

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

Contemporary theologies of the cross, I

ALL SPECIFICALLY Christian theology and spirituality is refracted, as it were, through the prism of the cross, but in the sixteenth century Luther gave a very precise meaning to the phrase *theologia crucis*, by which he meant that kind of knowledge of God which we receive in contradiction and dialectical knowing. Theologians of glory, he argued, seek to *know* God by intellectual effort and to *please* God by moral and ethical striving. They contemplate the wonders of creation and the 'glory' of men and women made in the image and likeness of their creator. Theologians of the cross, on the other hand, seek to know God *indirectly* in the redemptive mystery where God is revealed in and through the hiddenness, obscurity and suffering of a crucified Christ. God is found in the opposite of that which might be expected. The essence of *metanoia* (conversion) is precisely to 'turn your mind around' and so see that God cannot be 'grasped' or 'merited,' for God's bestowal of grace is always pure gift. Before God we are, and will continue to be, as beggars. And so paradoxically it is those who recognize their own helplessness and powerlessness who really understand the meaning of *sola gratia*.

Conversion is often a movement which begins when a person experiences the pain of contradiction. This is what Luther meant by saying that *only experience makes a theologian*. A theology of the cross is forged in personal and existential terms. In the midst of acute anguish (*Anfechtung*) the Christian asks 'What does it *mean* to have a God?' The dynamic of the experience of the cross moves from reversal, through the pain of contradiction, to the active 'reception' of such contradiction because it has become a new way of knowing God in the darkness. Anguish is transformed into the certainty that God's love can conquer darkness. We give thanks for the discovery that the ground of our being, that in which we ultimately *trust*, is indeed God alone. Luther's theology of the cross turns out to be a paschal symphony in four movements: reversal, contradiction, transformation, thanksiving. If 'courage is grace under pressure' (Hemingway) this is the particular quality of the grace of the cross.

A theology of the cross today

The historical context of Luther's experiential theology of the cross can never be ours. The focus of much contemporary theology has shifted from 'justification through faith alone' to that 'faith which does justice'. Yet Luther's theology of the cross is paradigmatic: in our own century it

has been 'retrieved' and applied to Christians living and suffering in very different circumstances of time and place. The underlying reasons for this are very interesting. The intellectual 'shaking of the foundations' (Tillich) the challenge of the 'death of God' experienced as the Good Friday of the speculative mind (Hegel), have provided the shape or form for a 'crucified theology' (Rahner) one in which the certainties and self-reliance of an overly confident Christianity have been replaced by a theology which admits that it does not know all the answers and which proceeds from a certain powerlessness. The concrete historical events and developments of the twentieth century have further undermined our human self-confidence. Two major world wars, the Jewish Holocaust, Hiroshima and the threat of a future nuclear holocaust, have altered our expectations about the very survival of humankind. Science and technology have failed to solve the problems of hunger, poverty and the exploitation of the earth's resources. Luther's personal and existential question 'What does it *mean* to have a God?' has been asked over and over again vis-à-vis the hells of modern existence. Is God really there in the devastation and horror of urban terrorism or inner city deprivation? What does it *mean* to speak of redemption in Christ when faced with famine in Ethiopia, or torture in Chile, or a nuclear disaster in Chernobyl? All theology today has to be articulated from within the collective *Anfechtung* of our modern global village.

An impressive number of twentieth century theologians could be said to have a distinctive theology of the cross.¹ This article will approach contemporary reflection on the cross in two ways. Part one will consider the paschal mystery in the thought of five contemporary theologians: Hans Urs von Balthasar (b. 1905), Karl Rahner (1904-84), Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1928), Edward Schillebeeckx (b. 1914), and Jon Sobrino (b. 1938). All these theologians would share Moltmann's fear that theology will remain 'talk about' the cross unless firmly rooted in 'experience of' the cross. So part two of this article will pay particular attention to those who experience the sufferings of this present time. It will explore some sources for a theology of the cross articulated from the 'underside of history'. For a 'history of glory' must also give way to a 'history of the cross' as the foundation for a genuinely *historical* theology of the cross.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Hans Urs von Balthasar is the most distinguished Catholic exponent of a *theologia gloria crucis*. He has deliberately set out to write a theology of glory (*Herrlichkeit*) within the great tradition of Christian humanism. However his rich *analogical* theology contains within it a *dialectic* of the cross: for the glory of God is most fully revealed in the descent of the Son into suffering, death and the passivity of the grave, that which is the

kenosis of all beauty. 'God's splendour . . . reveals and authenticates itself precisely in its own apparent antithesis.'²

