

If your life was a movie, what genre would it be?

If they made a movie about your life, whose point of view would they tell it from? (This question is the premise of the movie, *Letter to a Priest*, which is having its world premiere July 25 at 2pm at World Youth Day 2013 in Rio. A preview trailer is viewable on YouTube.)

You might think your own point of view is the best way to tell your life story. But what about other people? Don't they have a perspective that also helps tell the full story?

The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar famously came up with an amazing analogy to think about salvation. Reflecting



on human history, Balthasar noticed its incredible drama. Hence he developed his notion of the "theater of the world:" *Welttheater* in German, or *theatrum mundi* in Latin, or "global theatre" in my preferred English translation (because of the resonance with Shakespeare).

The idea of the global theatre isn't original to Balthasar. Greek and Roman classical thought had developed the idea of world history as a "play" in which the gods have assigned vari-

ous roles to humans. Human history thereby provides a "spectacle for the gods," who watch and judge their performance.

What Balthasar did was refine this notion of the global theatre in light of what the Bible has to say about God's interaction with the human race. In five volumes, under the title *Theo-Drama*, Balthasar engages in theological reflections that use this analogy to deepen our appreciation of the drama of salvation history.

Balthasar shows the fruitfulness of this approach by highlighting how it helps us think about the unique Christian doctrine of the

Incarnation. "Theo-drama (as distinct from merely human drama) is only possible where 'God', or a 'God', or some accredited representative of God, steps onto the stage of life's play as 'a person' in the action, separate from the other characters," he writes in Volume II.

In the drama of your life, you have a role to play. Just as in our theatrical experience, so too in theology it is important to distinguish the actor from the author and from the director. For example, with regard to the movie *Letter to a Priest*, people can distinguish the author (C.S. Morrissey) from the director (Clayton Richard Long) and from the

actor (Frank Turner, who plays the priest).

If real life, some people are so deluded they might think they are either the author, or the director, of their life story. That this is a delusion becomes clear once you see yourself in relation to all other people and to all of human history. The world doesn't revolve around you. It would be ridiculous for the global theatre to be a story told entirely from your own point of view.

But since "all the world's a stage," as Shakespeare famously recognized, and you are indeed an actor in the drama, then we must still ask who is the author and who is the director. Balthasar

therefore uses his amazing analogy to meditate on the Trinity: God the Father can be thought of as the Author. This means the incarnate Son can be thought of as an actor in the drama, since the Author gives him a unique role, just like the rest of us are given acting roles in the theatre of the world. Each actor is thereby assigned, by the authorship of the Father, an identity on the stage of the global theatre. But the challenge for each actor is, like the Son, to freely and obediently assume the role in which they have been cast.

Just as in our theatrical experience we recognize
See YOUR – Page 19

Your mission is to take up your role

Continued from Page 7

some actors are better than others, so too we can realize we human actors have an amazing freedom, despite the fact actors have to work with pre-assigned roles. The freedom comes in the interpretation of the role pre-assigned by the Author.

Freedom is undeniably on display whenever we see an actor make the most of their role. Lesser actors are enslaved to cliched ways of interpreting roles. Great actors, however, make a role come alive with a uniquely individual interpretation that we find unforgettable and that we therefore forever attach to their person.

But great actors also recognize the need to work with great directors who “breathe life” into the author’s text along with them. Therefore Balthasar completes his analogical reflection on the Trinity by pointing out it is the Holy Spirit who acts as the Director of the drama in the global theatre.

Like a director, the Spirit does not appear on stage. But this means the director has a unique perspective, constantly reminding every-

one of how each role is part of a communal effort. Each role is part of the drama according to the providential will of the Author (the Father), but this willed “text” of the play still has to come alive, and this means that even the smallest assigned role can become truly unforgettable and astonishing, when the director and the actor freely collaborate to achieve the best creative result.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to develop your personality such that you fully take up the role in which you have been cast and to thereby make it your own. As Balthasar helps us understand, the threefold point of view of the Trinity is the best standpoint from which to view the drama of your life.

C.S. Morrissey is an associate professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. The Web site moreC.com/simone links to the movie trailer for “Letter to a Priest” and, as evangelization resources, contains a film study guide and group discussion questions. □