perception of prayer as a mere human activity on the one hand, and seeks after a place to think afresh about prayer within the logic and structure of trinitarian theology on the other.

In order to survey von Balthasar's theology of prayer, this essay consists of three sections. First of all, I will begin by introducing von Balthasar's definition of prayer and his view of human praying agency in relation to his favorable interpretation of *analogia entis*. Secondly, I will show how our understanding of prayer can be enriched and widened by investigating his theology of prayer within a more comprehensive background of the triune God's salvific act for us. Thirdly, I will explore the way in which his doctrine of *analogia entis* has produced tantalizing insights into our prayerful response to God in a triadic pattern. By studying the basic presuppositions and spiritual implications of von Balthasar's doctrine of prayer, this essay will illustrate that it is a constructive task of theology to articulate the unique nature, possibility, and benefit of prayer within a broad context of Christian life and of theological discourse.

Humanity as the Womb of the Divine Word

One of the great passions which inspires and animates von Balthasar as a theologian is the growing lack of ability to pray among contemporary Christians. In his book *Prayer*,² von Balthasar's main concern is to explicate the nature and the significance of prayer. It should be noted that his interest in prayer in this book is mainly a contemplative one. One may be wary of the danger of this non-verbal form of prayer, which has no concrete substance.³ However, von Balthasar clearly distinguishes the *objectless* contemplation of the Eastern religions, which is achieved by abstraction from the worldly-objective, from the contemplation of Christianity, which is achieved through the meditation of the living God revealed in the humanity of Christ.⁴ In other words, Christian prayer is a gaze at the Trinity, all three divine Persons, especially the Incarnate Word.

How, then, can finite human beings contemplate the real God despite the qualitative distance between God and them? To answer this

2. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

3. See, for example, Karl Barth's critique of contemplation in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976), 284.

4. See von Balthasar in Angelo Scola, *Test Every Thing: Hold Fast to What is Good – An Interview with Hans Urs von Balthasar*, trans. Maria Shradly (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 27-28.

question, von Balthasar takes analogy as a crucial basis of his theology. This does not mean that he overlooks the depth of human guilt, the gravity of evil and the seriousness of divine judgment upon sinners. Just as God's 'No' to humanity focused on the crucifixion of Jesus serves as the starting point of the early Barth's theology,⁵ so is God's refusal to human beings revealed in the Cross of Christ a central theme in von Balthasar. He contends that there are two different kinds of 'No' in the event of Jesus' crucifixion: "the sinner's 'No' to God and God's 'No' to this refusal."⁶ God's judgment upon human rejection of God is so serious that Jesus himself came to experience God's severe anguish and ruthless judgment.⁷ Despite their tendency to reject God, human beings paradoxically have an eagerness to know God. The finiteness of the world and the infirmity of humanity ironically urge them to seek the ultimate truth which cannot be found within the realm of horizontal history. The nature and the goal of our desire of transcending ourselves, according to von Balthasar, can be properly informed only when it is seen in the light of the doctrine of *analogia entis*. In other words, it is impossible to realize this distance between God and humankind, and our yearning for God, if one does not presuppose a common bond between them.⁸

Von Balthasar constructs a theology of prayer based on this paradoxical nature of human existence: human beings as sinners stand under the law of sin, but they can find the word of God by looking inwardly because it was implanted by God.⁹ Von Balthasar writes:

Man is the creature with a mystery in his heart that is bigger than himself.
He is built like a tabernacle around a most sacred mystery It is

5. See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th rev. ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 38.

6. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us? – Do We Know Him?* trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 35.

7. In von Balthasar's eyes, many theologians have paid too much attention in their doctrine of the Kenosis of the Son of God to the human nature assumed by the Son. Instead, he attempts to examine the significance of the Incarnation for perceiving the mystery of the Trinity and for conceiving of the content of theology. He radically emphasizes Christ's vicarious suffering in sinful humanity's place, seeing the Incarnation as ordered to passion. It results in his strong appeal to Christ's passion, death and descent to hell in nearly every subject of his theology. See, especially, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 11-41, 79-83.

8. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Analogie und Dialektik," *Divus Thomas* 22 (1944): 28.

9. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 233. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 56-58.

already there, its very nature is readiness, receptivity, the will to surrender to what is greater, to acknowledge the deeper truth, to cease hostilities in the face of the more constant love. Certainly, in the sinner, this sanctuary is neglected and forgotten, like an overgrown tomb or an attic choked with rubbish, and it needs an effort – the effort of contemplative prayer – to clean it up and make it habitable for the divine Guest. But the room itself does not need to be built: it is already there and always has been, at the very center of man.¹⁰

In order to illustrate that the divine word is placed and preserved within the person, the above quote introduces spatial metaphors “tabernacle” and “sanctuary.” What is needed is not to build a new place for the word, but to clean up an already-existing room. These spatial metaphors beautifully show that human beings cannot receive the word of God without presupposing an analogy between them.

Besides “tabernacle” and “sanctuary,” the “womb” is another central metaphor von Balthasar uses to explain the importance of analogy in relation to prayer.¹¹ Just as Jesus, who is the Word of God, was conceived in Mary’s womb, so also God implants the divine word within men and women. Just as Mary brought Jesus as the Word of God to fulfillment in her womb, so also Christians bring up the divine word within themselves. Just as Mary constantly communicated with the Word in her womb, pray-ers also listen to and respond to the indwelling word. This metaphor of the womb shows how human beings can communicate with God by answering to the divine word in them, which makes a dialogue between God and them possible.¹² These metaphors clearly demonstrate that the word of God is given by God meaning that God’s word has the initiative. Accordingly, in order to converse with God in God’s language, namely, to pray to God, men and women should first listen to God’s word by opening up their womb to God.¹³

Although von Balthasar underlines the importance of the doctrine of analogy, he suspects that men and women do not have the capacity for interpreting the divine word by themselves, and thus he relates his theology of prayer with the doctrine of the Trinity. For him, the Trinity builds the foundation of prayer within humanity in order to make human prayer possible, and true prayer is based on this gracious work of the three divine Persons. Prayer therefore is conceived as a co-operative action of the praying Christian with the Trinity.

10. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 23.

11. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 27-31.

12. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 14.

13. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Christian Meditation*, trans. Mary T. Skerry (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 7.