Balthasar's *opus magnum* is a great triptych in which the whole of theology is viewed successively under the aspects of beauty, goodness and truth. The first panel *The glory of the Lord: a theological aesthetic*³ is an invitation to look at theology under the sign of beauty and to contemplate Jesus Christ, Icon of the unseen God. The act of faith begins in wonder and contemplation but must move into decision and deed. The central panel of the triptych is *Theo-Dramatics*⁴ in which Jesus Christ, the Glory of God enters the world stage and engages in the drama of human history. The third and final panel *Theo-Logics*⁵ is a philosophical reflection on parts one and two, but now under the sign of truth. How can God's dramatic intervention into human history be transposed into human words so that it can be truthfully proclaimed and understood in succeeding generations? The form of Balthasar's tripartite theology is itself a classic of the paschal imagination: the glory of God (beauty) which is also our justification (goodness) and our guarantor of truth.⁶

Balthasar's theology of the cross is most precisely focused in *Theodramatik* II/2 and III, and in an extended essay *Mysterium pascale*⁷ in which he uses the *Triduum mortis* (Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday), as the dramatic backcloth for his thought. As the drama unfolds the human form of the obedient Son, broken in death, reveals *both* the glory of the unseen God *and* the depth of the sinful human condition. The form of the crucified one reveals the very nature of the Triune God, for the being of God, Father, Son and Spirit, is structured in and by selfless love, by 'holding-onto-nothing for oneself'. 'The Son lays bare the heart of the Father as he becomes the servant of all and breathes into the world his Spirit of service and of the last place.'⁸

But the drama of the cross is also one of separation-in-unity. This is the context in which the word must be saved. The cross reveals the distance of the Son, who has gone into a far country (Lk 15,13) and become sin for our sakes (2 Cor 5,21). In the passion the Trinity is 'distended' and 'distorted' into the relationship of judge (father) to sinner (son). The Son utters his cry of abandonment (Mk 15,34) and the Father does not intervene to rescue him from a sinner's death. The Spirit permits this 'hiatus', this distance and darkness between Father and Son. Every other human darkness, separation and abandonment can only happen within this separation. Every possible drama between God and the world is here included or rather surpassed. Balthasar struggles to articulate the abyss of sin. (Though he rarely mentions it specifically, Balthasar was deeply affected by the Jewish Holocaust [1935-45], and by the evil perpetrated in Auschwitz, Treblinka and elsewhere.) Jesus enters into the situation of those who reject God's offer of life. The sin of the whole of human history is burned up in his love, or absorbed by him as by a

sponge. The tragic depths of human iniquity and the magnitude of God's saving action are such that only the radical and drastic language of sacrifice and substitution, of the blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Apoc 3,28), can begin to convey the reality of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Beyond the freely chosen death of Good Friday lies the passivity of the grave. Balthasar has developed a theology of Holy Saturday for which he is indebted to the mystic Adrienne von Speyer. On the cross Jesus *actively* surrendered to his Father's will; in death he is powerless, passive and silent. To be in hell is to be cut off from human life and from God. In traditional iconography Jesus descends into hell as a victor who leads the just in a triumphal procession to heaven. For Balthasar Jesus's descent into hell means that he enters into the aloneness and godforsakenness of the sinner who has chosen self rather than God. Hell is the supreme consequence of human 'freedom', of those who have said 'no' to God's offer of life. Here the word of God is passive and silent, incapable even of preaching a sermon to the dead. Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday carries with it the implicit hope that even the depths of our self-made hells are not beyond the reach of God's redemptive love—if we would but respond.

The resurrection is for Balthasar, as for Barth, the *revelation* of what has already been achieved on the cross and by the descent into hell.

