

**The Avonside Lectures: Intimacy with God**  
**Presented by the Revd Hugh Bowron under the auspices of Theology House**  
**Five Lectures over five successive Fridays from 16 September to 14 October**

1) **Descent into Hell: Barth, Von Balthasar and the breakdown of intimacy** – 16 September

'He descended into hell,' is a brief phrase in the creed we rarely think about. For Karl Barth it became an extended metaphor for his theology of the cross, believing as he did that in the cry of dereliction from the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' the ministry of Jesus had reached its climax and its consummation. For Hans Urs Von Balthasar the descent into hell is an entry point for developing his theology of Holy Saturday, a vital and neglected part of the Holy Week story he felt. This lecture introduces us to Karl Barth and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, and then explains how for them the cross has decisively changed all human reality. In the descent into hell Jesus Christ underwent the second death of separation from God – going to hell on our behalf so that no human being need ever go there.

2) **Rupturing the Trinity or Redefining Intimacy** – 23 September

Summing up Hans Urs Von Balthasar's theology of the cross Gerard O'Hanlon writes, "The entire Trinity is involved in this event of the cross – the Father wants the reconciliation with us which is effected through Christ's death, and whose fruit is the Holy Spirit in us?" In another place he writes, "The cross is the exposed place in which love appears at its most extreme and as most itself?" But the means to bringing about this Trinitarian theology of the cross was Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday, which has attracted a number of powerful criticisms. This lecture assesses the controversies surrounding the Theology of Holy Saturday, and concludes by considering whether Balthasar believed in universal salvation.

3) **Present and future intimacy with God** – 30 September

Karl Barth was adamant that God was not a being – that would buy into Greek metaphysics and give God a frozen and static nature. For him God is the generator of events and happenings. So to become an analogue of Jesus Christ is to witness to him, and to mirror the eventfulness of God. For Balthasar God is the plenitude of being, and without being there is nothing. To receive the gift of God's grace was to receive God himself, and that had to have ontological consequences for human beings. As for heaven, that must amount to being enveloped by, surrounded by, the Trinity, who is full of liveliness. This lecture considers what union with God consists of for those two heavyweights of twentieth century theology. It asks, "What does life with God actually amount to – what is the content on salvation?"

4) **Inclusive intimacy with God: the fate of the unchurched?** – 7 October

As the Vatican 2 Council concluded in 1965 in a general mood of euphoria and optimism one of its theological advisors Karl Rahner began to consider the sombre theological implications of the spread of unbelief and atheism

throughout western society. What was the ultimate destiny of those outside the Church who had never heard an adequate presentation of the gospel, and who tried to live in to the horizon of their possibilities? Out of this staring into the abyss of unbelief came Rahner's notion of the 'Anonymous Christian', together with his thought provoking analysis of how human beings encounter ultimate reality, even when they can't give a name to it. But the 'Anonymous Christian' concept came under sharp attack from Rahner's former theological collaborator Hans Urs Von Balthasar in a controversy that offers much food for thought to the contemporary church and its current mission strategies.

5) **The Spirit of freedom and intimacy: Walter Kasper's Holy Spirit theology** – 14 October

Usually theologians are on the sidelines of the church, only occasionally invited in to offer advice to the central councils of the church. Walter Kasper bucked the trend by moving from being a Professor of Theology to a Diocesan Bishop to the President of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity.

In this lecture we consider his unique theology of the Holy Spirit. How did this theologian, tasked with managing the Vatican's relationship with the Anglican Communion and Judaism, put the Holy Spirit at the centre of his theology?

**Venue** – The St Francis hall, 168 Stanmore Rd

**Time** – 5.30 pm

There is no charge for attending these lectures

For more information about the Avonside lectures e mail Hugh Bowron at [hugh.bowron@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hugh.bowron@xtra.co.nz), or ring 389 6948