Christian Prayer and the Trinity

Borrowing from Kierkegaard's famous expression, von Balthasar is keenly aware of the "infinite qualitative difference" between God as the Wholly Other and the human person as God's creature. Nevertheless, he contends that human beings *can* pray to God and receive God's revelation because three divine Persons play special roles in prayer. This section will examine the way in which von Balthasar argues that the Trinity creates the possibility of prayer and endows human beings the ability to pray.¹⁴

First, God the Father, who is the Creator, gives the Son to human beings and creates an intimate relationship with them in the Son. In traditional dogmatic words, God the Father *destines* human beings for *adoption* as God's own children in and through Christ. To explain this renewed relationship between God and humanity, von Balthasar utilizes the Greek term *parrhesia*.¹⁵ On one hand, the *parrhesia* of God is the Father's making known the wonders of the divine nature and activity, which was concealed to creatures. On the other hand, human beings receive a *parrhesia* from the Father and can obtain the possibility and the ability to pray because of this *parrhesia*. Thus, the notion of *parrhesia* has both an objective and a subjective meaning: God's objective openness to the creature and the creature's opening up of the subjective heart. To illustrate this transformed God-human relationship, von Balthasar quotes Romans 8, where Paul relates the human cry to the Father with the spirit of adoption. Because of his favorable interpretation of *analogia entis*, interestingly, he finds in this text a remarkable idea that "the creature's very existence" is a "latent prayer" to the Father in Christ:¹⁶ our cry to the Father is already our response to God, who elects, justifies and glorifies us in Christ.

Second, Christ, the Son of God, has a twofold motion, which builds the possibility of prayer – from the Father and to the Father. On the one hand, Christ in his incarnation translates the mystery of God into the language of human existence so that the finite human being can perceive God's revelation in history. On the other hand, ascending to the Father in heaven, the Son draws all creatures with him and orients them to the Father.¹⁷ Because of Christ's twofold motion, we can encounter God's revelation and be transfigured into new beings through prayer.

14. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 33.

15. The term *parrhesia* (1Jn 3:21; Heb 3:6) is interpreted as "boldness," "confidence," "openness," "frankness," and "assurance" in English Bible translations.

16. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 44.

17. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 55.

Von Balthasar's theology of Christ's perfect knowledge of humanity, too, explains how the Son creates the possibility of prayer.¹⁸ Christ's immeasurable suffering on the Cross and his dreadful experience of abandonment by the Father made him fully understand the finiteness, sinfulness, and vulnerability of humanity.¹⁹ Christ's perfect knowledge of humanity has the following theological implications.²⁰ One, it enables Christ to be the true judge of and advocate for humanity. As the one who represents the Father, Christ judges human sinfulness. At the same time, as the one who represents human beings, Christ plays an intercessory role for us. Two, in his complete knowledge of humanity, Christ invites us to be united with him. By opening up his wounds in his side and hands, the risen Christ invites human beings to enter his body.²¹ By being incorporated into Christ's body, men and women can receive the body of Christ in the present life. Three, Christ's knowledge of humanity creates the foundation for the human knowledge of God. In Christ's knowledge of humanity, God affirms and chooses us in love. In God's love, human beings can approach the mystery of God. By meditating on Christ's suffering and death in our place, von Balthasar discovers crucial doctrinal elements of the theology of prayer, including Christ's intercession, the transformation of believers, and the creature's participation in God.

Third, the Spirit implants the Word, the seed of the Father, into the human soul, and this activity of the Spirit is the final condition that makes human prayer possible. In the Bible the Spirit has two crucial roles – to deliver God's Word to the world and to translate it for human beings. Just as Christ was conceived by the Spirit in Mary's womb, so also

18. For the further study of critical examination of von Balthasar's doctrine of Christ's death and descent into hell, see Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Alyssa Lyra Pitstick and Edward T. Oakes, "Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy: An Exchange," *First Things*, December 2006, 25-32; "More on Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy," *First Things*, January 2007, 16-19; "Responses to Balthasar, Hell, and Heresy," *First Things*, March 2007, 5-14.

19. For von Balthasar, the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell is not an expression of Jesus' victory over death and evil but a state of utter dereliction and abandonment. He critiques Anselm's and Rahner's doctrine of atonement, in which Jesus reconciles God and humanity in "his entirely guilt-free and spotless self-surrender to God." Conceiving Jesus' death on the Cross in this way, argues von Balthasar, the gravity of human sin and the necessity of divine judgment cannot be sufficiently reflected. See von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us? – Do We Know Him?*, 32.

20. von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us? – Do We Know Him?*, 45-55.

21. von Balthasar, *Does Jesus Know Us? – Do We Know Him?*, 51; *Theo-Drama*, vol. IV, 363.

enters the Word into the human spirit through the work of the Spirit. However, the finite human being cannot understand God's revelation in Christ, making the Spirit's interpretation absolutely necessary.²² Thus, the Spirit's activity cannot be understood independently from the work of Christ: "the sending of the Word of God and the lending of the divine Spirit are only two phrases of a single process in which divine truth and divine life are offered to man."²³ Since the work of Christ and that of the Spirit are two aspects of God's communication to humankind, a prayer inspired by the Spirit is a prayer rooted in God's revelation in Christ; otherwise, it risks being either a spurious or demonic pious activity.²⁴ Here von Balthasar emphasizes the link between the Spirit and the Son in order to avoid the danger of any form of religious enthusiasm or content-less mysticism, but he also underlines the distinctiveness of the Spirit's work. He observes, especially, that Christ's earthly life was led by the Spirit and that Christ prayed to the Father only in and through the Spirit. He writes:

It is the Spirit that gives Jesus his human equipoise, for considering the gigantic dimensions of what he says and does, such equipoise would be impossible apart from the Spirit. Docile to the Spirit he obeys the Father, for the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father: the Spirit brings the Father's will to the Son in a spiritual manner, makes a home for it in him, infuses it into him. But, in obeying, the Son also obeys his own will. This will of his bursts forth from his innermost core, transcending him, transporting and 'in-spiring' him; it both controls him (as the Father's will) and liberates him (as his own rational and personal will).²⁵

This quote shows that the harmony between the will of the Father and the Son was possible during Christ's earthly life because of the Spirit, who holds the Father and the Son together in their separation. Thus, the work of the Spirit cannot be reduced to the work of Christ.

So far we have discussed the way in which the Trinity creates the possibility and the ability of prayer. Von Balthasar further argues that the Trinity is the 'object' of our prayer and that this object is thoroughly "christo-centric." He relates this christo-centric view with the paradoxical nature of every spiritual being as follows: "No relative being is Being, but none is apart from Being, and each only exists in relation and as a pointer to Being."²⁶ There is only one answer to the problem posed by the paradoxical existence of humanity. The eternal Being should disclose

22. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 71.

23. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 68.

24. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 78.

25. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 189.

26. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 157.

its own self in the form of a relative and perceivable being. In other words, gazing at the mystery of the God-Man can provide a way out of the impasse of the finite human existence. Thus not only the divine nature of Christ but also the entire life of Jesus should be regarded as the revelation of God.²⁷ In contemplation, one continually gazes at the humanity of Jesus and then can expand one's contemplation to the Trinity.

Contemplation of Christ's hypostatic union opens up broader dimensions of prayer: since the earthly life of Christ is incomprehensible without considering his flesh and blood, the *sacramental* aspect should be considered as a crucial element of prayer. Thus, the church and ecclesiastical life, in which one constantly contemplates Christ's blood and body in the Eucharist, constitute a crucial context of human prayer to the Trinity. In addition, because all creatures created and loved in Christ will be received by God in Christ's motion of ascending to the Father, the whole world remains an "object of prayerful contemplation."²⁸ In contemplation, therefore, one can realize that the mystery of the Trinity is also revealed through the church and the world.

To conclude, von Balthasar demonstrates that the three divine Persons in the Godhead have specific roles in creating the possibility of human prayer. He epitomizes the three distinctive roles of each divine Person as follows:

There is the Father who predestines and chooses us and adopts us as his children; the Son who interprets the Father to us and gives him to us in his self-surrender unto death and the mystery of the bread; there is the Spirit who implants God's life in our souls and makes it known.²⁹

As God's children we have a capacity and a privilege to pray to God, and in prayer we experience the three divine Persons' works, which finally draw us into the trinitarian life of God. When we pray, moreover, we contemplate on how the church and the whole world disclose the mystery of the triune God. Accordingly, von Balthasar claims that the very possibility of prayer "is founded entirely on the doctrine of the Trinity."³⁰

27. The von Balthasar of *Theo-Logic* also claims that created human nature can show a trinitarian structure. See Hans von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 2, *The Truth of God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 35; *My Work: In Retrospect*, trans. Brian McNeil and Kenneth Batinovich (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 117; *Prayer*, 193.

28. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 63.

29. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 82.

30. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 76.

Human Response to God in a Trinitarian Pattern

As I have discussed above, von Balthasar shows that an analogy between God and humanity is a crucial basis for explicating the God-human relationship and that human prayer is deeply related to the mystery of the Trinity. Based on these two crucial theological stances, he claims that the praying Christian's response to the Trinity also has a triadic structure. Most of all, he presents Mary's response to the revelation of the Trinity as the model for this kind of trinitarian structure of prayer.³¹ In Luke 1:27-38, Mary was addressed by God in trinitarian terms when the angel foretold the birth of Christ. The angel's three greetings (the first indicating the Father, the second the Son and the third the Spirit) are each followed by Mary's three distinctive responses: her first response to the revelation of the Father was alarm and wonder. When she knew that she would conceive the Son of God in her womb, she showed obedience to God. This constitutes her second response. Mary's third response comes when the angel said that the Spirit would overshadow her. Here, she completely consented to God's Word which would become flesh in and from her. What she shows us is that the obedience of the praying believer is the medium through which God's triune nature is revealed.³² Here one can hardly fail to notice a beautiful analogy between the trinitarian revelation of God and the triadic structure of human prayer.

Just as the pray-er's obedience to God discloses the triunity of God, so too the church reflects God's trinitarian revelation. For von Balthasar, the three "pillars of the church" – Peter, John and James – symbolize the church's trinitarian structure.³³ When they went up a mountain to pray and saw Jesus' transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36), what they encountered there was not only the Son, but also the revelation of the triune God. They were overshadowed by the cloud of the Holy Spirit (v. 34), heard the voice of the Father (v. 35), and saw the transfigured Christ. Because they experienced "the trinitarian form of God's entire revela-

31. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 193-197.

32. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 195.

33. According to von Balthasar, just as the Son cannot be known in isolation from the Father and the Spirit, the earthly Jesus should be understood in relation to other people. Accordingly, von Balthasar's ecclesiology pays special attention to Jesus' relation to several key figures in the Gospels, including John the Baptist, Mary, Peter, James, John and Paul. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Office of Peter and the Structure of the Church*, trans. Andrée Emery (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

tion of salvation,”³⁴ the embryonic hierarchical church was initiated on the mountain and drawn into the trinitarian mystery.

Since God discloses God’s triune nature through the church, the medium of the church should also have a threefold form – “the medium of *being*, of *knowledge* and of *love*.”³⁵ First, the church is the medium of “being” since the church is the receptacle and the guardian of the sacraments, in which the mystery of God’s being is transformed into communicable forms. Second, it is the medium of “knowledge,” because God reveals the meaning of the world’s reconciliation with God through the teaching of the church, which includes kerygma, dogma, preaching, institution, theology, spiritual exercise, and personal inspiration. Third, the church is the medium in which the mystery of God is revealed through the “love” of one’s neighbor.³⁶ Just as Christ discloses the meaning of his life through his love of other people, so too should the church mediate the revelation of God through the love of her neighbor. Since the media of being and knowledge point to human beings’ sharing in God’s love with others, brotherly love should be the goal of the church and the last of the transformations of believers. Therefore, prayer not only enriches the God-human relationship, but also makes us thirst for love among human beings.³⁷ A pray-er is not a recluse from the secular world. Rather, each individual prays as a member of the church, for in prayer one can concretize the love of God through the love of a neighbor.

In summary, for von Balthasar, God’s revelation of the triune nature is followed by the transformation of pray-ers, who respond to the Trinity in a triadic pattern. The purpose of the transformation is not to seek one’s own spiritual or moral perfection; rather, the goal and the last stage of the transformation are to love one’s neighbors. Because von Balthasar shows the way in which the transfiguration of humanity and the participation in the Trinity take place in prayer, his view of prayer can be described as the “ladder to heaven.”³⁸ Just as steps are needed to climb up to the top of a ladder, so too is prayer a way through which we ascend from our paradoxical existence to the trinitarian life of God.

Conclusion

This essay has examined von Balthasar’s doctrine of prayer, showing that the triune God is not only the addressee of our prayer but also its true subject. Von Balthasar’s trinitarian theology of prayer offers a

34. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 196.

35. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 211.

36. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 215.

37. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 218-219.

38. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 9.

rich pneumatology, for he posits the priority of the Spirit in our prayerful experience of the Trinity. In his other writings, the Spirit is mainly understood in the sense of the Western tradition—namely as the uniting bond between the Father and the Son.³⁹ In his *Prayer*, however, the Spirit is conceived as the experiential point of entry into the communion of the triune God; just as the human Jesus prays to the Father through the Spirit, so also should a pray-er pray to the triune God through the Spirit.⁴⁰ Accordingly, our prayer to God and our being drawn into the Trinity begin with the distinctive work of the Spirit, for contemplative prayer is never an achievement of human nature but is itself a gift of grace. In other words, the logic of justification is utilized by von Balthasar to illustrate that our prayer becomes a true dialogue with God not by our own pious practice but by God's gracious acceptance of our prayer. Von Balthasar writes:

Our praise, gratitude and worship do not spring solely from our existence.... Our existence itself was only given to us because of a thought in God's mind prior even to that of our existence.... When we contemplate the Word of God, we must let ourselves be gripped by this primary truth, namely, that the whole compact mass of created being and essence and the everyday world we are so familiar with sails like a ship over the fathomless depths of a wholly different element, the only one that is absolute and determining, the boundless love of the Father.... For the relation between God and creature is now seen to depend on the marvel of God's incomprehensible love, and shows him, in setting up this relation, as the Lover absolutely. Then the creature itself is seen as a sustained utterance of prayer; and man only needs to know, in some degree, what he really is, to break spontaneously into prayer.⁴¹

This quote beautifully demonstrates the priority of God's grace over the human effort to pray. By exposing the limitedness and the incapability of humanity, prayer makes us realize the absolute need of the limitless

39. About von Balthasar's pneumatology, see von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. IV, 362-364; *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl, and Werner Löser, trans. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (New York: Cross Road, 1982), 148-154, 177-181. See also Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity," in Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47-49.

40. von Balthasar, *Prayer*, 187-188, 192-197.

41. I chose A. V. Littledale's English translation of von Balthasar's *Prayer* [1961] only for this quote, because Littledale's translation shows the importance of grace in a more poetic way. See von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A. V. Littledale (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 35-36. I owed my renewed attention on Littledale's translation to Edward Oakes. See Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (New York: Continuum, 1994),

grace of God, which alone creates the possibility of prayer in the first place.

As discussed above, one of the distinctive features of von Balthasar's view of prayer lies in his positive interpretation of *analogia entis*, which inspires him to construct a robust trinitarian theology of prayer. Nevertheless, we need to examine critically at least three crucial theological issues, especially from an evangelical theological viewpoint, before concluding this essay. First, his radical emphasis upon God's grace arguably results in an unclear distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate. It is true that his main concern is to show the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity in the practice of prayer, thereby giving priority to the objective basis for prayer. Although one admits with him that God alone creates the possibility of prayer, however, it is important to hold that this view does not – and must not – marginalize the fact that prayer is a human pious act, a practice of faith.

Second, in the light of my first criticism, one must denote that von Balthasar's view of the universality of divine grace, in relation to the doctrine of *analogia entis*, leads to a modern version of universal salvation. Many critics have casted a skeptical eye on him, for he clearly states God's universal saving will and act but does not explicitly clarify that only the believers will be saved.⁴² This universalist tendency can also be found in his theology of prayer, in which every prayer itself is understood in terms of the triune God's gracious acceptance of humanity, and thus human existence itself is defined as a latent prayer. One may grant that his main purpose in his discourse on prayer is not to speculate and determine the scope of salvation, but to ask how a prayerer can be found to be in the Trinity and what the role of prayer is in God's salvific will and act. Nevertheless, his way of structuring and explicating on prayer inevitably invite criticisms and questions concerning whether or not God's sufficient grace is effective to every person.

Third, von Balthasar's deep interest in German Romanticism more or less influences the way in which he utilizes various metaphors in light of *analogia entis*, including the womb of the Word, the tabernacle, the sanctuary, the triadic structure of the embryonic hierarchical church, and others. They are rhetorically appealing, perhaps more to the heart than to the mind, determining the tone of his theological language as descriptive and worshipful, rather than analytical and critical. Despite

124, n35.

42. von Balthasar also offered an extensive study on this theme in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?: With A Short Discourse on Hell*, trans. David Kipp and Lothar Krauth (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). He argues that we cannot know as to whether all will be saved by God, but we can hope and pray for it.

his crucial insights into the analogy of the Trinity, unfortunately, he sometimes seems to treat it as a *principle*. This may be one notable example of the latent risks *analogia entis* entails. As Barth's critique of Thomist ontology shows remarkably, this doctrine risks generalizing the particularity of revelation by trapping God's free relationship with creation in the static structure of metaphysical principles.⁴³ Instead, I suggest, the analogy should be explored in terms of a fellowship of persons, to illustrate, and even justify, the triadic structure of creaturely being and act.

Although there are several critical issues that need further reflection and clarification, von Balthasar's theology of prayer is a remarkable and tantalizing example of situating prayer within a more comprehensive background of the triune God's dealings with creation. In other words, he demonstrates that a theology of prayer is never an isolated theological or spiritual issue; rather the logic, the grammar, and the practice of prayer needs to be associated with the proper context of trinitarianism, because it integrates prayer, the doctrine of God, anthropology, ecclesiology, and ethics together. Prayer cannot be simply reduced to the expression of our desire, emotion, and wishful thinking before God, for it is our conversation with God in and through which God expresses God-self as the gracious language of dialogue. Moreover, we must also conceive of our prayer as a justified language of human person before God in the sense that, by being drawn into God in the Spirit, our fragile language, or even our seemingly impotent silence, serves as a means through which a genuine dialogue between God and us takes place. This rich understanding of prayer reveals that God is "God-for-us," who wishes to listen to our prayer; as "God-with-us," whose incarnation interprets the divine mystery in a palpable form; and as "God-in-us," whose prayer enables us to prayerfully participate in the intra-divine fellowship. Finally, prayer reveals that *this* God can and does make a difference in how we see and experience God and our lives.

43. For further study of *analogia entis*, see the following collected essays from both Catholic and Protestant theologians, Thomas Joseph White, *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

Communion with God as Word-Centered Piety: Exploring the Pastoral Concern and Thought of Matthew Henry (1662-1714)*

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Matthew Henry is most well known for his six-volume *Bible Commentary*,¹ especially in contemporary Evangelical circles. His *Bible Commentary* is still read by many pastors for sermon preparation. Although this *Bible Commentary* is the representative of his life's work, Henry wrote other various works on Christian faith, life, and ministry. However, there has been no major study or critical engagement on Henry's thought except for brief descriptions in dictionaries or in the introductions of republished works by Henry.² These secondary works

* This article is based on the author's dissertation: "Communion With God: Liturgical Resources in the Theology and Practice of Matthew Henry's English Presbyterian Worship" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010).