Where did I triumph if not on the cross? . . . Do you believe that it was only later—three days later—that I recovered from my death and climbed laboriously from the pit of Hades to appear among you again? Look . . . my cross is my salvation, my death is my victory, my darkness is light . . . In the cross was Easter, In death the grave of the world was burst open, In the leap into the void was the ascension into heaven.⁹

The salvation effected by the paschal mystery is only truly completed when it penetrates and is 'received' into the hearts of men and women. This the work of the Spirit: the configuration of the redeemed Christian to the crucified and risen Lord. Balthasar feels that much of modern theology is not targeted on the centre/the heart. The crucified Lord reveals the *heart* of the Father: the *Triduum mortis* is at the *heart* of the world because there divine love engages with the full reality of human freedom. History is the apocalypse (unveiling) of the human spirit's decision for or against God. The *heart* is therefore the seat of decision and is the primary locus of the divine/human encounter. It is the free thinking spirit which makes history: but a true freedom is realized in selfless giving. For the paradox of *analogia libertas* is that 'created freedom is most fully realized the more deeply it gives itself up to uncreated freedom'.¹⁰

Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner's repeated concern has been to address his questions from within the cultural and historical experience of human beings, in particular from within the intellectual climate of unbelief in post-Enlightenment Europe. More than most contemporary theologians he has wrestled with the fact that millions of people before and after Christ have never heard of the gospel. If it is God's will that all should be saved, then God's universal offer of salvation must be *implicit* in the way ordinary people experience their humanness. Salvation must be co-extensive with world history. It is within these broader perspectives that Rahner locates God's unique, definitive and *explicit* offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. He is the *Absolute Saviour*, the one who embodies *both* the human quest for God, and God's definitive self-communication to humankind. The human person's basic openness to God is taken up dialectically in grace as the salvific self-bestowal of God's own life.¹¹

Rahner has been strongly criticized by Balthasar, firstly because Rahner's anthropology seems to control his theology, rather than the opposite; secondly because he seems to see Christ as the *fulfilment* of human potential and not as one who reveals the radical sinfulness of the human situation; thirdly Rahner lacks a theology of the cross because the cross would not appear to be central or even necessary to his theological system. A recent writer has suggested that the heart of the difference between the two men 'seems to be that Rahner thinks of human frustration in terms of incompleteness, Balthasar in terms of tragedy'.¹²

Rahner's incarnational theology is sensitive to the presence of God's patient Word at work within history and human freedom, and to the essential goodness of graced creation. However in his later years (1974-84), his theology came to be increasingly focused on the cross and on the more negative themes of Christian living. The success of *Foundations of Christian faith* has tended to divert attention from other important writings of this period in which his theology of the cross is more evident. 'Each year more acutely aware of his own mortality he speaks of the cross of Christ with new urgency and confesses that he finds this a wintry time both for Church and society.'¹³ Increasingly he came to stress that a theology of glory could be accepted 'only to the extent that it continually returns us in practice to a theology of the cross'.¹⁴

For all its apparent complexity Rahner's central theological theme is very simple: all human persons live in the presence of God as holy mystery and are created in freedom as 'open' to this mystery. Focusing on contemporary interest in our ability to 'become ourselves in freedom', Rahner sees life as 'open to unlimited future'. We have the capacity to make, or unmake ourselves as persons through innumerable choices of everyday life. For Rahner all human freedom is fundamentally an option for or against God's universal offer of *grace-as-becoming*. At certain key

moments in our life—commitment, bereavement, failure—the need to make an option is clear or unavoidable. Rahner speaks of times of ‘radical unfamiliarity’ when we feel we are ‘falling into an abyss of uncertainty’. The ultimate and extreme experience of negativity is death. Death would appear to be the end of all human hope of future. There is a radical contradiction between the human will-to-future and the inevitability of death. In a sense all human history is ‘crucified’ through death.

The God who creates us in freedom, open to future, yet in the present dispensation doomed to die, drew near to us and entered our human history. In the person of Jesus Christ, God’s offer of grace-as-becoming was most fully and completely realized. But Jesus Christ is also the sign of God’s desire to communicate his saving love to us. Jesus overcame the negativity of death and the hopelessness of the human condition.

Rahner’s most original contribution has been his insistence that a theology of death was needed in order to explicate God’s saving work. Death is life’s basic option. According to Rahner the human process of dying is the time during which a person either surrenders to the unknown, the mystery, which has brought him/her to this stage of life, *or* the person refuses to trust the darkness. Paradoxically, it is by letting go of control that an individual says ‘yes’ to self as subject. So the *passivity* of the act of dying can be *actively* assented to in freedom. According to Rahner the story of the cross ‘is the narrative of one man’s acceptance of himself as person’.¹⁵ Jesus’s death focused the meaning of his whole life. It was not an inevitable experience he had to undergo but one into which he actively entered. The crucifixion of Jesus manifests his ‘yes’ to the darkness which surrounded Calvary.¹⁶ The political causes of his death are important because they arose as an inevitable consequence of his mission. But the *theologically significant point is his free acceptance of death itself*. Jesus died in solidarity with all human death, and henceforth death is no longer the end of history but the event in which history transcends itself into the unlimited freedom of God.¹⁷ This is death *into* resurrection, a movement through death into God’s new life of freedom.

