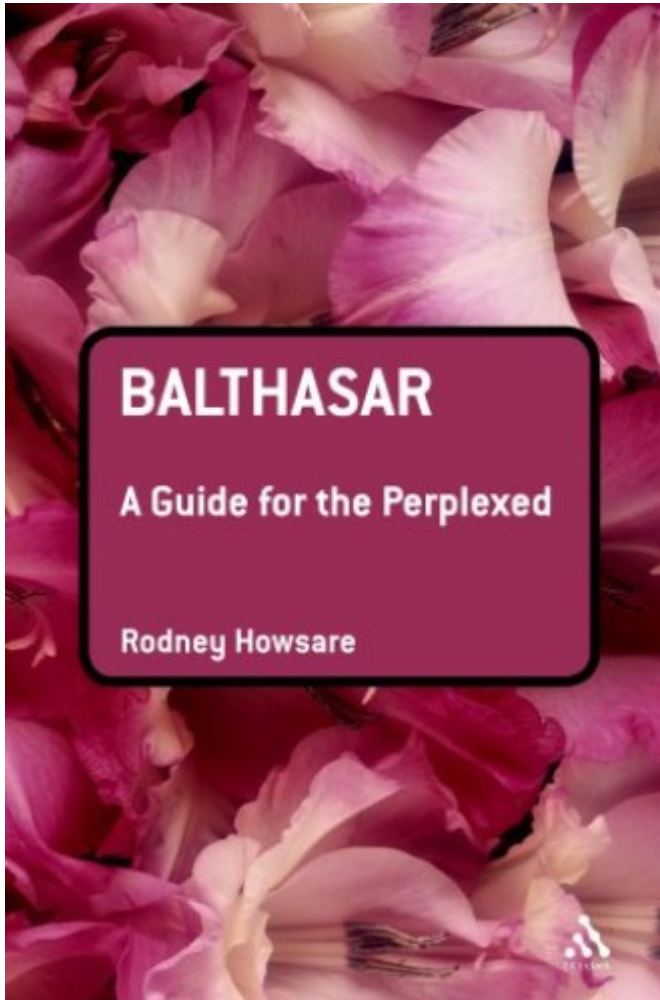


Balthasar

By [David Heim](#)

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In Review



Balthasar

by Rodney Howsare

T & T Clark International

The problem with liberal theology, Protestant or Catholic, says Rodney A. Howsare in *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, is that Christ comes too late into the picture. "If Christ is just the highest example of humanity transcending itself toward God," then he's not really essential to faith. Furthermore, if Christ is just the highest example of humanity, then why, wonders Howsare, was he "so offensive to the most philosophically astute (the Romans) and religiously astute (the officials of the Judaism of Jesus' day)?"

The usual counters to liberal theology run into their own problems, however. If one chooses to stress, as Karl Barth did, the unbridgeable gap between human striving after God and the divine revelation in Christ, then it's hard to explain why human beings would respond to Christ. And if humans without Christ are totally cut off from contact with the divine, how could Jesus have found a serviceable language ready at hand when he came to reveal God? "It seems," observes Howsare, "that Jesus presupposed the natural religiosity of his listeners, even if he challenged that religiosity in significant ways."

These are somewhat passing comments Howsare makes in the course of explaining the vast theological writings of the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, but they indicate why Howsare's book is so valuable: it is in steady conversation with central theological questions. The book is not only a guide (more accessible than most) for those perplexed by Balthasar but a guide for those perplexed by modern theology.

Balthasar, in Howsare's reading, offers a way through the dilemmas of 20th-century theology by way of a Christ-centered affirmation of creation, reason and the philosophical tradition. For Balthasar, says Howsare, "there are no human beings who are not created precisely in Christ" and therefore the movement of human beings toward God "is always undertaken within God's movement toward them in Jesus Christ."