1. Henry finished his commentaries for Genesis up to Acts before his death. The remaining parts of the New Testament were completed by several ministers based on Henry's Exposition notes. On the specific assistance of these ministers, see John Williams, *Memoirs of the Life, Character, and Writings of the Rev. Matthew Henry (Life of Matthew Henry)* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1828), 308.

2. James Hamilton London, "Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Matthew Henry," in Matthew Henry, *Daily Communion with God; Christianity No Sect; The Sabbath; The Promises of God; The Worth of The Soul* (London: Thomas Nelson, N. D), 4-50; Allan Harman "Introduction," to *Family Religion: Principles for Raising a Godly Family*, 13-26; Ligon Duncan III, "Editor's Introduction" to *A Method for Prayer*, v-viii; James Packer, "Introduction," *The Pleasantness of a Religious Life* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 7-18; Hughes Old, "Matthew Henry," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 521-24; David Wykes, "Matthew Henry," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 582-84; A. W. Wainwright, "Matthew Henry," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 495. For his preaching ministry, see Hughes Old, *The Reading and*

are enough for briefly describing Henry's life and thought but limited to fully figure out his thought on Christian faith and life. Also, considering his influence on Evangelical Christianity, it is very strange to know that there have been no academic debates or critical reflections on Henry's thought in the disciplines of Christian theology and history. So, I would like to lay a foundation for academic and critical engagement on Matthew Henry by spelling out his thought in more detail by examining and analyzing the writings beyond his *Bible Commentary*. In order to figure out Henry's thought on Christian faith and life, this paper premises that Henry was affected by his times and theological concerns: articulating godly life by emphasizing patterned relationship between God and humanity based on the Bible. So, by examining and analyzing his thought on Christian faith and life in his writings, this paper will argue that Henry could be a good historical model of Christian piety on communion with God in daily life based on the Bible.

Henry's Thought: His Works, Themes, and Theological Method

Besides his *Bible Commentary*, for which Evangelical circles know him best, Henry wrote many other books and treatises. He cultivated godly life in himself and others through his writing and preaching ministry. This section will analyze Henry's works and articulate his thought and theological method by analyzing his own writings and sermons.

Henry wrote many works in his plain English style. Many of the works have been revised in modern English. Henry began to publish his works in 1689, two years after being ordained and beginning as a Presbyterian minister. The first publication was "The True Nature of Schism: A Persuasive to Christian Love and Charity (1689)," in which he argued that a schism does not necessarily mean being opposed to orthodox Christianity when defending the Nonconformist position. For the next five years while he concentrated his time and energy on ministry, Henry did not publish any work until 1694. After that he published works regarding piety and ministry. The two volumes of *The Complete*

Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, vol. 5: *Modernism, Pietism, and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 24-33. See also Selwyn Gummer, *Bible Themes from Matthew Henry* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953); Erik Routley, "Charles Wesley and Matthew Henry," *Congregational Quarterly* 33 (October 1955): 345-51; David Crump, "The Preaching of George Whitefield and His Use of Matthew Henry's Commentary," *Crux* 25 (September 1989): 19-28; most recently, Randall Pederson, ed. *Matthew Henry Daily Reading* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Heritage Imprint, 2009).

*Works of Matthew Henry*³ include forty-four of his sermons, treatises, and tracts except for the funeral sermons and biographical writings.

Henry published these works mostly based on his sermons. When he officially began to publish his works in 1698,⁴ he already had been preaching for ten years.⁵ With special concerns, he revised his selected sermons and lectures that were delivered in Chester and other cities from these years. He also added his own brief introduction to the beginning of each work. While indicating the date of publication in the “to the Reader” section, he explained the reason of publication as well, giving a thesis for each work for readers to know what he intended in his published works. In brief, through his published works, Henry attempted to show his thoughts on various issues such as personal piety, ministry, the young generation, and so forth. Henry selected his works in order to show his thought on pietistic and ministerial issues.

Meanwhile, although he selected and published some of his sermons, Henry did not publish all his sermons, and few after him have taken on that task. So it is very difficult to access all of Henry’s sermons. Besides the published sermons in the *Completed Works*, there are not many manuscripts that readers can access. In 2002, Allan Harman edited and published Henry’s unpublished consecutive sermons that were delivered from December 20, 1691, to June 26, 1692, in his book *The Covenant of Grace*. Except for these works, we have only the titles comprising subjects and Scriptures of his sermons for twenty-five years. Tong, as a friend and biographer of Henry, “received [the subjects of sermons] as it was drawn up by [Henry] a little while before he left that place [Chester].”⁶ Williams quoted Tong’s analysis of the subjects that Henry preached upon for twenty-five years.

Henry began a series of topical sermons in July 1687. After then, he followed a certain pattern of subject in his preaching. Based on Wil-

3. Matthew Henry, *The Complete Works of Matthew Henry*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). *The Complete Works* was published in 1979 (1997) and included most of Henry’s works; several works are also published as monographs with an added brief introduction to Henry’s life and thought.

4. *Family Hymns* was published in 1694 with only a brief essay on psalms and revised in 1702 with large additions. Cf. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 224. Also, Henry began his publication of “The Exposition of the Old and New Testament” in November 1704. Cf. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 235.

5. John Williams analyzed the subjects and the Scriptures of Henry’s sermons from 1687 to 1698. See Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 273-79.

6. William Tong, *Account of Life and Death of Mr. Matthew Henry, Minister of the Gospel of Chester, Who Died June 22, 1714 (Account of Life and Death of Matthew Henry)* (London: M. Lawrence, 1716), 101.

liams' analysis,⁷ Henry's preaching topics at Chester for twenty-five years can be summarized in chronological order as follows:

July 1687 – September 1687	A Sinful State
October 1687 – July 1689	Conversion
August 1689 – January 1691	A Well Ordered Conversation
February 1691 – July 1692	The Covenant of Grace (God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the Covenant)
August 1692 – April 1694	Sanctification
May 1694 – December 1695	Worship (Ordinances, Opportunities, Of the Manners, Of the Mediator)
January 1696 – April 1696	Concerning Our Duty to Our Neighbors
May 1696 – May 1698	Reasonableness of Being Truly Religious
June 1698 –December 1712	A Body of Divinity ⁸

In this general pattern of Henry's preaching on the Lord's Day, there are several characteristics of this scheme. Henry approached his preaching ministry thematically. He did not follow the rule of *Lectio Continua* in his preaching. *Lectio Continua* was applied to the expounding of the Scriptures, which was another part of the worship service. He arranged his sermon not as based on the Scriptures but on the subjects. The year of 1698 was crucial for Henry in that he officially began his publications with revising his sermons and lectures. In that year, Henry visited London for the first time since his settlement at Chester. A friend in London encouraged Henry to publish his sermon.⁹ It can be assumed that Henry had a mind to have an affect on other Christians outside Chester through his published work on the synthesized topics. Third, it is certain that Henry was a very organized minister in terms of his preaching ministry. He did not insert any occasional topics into the subject of the normal Lord's Day worship except for the worship services of the sacraments. Moreover, he was very articulate in pursuing a subject by taking it for several months or even a year or longer.

7. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, note F: 273-93; Tong, *Account of the Life and Death of Matthew Henry*, 163-210.

8. Henry began this subject and did not finish it until 1712. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 279.

9. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:96; "It is published at the request of a very worthy friend who heard it preached in London last summer."

The main themes in Henry's works and sermons can be delineated by analyzing his sermon subjects. Henry pursued three important themes: connection between God and humanity, communion with God as a patterned relationship, and the domestic role of religion. The titles in the *Complete Works*, including monographs, present the themes in which Henry was interested. His sermon topics also show that he was concerned with practical aspects for the congregation at Chester.

Henry's sermon subjects begin from the assumption that there is a distance between God and human beings. Human beings are in a "sinful state" and cannot have an appropriate relationship with God. They are fallen and cannot be connected to God. Yet, they can recover their relationship with God by conversion. This conversion does not mean a static state; instead, it leads people into a more developed state by requiring of them "a well ordered conversation." This well-ordered conversation concerns personal piety, transformation of the heart by "God's grace."

Henry further developed from the point of conversion to a patterned relationship: a personal and intimate interaction between humanity and God. Henry treated "a well ordered conversation" under the subject of the covenant of God's grace, which means God's consolation for human beings.¹⁰ Because of God's consolation, he instructed his congregation to put off the old man and put on the new as a subject of sanctification.¹¹ The remaining subjects addressed include worship as a vertical relationship between God and the human, ordinances as that which mediates worship, and horizontal (human) relationships such as one's "duty to neighbors," and the relationship between God and the human under "reasonableness of being truly religious."

Beginning in 1698, Henry systematized all the subjects of sermons he preached in a new order and structure. He did not change the subjects of preaching, but rearranged them in a new way. Based on his eleven years of preaching, he intended a more systematic approach to the close relationship between God and humans. Henry developed so called his systematic theology based on his preaching ministry. His systematic approach is similar to contemporary approaches to systematic theology. In the preaching subjects, he included God, God's Word and Works, Man, Jesus Christ and Redemption, Divine Law, Faith and Repentance,

10. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 275.

11. Henry selected twenty items that need to be changed: pride: humility; passion: meekness; covetousness: contentment; contention: peaceableness; murmuring: patience; melancholy: cheerfulness; vanity: seriousness; uncleanness: chastity; drunkenness: temperance; deceitfulness: honesty; hatred: love; hypocrisy: sincerity; bad discourse: good discourse; bad company: good company; security: watchfulness; slothfulness: diligence; folly: prudence; fear: hope; a life of sense: a life of faith; self: Jesus Christ. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 276-77.

Gospel Ordinances, Church, and Last Things. These themes resemble contemporary Evangelical systematic theology. Systematic doctrines, from Henry's perspective, are not just pedagogical subjects in theological education but real issues for the congregation's patterned relationship to God.

Henry thus emphasized the relationship between humanity and God through his preaching. His preaching subjects were deeply related to the *ordo* of human salvation. The human sinful condition needs to be reconciled to God for the appropriate relationship. By grace, humans can connect all of life to God, which promotes a patterned relationship between God and human without ignoring the relationship between humans and each other. He systematically articulated real ways of connecting the person and God.

On the theme of "Communion with God,"¹² Henry may have been influenced indirectly by John Owen (1616–1683), who was a dissenting Puritan theologian and friend of Philip Henry.¹³ Although there is no record that Henry learned from Owen on the theme of communion of God, it is possible that Henry indirectly took the thought of Owen through his home schooling under his father, Philip Henry.¹⁴ For instance, Owen wrote *Of the Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation* in 1657, and dealt with the communion with God by emphasizing the human's relationship with each person of the Triune God. Henry may have adopted the same wording of "communion with God." However, his emphasis was much more practical than Owen's. For Henry, communion with God basically meant a pattern of relationship between God and the person. Henry identifies communion with God like this: "I am willing to hope . . . that you are come with a pious design, to give glory to God, and to receive grace from him [God], and in both to keep up your communion with him [God]."¹⁵ Henry's various published works reveal his thought on communion with God.

12. William Dyrness articulated a patterned relationship in terms of culture from a Reformed perspective. See William Dyrness, *The Earth Is God's* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997). Also John Owen articulated the concept of communion with the Triune God as a representative thought of Puritan theology.

13. See Matthew Henry, *An Account of the Life and Death of Mr. Philip Henry, Minister of the Gospel, Near Whitchurch in Shropshire* (1712) (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 20.

14. Further work needs to be done in this area. I was not able to discern who Henry read extensively, and this would be an important area of further research.

15. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:199.

Henry developed a method for prayer as a practical way of communion with God. Henry defined prayer as a core way of communion with God: “it is a piece of respect and homage so exactly consonant to the natural ideas which all men have of God, that it is certain those that live without prayer, live without God in the world.”¹⁶ For Henry, the essence of prayer is not so much a petition or request but humble adoration of and thanksgiving to God.¹⁷ When it comes to communion with God, Henry was convinced that “the scripture describes prayer to be our drawing near to God, lifting up our souls to him, pouring out our hearts before him.”¹⁸ Moreover, this prayer as a way of communion with God is at the center of the Christian life.¹⁹ With this conviction, Henry articulated a method of prayer that suggested the sufficiency of the Scriptures in furnishing us for the real practice of prayer. Henry organized his own method of prayer with Scripture expressions in six components: Adoration of God, Confession of Sin, Petition or Supplication, Thanksgiving for Mercies, Intercession, and Conclusion.²⁰ At the same time, he included fourteen examples of scriptural prayers for several occasions at the end of *A Method for Prayer*.