Rahner stresses that *because* God wills salvation Jesus died and rose again, not vice versa. God is not transformed from a God of anger and justice into a God of mercy because of the cross. Thus Rahner is wary of using the language of sacrifice or satisfaction because it might imply an act calculated to change God’s attitude towards us, rather than being itself an effect of God’s love.

The Christian is one who *explicitly* places God at the centre of his/her free existence. But human freedom also meets inevitable disappointment, sickness, the diminishment of old age, and death. ‘The cross remains erected over history. Even within the world, in fact, ascents are always paid for by falls.’¹⁸ In addition the Christian has to bear the cross of unbelief both within and without self. It is the crucified and risen Lord,

present in his people, who can communicate courage to *be*, and to *become*, within the struggles of this present time. Rahner, therefore, would not say with Luther: 'The cross only is my theology'. His extensive and inclusive theology approximates more to the ignatian 'finding God in all things' whether affirmative or negative.

Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann's theology has been deeply affected by his experience of growing up in Nazi Germany, his time as a prisoner of war in England, and his return to a defeated Germany after the war.

Since I first studied theology, I have been concerned with the theology of the cross . . . Scattered and broken, the survivors of my generation were then returning from the camps and hospitals to the lecture room. A theology which did not speak of God in the sight of the one who was abandoned and crucified would have nothing to say to us then.¹⁹

Moltmann has stressed the need to recover the sense of the harsh reality of the cross of Christ. 'The God who was crucified died not between two candles on an altar, but between two thieves in the place of the skull.'²⁰ The long history of human suffering is focused in the cry of Jesus from the cross, which forces us to consider whether God is present or absent in his suffering, or in any human suffering. 'Either Jesus abandoned by God is the end of all theology or else he is the beginning of a specifically Christian life and theology which is both creative and liberative.'²¹

Moltmann has given us an aesthetical guide to the form of his theology. For most of his major writings he has worked with a painting in front of him which encapsulated a key idea. Two works, and so two pictures, have particular relevance for his theology of the cross. For *The crucified God* he chose Chagall's *Crucifixion in yellow*, showing the figure of Christ 'in an apocalyptic situation: people sinking into the sea, people homeless and in flight . . . It symbolises the cross on the horizon of the world'.²² For the *Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, he chose Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Trinity (c. 1450), symbolising the 'open circle' of the three persons of the Trinity in free and loving 'inclination towards one another'.

The chalice on the table points to the surrender of the Son on Golgotha. Just as the chalice stands at the centre of the table round which the three persons are sitting, so the cross of the Son stands from eternity in the centre of the Trinity.²³

Trinity—cross—a world in need of redemption: these form three inseparable themes in Moltmann's theology.

Moltmann sees the death of Jesus 'not as an event between man and man, but primarily as an event within the Trinity between Jesus and his Father, an event from which the Spirit proceeds'.²⁴ The theologically significant moment in this Trinitarian passion drama is that Jesus was forsaken and abandoned by his Father, the one in whom he totally trusted (Mk 15,34). Not only did the Son *surrender* himself to the will of his Father, but the Father also *surrendered* his beloved Son to death on a cross (Gal 2,20; Rom 8,32). At Jesus's death there was a sundering of the Father/Son relationship which caused both to suffer though in different ways. There was a dichotomy in God expressed as distancing-in-nearness or union-in-pain. The Son died in god-forsakenness, bearing the evil of the human condition. The compassionate Father suffered because he 'lost' his Son for our sakes on the cross. From this *mutual surrender* in the Spirit, the Spirit was released as the power and force of God in the world, accepting the poor, the rejected, the broken-hearted, the god-forsaken. The crucified Jesus becomes 'God's eternal signature in the world'. Unlike the power of the Caesars established and sustained by force, the power of the Crucified One was established in a moment of absolute and total self-abandonment on the cross.

Moltmann wishes to go even further than Barth in 'etching the concept of suffering into the being of God'. The traditional image of God as remote and impassible, incapable of suffering and so of that vulnerability which is part of genuine love, is at the root of an atheistic rejection of such a God today. Aware that 'only a suffering God can help' (Bonhoeffer), Moltmann struggles to articulate God's compassionate involvement with the pain of the world. When he speaks of the suffering of God, it is the suffering of love, not suffering as deficiency of being or privation of good. Yet an empathetic God is not enough either. The triune God vis-à-vis the world must somehow be 'constituted in suffering as well as joy'.²⁵ With the surrender of the Son to death on the cross the endless suffering of God begins. 'As evil that has been overcome it is integrated into the being of God.'²⁶ The resurrection brings something new for God as well as for us: 'The Father has become another through his Son's selfgiving and his Son has become another through his experience of suffering in the world'.²⁷

In Moltmann's theology the double event of death/resurrection is so structured that each part is dependent on the other for its full meaning: this event is the resurrection of the crucified Christ *or* the cross of the risen Jesus. Cross without resurrection is merely tragic; resurrection without cross is illusory. Furthermore the historical Jesus cannot be separated from the Christ of faith. The Church is born from the pierced side of Christ in the power of the Spirit (Jn 19,34) and so has its true being, its authentic centre, in the cross. But it lives in the time of the resurrection. Christian ministry is a continuation of the ministry of the

Crucified One. In the power of the Spirit the Church exercises a ministry of liberation, but through self-abandonment. In the power of the Spirit the Christian can be liberated from a personal drive to sin, from the idols of wealth and power, and from the experience of god-forsakenness in its various forms—suffering or handicap where there is apparently no hope but only despair. A Church structured in the power of the Spirit of the risen Lord, will enter this world and give hope: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked (Mt 25,31–46), if necessary disturbing the political or religious *status quo* (Mt 27,25–27) and if necessary suffering rejection and death (Jn 19,14–16).

Edward Schillebeeckx

Edward Schillebeeckx's massive theological writing, like that of Rahner, could not be said to be characterized by a *theologia crucis*. However, his sharp divergence from Moltmann provides a healthy contrast and an equally challenging approach to an understanding of the paschal mystery. Schillebeeckx disagrees with Moltmann on three key issues: firstly, he cannot accept that on the cross Jesus was abandoned by his Father; Jesus was continuously and unfailingly supported by God in his life, death and resurrection. Secondly the cross was not primarily an event between 'God and God' but something inflicted on Jesus by an act of human injustice—an index of the anti-divine in history. Thirdly, from his Thomistic perspective, Schillebeeckx rejects the possibility of incorporating suffering into the being of God. Not only can suffering *never* be classified as a good; suffering and God are essentially antithetical and so exclusive to each other. 'God is the counter sign to evil. Jesus is this sign in his life of healing and of life giving.'²⁸

In *Jesus: an experiment in Christology* Schillebeeckx deliberately sets out to give priority to narrative over theory as the primary form of theological language and so to 'retell the life story of the man Jesus as the story of God'.²⁹ In a second but related work *Christ: the Christian experience in the modern world*³⁰, he deals explicitly with a theology of salvation and grace. Schillebeeckx begins with a thoroughgoing discussion of human experience as a *dialectical* way of knowing and learning. All experience is interpreted experience and is open to the dynamic of future life. When new experiences force us to 'think again' and call into question our previous assumptions we have to struggle to integrate, evaluate and be open to the possibility of change, even *metanoia*. In this dynamic of living, a Christian individual or community makes its response in faith to God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Schillebeeckx insists that the significance of Jesus's death and resurrection can only be seen in relation to the life he lived before death and to the salvation he continually offered during his ministry. Jesus lived entirely *from* his Abba/Father, to whom he turned in absolute priority.

Jesus's human identity was realized *in* and *by* his living for others. He was 'God's countenance turned towards us', the 'nucleus of God's action in history'. In life and in death he was not concerned with himself but with his Father and with his community of friends. His death was not an accident of fate, but arose out of a life lived in opposition to evil in all its forms. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was not only acting on Jesus himself, but saying 'Amen' to the whole of Jesus's life. 'The final word uttered by God is not the word revealed in the life of Jesus, nor the silent word on the cross. It is the creative, transformative word of the resurrection.'³¹

Schillebeeckx places very little weight on the actual death of Jesus which he sees negatively. His more usual procedure is to locate the redemptively significant moment,

either in Jesus's free acceptance of death in a spirit of service, as distinct from death itself, or in the divine conferral of value on Jesus's death through the resurrection, understood as a correction victory over suffering and death.³²