Furthermore, Henry articulated a realistic way of communion with God as a practical guideline. In his book entitled *Daily Communion with God* (1712),²¹ he attempted to develop a way of experiencing God’s presence not only in the acts of ritual but also in common life. His goal was to cultivate godly life in ordinary people. His approach to the pres-

16. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1.

17. Henry’s thought on the essence of prayer was not different from that of Church of England. “The principal kinds of prayer are adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. . . .” See “An Outline of the Faith,” in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ed. Charles Guilbert (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1977), 856: Section of Prayer and Worship. The Puritan came out from the Church of England in order to reform her more strictly according to the Scriptures. So, even though there were struggles between the Puritans and the Church of England in terms of the manner of worship, the Puritan way of prayer was not totally separate from the prayer book of the Church of England (*Book of Common Prayer*). Cf. Paul Rust, *The First of the Puritans and the Book of Common Prayer* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1949).

18. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1.

19. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:1; “A golden thread of heart-prayer must run through the web of the whole Christian life; we must be frequently addressing ourselves to God in short and sudden ejaculations, by which we must keep up our communion with God in providences and common actions, as well as in ordinances and religious services. Thus prayer must be sparsim (a sprinkling of it) in every duty, and our eyes must be ever towards the Lord.”

20. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:4-57, 68-70.

21. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:198-247.

ence of God emphasizes much more time than space. He did not separate holy place from secular place in terms of the presence of God and experience of it. Wherever people stand, according to Henry, they must seek for the presence of God at any time. He clearly categorized every day into three time periods: beginning, spending, and ending. By beginning, spending, and ending every day with God, one can experience communion with God as a patterned relationship. For Henry, the most important thing in human life is to be united with Christ²² by practicing communion every day.

On domestic religious matters, Henry focused on raising a godly family. Henry defined family as the center of religion: “Look upon houses as temples of God, places for worship, and all your possessions as dedicated things, to be used for God’s honor, and not to be alienated or profaned.”²³ Moreover, he assumed that “here [family religion] the reformation must begin.”²⁴ Henry published several works on family religion and stressed the role of family in Christian faith.

Specifically, “the families of Christians should be little churches . . . or wherever we have a house, God should have a church in it.”²⁵ Henry saw the nature of church in the family by saying that “Churches are societies, incorporated for the honor and service of God in Christ, devoted to God, and employed for him; so should our families be.”²⁶ The service and honor of God is at the center of a church in the house. Henry furthermore developed three things necessary for a house to be a church: doctrine, worship, and discipline.²⁷ And, according to Henry, family worship and discipline are based on family doctrine.

Family doctrine is comprised of two parts: reading the Scriptures as a family and catechizing children. Henry emphasized reading the Bible in family worship. This reading was very important for Henry in that

22. “See what need we have of the constant supplies of divine grace, and of a union with Christ, that by faith we may partake of the root and fatness of the good olive continually.” Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:245.

23. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:250-51.

24. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:248.

25. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:249.

26. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:249.

27. Henry applied the necessary conditions of church to family: “where the truths of Christ are professed and taught, the ordinances of Christ administered and observed, and due care taken to put the laws of Christ in execution among all who profess themselves his subjects, and this under the conduct and inspection of a gospel ministry; there is a church. And something answerable to this there must be in our families, to denominate them ‘little churches.’” Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:251.

it led to communion with God.²⁸ Moreover, Henry regarded catechism an essential way of raising children. In his “Sermon on the Catechizing of Youth,”²⁹ Henry explains the nature and principle of catechizing. He also organized *A Scripture Catechism*,³⁰ composed of 107 questions and answers based on the *Westminster Catechism*, and published “A Plain Catechism for Children,” composed of five parts, with a short catechism for the Lord’s Supper. Henry used the method of catechism as a way for parents to teach their children. This way of catechizing is very important in relation to public teaching at church:

Public catechizing will turn to little account without family catechizing. The labor of ministers in instructing youth and feeding the lambs of the flock therefore proves to many labor in vain, because masters of families do not their duty in preparing them for public instruction and examining their improvement by it. As mothers are children’s best nurses, so parents are, or should be, their best teachers.³¹

In this way, parents have a major role in children’s spiritual formation.

Henry also attempted to apply a method of connecting God and humanity to family. As in the connection between God and humans, Henry emphasized the human heart for the house itself. The most important point connecting God and humanity was the heart. The right method of having a church in the house is this: “first set up Christ upon the throne in your hearts, and then set up a church for Christ in your house.”³² As masters of the family, parents who have Christ at their hearts can keep their authority through family worship. For Henry, this family worship was the most important “good work” that needs to be kept up for the family. Henry emphasized the place and importance of family worship in detail:

Would you have your family relations comfortable, your affairs successful, and give an evidence of your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ? Would you live in God’s favor, and die in his favor, and escape that curse which is entailed upon prayerless families? Let religion in the power of it have its due place, that is, the uppermost place in your houses.³³

28. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:252; “When you speak to God by prayer, be willing to hear him speak to you in his word, that there may be a complete communion with you and God.”

29. Henry, *Complete Works* 2:157-73.

30. Henry, *Complete Works*, 2:174-265.

31. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:252-53.

32. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:262.

33. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:263.

Along with communion with God, Henry also emphasized the communion of people as a family. Henry asked people who have a church in their house to “be careful to adorn and beautify it in their conversation.”³⁴ Family worship means not only to pray, read the Scriptures, and sing the psalms, but also to “act under the commanding power and influence of it.”³⁵ Thus, in family worship, real life as a practice of the teaching of worship was very important. Henry also developed the communion of families as domestic churches by advocating that “religious families keep up friendship and fellowship with each other, and as they have opportunity, assist one another in doing good.”³⁶ For Henry, upholding one another between religious families is directly related to God’s glory:

Religious families should greet one another, visit one another, love one another, pray for one another, and as becomes households of faith, do all the good they can one to another, forasmuch as they all meet daily at the same throne of grace, and hope to meet shortly at the same throne of glory, to be no more, as they are now divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel.³⁷

In this way, Henry saw domestic religion at the core of the spiritual formation of each family in terms of constant communion with God.

As I probed in detail above, Henry developed his thought on communion with God as a patterned relationship in daily life mainly through articulating domestic religion. With this theme, he treated various issues in relation to cultivating personal piety. He developed this pious thought through his sermons and lectures. Henry’s published works are based on his sermons and lectures reveal two main characteristics: promoting acquaintance with the Bible and emphasizing the intellectual character of practical applicability.