'We have to say that we are not redeemed *thanks* to the death of Jesus but *despite* it.'³³ Schillebeeckx insists that God does not want men and women to suffer but rather wills to overcome suffering where it occurs in our history. He also avoids anything which might suggest a cult of suffering and prefers not to use the traditional language of atonement. One may draw two important conclusions from this: firstly to attribute salvific importance to Jesus's *life* and *resurrection* and to exclude or down-play the significance of his *death*, is a radical departure from tradition and blurs 'the profound unity of Jesus's ability to epitomize his life in the single act of going to his death'.³⁴ Secondly, if Jesus redeems us *despite his death*, then the *dialect of the cross is not present, that paradox of life through death*, salvation *through* suffering, strength *in* vulnerability, which is a characteristic of a theology of the cross. Schillebeeckx cannot be said to be a theologian of the cross, though he consistently portrays the cross of human existence which must be overcome in the power of 'orthopractic love'.

In Schillebeeckx's most recent book *Jesus in our western culture* he maintains that in modern times 'authentic faith seems to be nurtured above all in a praxis of liberation'.³⁵ We have to recover the sense that our God is a liberating God who wills to give life and wholeness. A political form of the Christian love of God and our neighbour:

knows the same repentance and *metanoia*, the same asceticism and self-emptying, the same dark nights and losing oneself in the other . . . which does not fall short of the ways of purgation in classical mysticism.³⁶

This political holiness today already has its own martyrs among men and women, those who die in the cause of the kingdom of God.

Schillebeeckx's theology could be said to be a *protest against* passive theologies of the cross and of suffering, and a massive *argument for* active engagement in that faith which does justice and which brings its own form of *metanoia*. If the fundamental symbol of God is a living person (*Imago Dei*), then the place where that person is dishonoured, violated and oppressed, is the *preferred* place 'where religious experience becomes possible in a way of life which seeks to give form to this symbol, to heal it and give it its own liberated existence'.³⁷

Jon Sobrino

Jon Sobrino's contextual theology has been forged from within the experience of oppression and the struggle for justice and liberation of his people in El Salvador. His first major work, *Christology at the crossroads* was dedicated to Fathers Rutilio Grande and Alfonso Navarro 'martyrs for the kingdom of God in El Salvador'.³⁸ His second major work *The true Church and the poor* was published within a year of the murder of Archbishop Romero on 24 March 1980.³⁹ For Sobrino the martyr's witness, that offering of one's life that others may live, 'constitutes the deepest root of the Church's activity in Latin America'.⁴⁰ His essential Marikan perspective is that we can come to understand the identity of the crucified one only in so far as we take up the cross and follow Jesus 'on the way' (Mk 10,52). Sobrino's deep concern for the historical Jesus is closely related to the Christian's call to practical action on behalf of those who suffer or are in need. This is the way in which we mediate his saving love. Salvation in Jesus Christ does not exempt us from responsibility for our world: the final question is always 'What must be *done* in order to establish the kingdom of God in history?'⁴¹

God's Son lived his human life 'from below' that is from the perspective of those who have no influence, no voice and no power—the 'other side' of history. Jesus's cross was the historical consequence of his life spent in the service of the kingdom. His work to establish the reign of God on earth brought him to the death of a criminal, and to an experience of forsakenness and abandonment (Mk 15,34). The form of the crucified one *forces* us to see that our God has not identified with the powerful but with the powerless. Yet the resurrection of Jesus Christ shows us that God is somehow present and active in the negativity and darkness of much of human history; that God works transformation from darkness and death into light and life. This is the sure grounds for the hope and optimism of a Christian people who humanly speaking have no grounds for hope.

'In Latin America', writes Sobrino, 'the suffering of the present, no wonder, plays an active role in the process of understanding'.⁴² This does

not mean that the positive themes of theology—love of God, hope, reconciliation—are neglected but rather that they ‘are always accompanied or even brought into play by some great suffering’.⁴³ The way to understand God’s relationship to the cross is analogous to our human way of coming to understand and to learn through suffering, especially in those we love:

The person who feels sorrow in the face of another’s misery and who tries to overcome it by bridging the distance between self and the other’s misery. Here we have the only authentic analogy for recognizing God on the Cross.⁴⁴

God comes to us in love and pity for our condition, not in judgement and condemnation. And his love is performative. He does not leave things as they are. And so, paradoxically, those who through suffering have come to understand the compassionate love of the crucified and risen Lord, have become themselves the privileged place of access to God. In Jesus’s eyes it was the poor who were ‘the authentic medium through which one draws near to God, as the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Last Judgement makes clear (Lk 10,25-27; Mt 25,31-46)’.⁴⁵

There is an essential reciprocity between cross/resurrection; God’s active *presence* in the resurrection *should* be viewed in connection with his *absence* on the cross. The Christian existence is structured by the paschal dialectic of death/resurrection; for we experience continually the tension between faith and unbelief, between hope and death, between love and alienation. As long as the world is in need of redemption, as long as we hear the cries of the victims of suffering in history, faith will be shaken, hope will border on despair and love will seem to have been overcome by hate and injustice. Cross without resurrection leads to unbelief, despair and unlove, resurrection without cross to false optimism. But *faith in the resurrection of the crucified one* is the ground of our hoping against hope and of our loving ‘unto the end’.⁴⁶

In Latin America Good Friday, not East Sunday or Christmas has been *the* great feast. ‘Popular intuition has rightly grasped the authentic element of Christian faith in Good Friday, but has also grasped it in very passive terms.’⁴⁷ So in the early stages of liberation theology, Sobrino, Boff and others sought to *shift* the cross from being a passive symbol of patient endurance of the status quo, into an active principle of transformation and responsible change.⁴⁸ However the second stage of liberation theology is wary of ‘imposing’ a theological principle from outside; it seeks instead to be truer to the principle of ‘being evangelized by the poor’ and to reflect *first* on the positive contribution coming from the movement of the base Christian communities. A liberation theology

of the cross must first of all wait in *patient* but *critical awareness*, taking up a humbler role. Through a genuine *praxis* of discipleship a Christian group will come to learn, by following the crucified Christ that his salvation is indeed performative and transformative.

Conclusion

'There can be no true understanding without a certain range of comparison' (Bloch). A comparative study of the paschal mystery in the thought of these five theologians has yielded some interesting *shifts* of theological interest. There has been a movement from a symbolic or a-historical theology of the cross to a historico-political one; from a focus on Jesus's death to the life which preceded and so shaped that death; from atonement language to the language of God's performative liberation. It has also highlighted differing perceptions of the resurrection: as the revelation of what has been achieved on the cross (Balthasar), as an event distinct but inseparable from the cross (Moltmann, Sobrino) as goal or fulfillment (Rahner) or as a definitive new beginning (Schillebeeckx). Most writers stress the 'unfinished' aspect of the resurrection, which now becomes a 'possibility' for the world.

Balthasar and Moltmann share a perception of a Trinitarian passion drama in which the Father/Son relationship is distanced, even 'distorted' to the point of 'rupture' (Mk 15,34). The Son becomes God-made-man-in-godforsakenness and within this mystery the world is redeemed in the power of the Spirit. However while Balthasar *must* use atonement language, Moltmann *cannot* do so.

Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Sobrino in different ways recognize that to speak of God is necessarily a second step in theology; one has to start with this world and with the life of the historical Jesus as 'the story of God' among us. While Rahner is uneasy with atonement language, Sobrino and Schillebeeckx reject it in favour of God's power to liberate. This in practice means a preference for the Synoptics rather than the Pauline or Johannine patterns of thought.

Moltmann, Schillebeeckx and Sobrino have a strong socio-political theology of the cross, and a concrete awareness that the sufferings of this present time are a stumbling block to belief. All have been influenced by J. Metz's understanding of 'the future in the memory of suffering'.⁴⁹ Moltmann and Sobrino have a *dialectical* understanding, a way of knowing that comes within the darkness; Schillebeeckx refuses to enter into or to come to terms with the darkness; evil must be conquered, overcome. God is ever present, never absent, so enabling us to do this in the power of his grace.

But Sobrino's theology has articulated the crucial problem for today: how can theology learn from the experience of the poor, if, as is so often true, the poor have a passive, uncritical, fatalistic understanding of the

cross? Part two of this article will address this question while exploring sources for a theology of the cross as articulated from 'the under-side of history'.

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NOTES

¹ For example: K. Rahner, B. Lonergan, H. Urs von Balthasar, H. Mühlen, J. Sobrino (from the Catholic side); K. Barth, H. Vogel, H. J. Iwand, J. Moltmann, E. Jüngel (from the Protestant side); N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, P. Evdokimov and D. Staniloae (Orthodox). It is a matter for particular regret that space does not permit a summary of the thought of E. Jüngel's important book, *God as the mystery of the world: on the foundation of the theology of the Crucified One in the dispute between theism and atheism*. ET Edinburgh, 1983.

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'In retrospect' in *The analogy of beauty: the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed J. Riches, (Edinburgh, 1986) p 214. Cited subsequently as *Analogy*.