Henry attempted to promote knowledge of the Bible through his sermons and works. During his twenty-five years of ministry, Henry sought a more thorough acquaintance with the Bible. Tong made this point by commenting how Henry “expected both pleasure and advantage in looking into every part of the Bible, and leading his hearers into a more thorough acquaintance with it.”³⁸ Henry was convinced that the history and doctrine of the Bible contain all the clues for the questions that people have. With this conviction, through his sermons, Henry organized the themes of the Bible into systematic categories such as

34. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:265.

35. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:265.

36. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:267.

37. Henry, *Complete Works*, 1:267.

38. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 293.

God, the human, Christ, the Church, and the last things. Thus, familiarity with the Bible is basic to Henry's method for developing his thought. This method came from his father, Philip Henry. Harman pointed out Philip Henry's influence on Matthew in terms of the familiarity with the Bible:

Matthew must have been very aware himself of advise his father regularly gave to prospective pastors. Students who had gone through their studies at private academies wanted to spend some time with Philip Henry and his family before they entered into the ministry. When they came to stay, what he did was to impress on them the need above all else to be familiar with the text of the Bible. He reminded them of the maxim, *bonus textarius est bonus theologus*, 'the good textual student is a good theologian.'³⁹

According to Old, "the biblical interpretations of Henry are remarkable for their high sense of the authority of Scripture."⁴⁰ Old evaluated Henry's method of interpretation of the Bible as the improving of the biblical imagery by pointing out that "Henry teaches us a great deal about the meaning of Scripture simply by a careful literary analysis of the text and a profound understanding of the literary forms of biblical language."⁴¹ In this way, Henry regarded knowledge of the Bible as the key method in developing his thought about relating people with God.

Moreover, Henry stressed the intellectual character for applying the Scriptures to daily life. He did not attempt to simply develop a theoretical doctrine of the Bible. Instead, he strove to apply all the biblical doctrines to real life in a clear and simple way. In order to do so, Henry articulated the way of instructing with questions. Following his father, he used the edifying method of question and answer. For example, Henry continued to develop catechisms that were composed of questions and answers such as his *A Scripture Catechism* and "A Plain Catechism for Children." Moreover, Henry used a systematic and logical approach in developing his sermons and writings. His preaching was composed of two main parts: doctrine and application. In each sermon, Henry first explored the biblical doctrine on a specific topic and then concluded by suggesting very detailed practical applications for that doctrine. Henry expressed the applications in a pungent and emphatic way.

In the funeral sermon for Matthew Henry, Daniel Williams evaluated his manner of expressions: "his words were decent, though familiar, and his proverbial sentences were contrived to affect, and retain in the

39. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

40. Old, "Matthew Henry," 523.

41. Old, "Matthew Henry," 523.

memory some important truth.”⁴² William Tong also found this quality in Henry: “In his preaching you had a very just and close way of thinking, with the most plain, proper, natural, and easy expression.”⁴³ He furthermore evaluated Henry’s preaching by pointing out that “there is generally something pungent and emphatic in what is put by way of question; it is a pointed way of speaking, that strikes the mind more directly; there is in it an immediate application and appeal to one’s reason and conscience.”⁴⁴

Henry’s method of presenting the Gospel in a logical way presupposes that “there is an intellectual element in presenting the Gospel”⁴⁵ As Harman pointed out, Henry “followed the Puritans in stressing the intellectual character of ministry, both spoken and written.”⁴⁶ Henry learned this Puritan intellectual style through his tutors, Mr. William Turner and Mr. Thomas Doolittle. Mr. Turner “introduced Mr. Matthew Henry into the grammar learning”;⁴⁷ and Henry learned Reformed and Puritan theology through Mr. Doolittle’s Academy in Islington.⁴⁸ Under their influence, Henry developed his own style. Williams commented on his style: “It is to the credit of the works under review, that there is in them all an entire absence of garishness and puerility; they never pander to the odious impertinence of vain, and mere curious speculators; neither are there any meretricious ornaments; instruction is never made contemptible by empty declamation.”⁴⁹ In this way, clear and simple knowledge with an intellectual character constituted Henry’s method of connecting the Bible to real life.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to spell out the thought of Henry by examining his understanding and practice of Christian faith and life and by exploring his theological method of developing Christian faith based on his original works. Henry sought communion with God in daily life as a patterned relationship between God and humanity. With that conviction, Henry endeavored to articulate and develop communion with God in the domestic religion as the main context of spiritual formation. In

42. Daniel Williams, *Funeral Sermon Upon Occasion of the Death of the Reverend Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: W. Wilkins, 1714), 33.

43. William Tong, *Funeral Sermon Preached at Hackney on Occasion of the Much Lamented Death of the Reverend Mr. Matthew Henry* (London: J. Lawrence, 1714), 31.

44. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 293.

45. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

46. Harman, *Family Religion*, 24.

47. Tong, *Account of the Life and Death of Matthew Henry*, 4.

48. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 9-16.

49. Williams, *Life of Matthew Henry*, 249.

order to accomplish his vision of human life as communion with God in the ordinary life, Henry developed his own method of connecting the Scriptures to daily life, which is an appropriate and even relevant resource for contemporary Evangelical spiritual formation.

The themes and method of Henry on Christian faith and life have theological implications for our contemporary Evangelical Christians. Most of all, Henry articulated the integration of the Word and life as foundational to Evangelical principles of spiritual formation. According to Evangelical tradition, the Word is the authentic foundation and guide of all human life. Henry argued that human beings in ordinary life should commune with the Triune God according to the teaching of the Bible. Moreover, Henry emphasized the communal aspect of spiritual formation. For Henry, the family was at the core of spiritual formation. Historically, the persecution under the Act of Uniformity ironically made domestic practice of relationship with God the most important pattern of spiritual formation. By emphasizing domestic context of relationship with God, Henry intended to value the communal aspect of spiritual formation.

However, the themes and theological method of Henry on Christian faith and life should not be the only model that may be applied to contemporary Evangelical Christians. His understanding and practice of Christian life was a contextual application for his own personal life and the congregational situation. At the same time, contemporary Evangelical Christians have encountered some strong influences on their spiritual formation from other cultures and contexts different from those of Henry. Therefore, contemporary Evangelical Christians may benefit by implementing the principle of life from Henry, but should be flexible in adjusting his teaching in order to appropriately develop Evangelical principle of communion with God in our current context.⁵⁰

50. For this contemporary contextualized application of Henry's teaching, more academic and critical evaluations should be worked out in the areas of Christian theology, history, and pastoral ministry.