³ *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, 6 vols. (Einsiedeln, 1961-69). ET *The glory of the Lord: a theological aesthetic*, vols 1-3 (Edinburgh, 1982-86).

⁴ *Theodramatik*, 4 vols. (Einsiedeln, 1973-83).

⁵ *Theologik*, 2 vols completed. (Einsiedeln, 1985).

⁶ See Balthasar, 'Another ten years—1975', *Analogy*, pp 222-233.

⁷ 'Mysterium Paschale' in *Mysterium Salutis*, III/2 ed J. Feiner and M. Lochrer, (Einsiedeln, 1969), pp 133-326.

⁸ Balthasar: *Pneuma und Institution*, (Einsiedeln, 1974) ET given in *The Von Balthasar reader* ed M. Kehl and W. Loser (Edinburgh, 1982) p 27.

⁹ Balthasar: *The heart of the world*, ET (San Francisco, 1979), p 175. Cited *Analogy* p 161.

¹⁰ Williams, R.: *Analogy*, p 22. Cf also Louth, A.: *Analogy*, pp 147-163.

¹¹ Cf Rahner, Karl: *Foundations of Christian faith* (London, 1978), pp 193-195.

¹² Williams, R.: *Analogy*, p 32.

¹³ O'Donovan, L.: 'A journey into time: the legacy of Karl Rahner's last years' in *Theological Studies*, 46 (1985), p 623.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 628.

¹⁵ Krieg, R.: 'The crucified in Rahner's christology: an appraisal' in *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 50 (1983-84), p 157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 156.

¹⁷ Cf Rahner, Karl: *Foundations of Christian faith* (London, 1978), pp 296-297.

¹⁸ Rahner, Karl: *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol 15 (Zurich, 1983), p 20. Cited O'Donovan, p 639.

¹⁹ Moltmann, J.: *The crucified God: the cross of Christ as the foundation and criticism of Christian theology* (ET London, 1974), introduction.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 9.

²² *Ibid.*, p 6.

²³ Moltmann, J.: *The Trinity and the kingdom of God* (ET London, 1981), Introduction.

²⁴ Moltmann, J.: 'The crucified God: God and the Trinity today'. *Concilium* 6:8 (1972), p 31.

²⁵ Bergin, Helen F.: 'The death of Jesus and its impact on God: Jürgen Moltmann and Edward Schillebeeckx', *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 52 (1986), p 200-201.

²⁶ Moltmann, J.: *The future of creation* (London, 1979), p 77.

²⁷ Moltmann, J.: *The Church in the power of the Spirit*; ET London, 1977, p 62. Cited Bergin, 201.

- ²⁸ Bergin, p 208.
- ²⁹ Schillebeeckx, Edward: *Jesus: an experiment in christology* (ET London, 1979).
- ³⁰ Schillebeeckx, Edward: *Christ: The Christian experience in the modern world* (London, 1980).
- ³¹ Bergin, p 195.
- ³² Galvin, J. P.: 'The death of Jesus in the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx' in *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 50 (1983-4), p 177.
- ³³ *Christ: The Christian experience in the modern world* (London, 1980), p 730.
- ³⁴ Galvin, p 177.
- ³⁵ *Jesus in our western culture: mysticism, ethics and politics* (London, 1987), p 73.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 74.
- ³⁷ *Christ: the Christian experience in the modern world* (London, 1980), p 837.
- ³⁸ Sobrino, Jon: *Christology at the crossroads: a Latin American approach* (ET London, 1978).
- ³⁹ Sobrino, Jon: *The true Church and the poor* (ET London, 1985).
- ⁴⁰ Sobrino, Jon: 'The witness of the Church in Latin America' in *The challenge of the base Christian communities* ed S. Torres and J. Eagleston (Maryknoll, 1981), p 163.
- ⁴¹ *Christology at the crossroads*, p 113.
- ⁴² *The true Church and the poor*, p 27.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 28.
- ⁴⁴ *Christology at the crossroads*, p 199.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 231-236.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p 280.
- ⁴⁸ See J. Segundo: 'Two theologies of liberation' in *The Month*, 10, (1984), pp 321-327.
- ⁴⁹ Metz, J. B.: 'The future in the memory of suffering' in *Concilium* 6:8 (1972), pp 9-25. Metz holds that the centre of belief is apprehended through memory, a 'dangerous' memory which enables future. See also his *Faith in history and society*, ET New York, 1980.