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TAKING UP ONE'S CROSS WITH HOPE:  
A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SUFFERING

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**TAKING UP ONE'S CROSS WITH HOPE:  
A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SUFFERING**

**A  
THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
St. Mary's University in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**in**

**Theology**

**by**

**Linda George DeBrecht**

**San Antonio, Texas**

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*This thesis is dedicated to my loving husband John.*

## ABSTRACT

### TAKING UP ONE'S CROSS WITH HOPE

#### A Christian Approach to Suffering

Linda George DeBrecht

St. Mary's University, 2017

Supervising Professor: Andrew Getz, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study is to encourage a more contemporary understanding of the traditional Christian approach to suffering - the belief that we can experience great goodness and enrich our lives as a result of taking up our cross as Jesus did. This concept of "redemptive suffering" seems to be losing its viability in contemporary life. Instead, advancing support for the Assisted Suicide movement reflects a growing sense that suffering is a "problem" that can be "solved" even if it means taking one's own life. The author contends that a more contemporary understanding of Jesus' suffering - one that can be related to one's *own* experience of suffering - is necessary so we can more confidently face the hardships of life, and in doing so reap unexpected benefits for ourselves and others.

Essential to the project was a theological anthropological methodology in order to address a two-fold task: 1) developing a contemporary theological interpretation of Jesus' sacrificial suffering on the cross, and 2) relating it to an authentic experience of even everyday human suffering. To accomplish this, theological insights of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar were supplemented with social scientific findings that

connected healthy human growth/development with a positive resolution of suffering.

The study highlighted the significance of Jesus' suffering the abandonment by God on the cross, as well as his trusting response to God's will even in the midst of not understanding why God seemed to have forsaken him. This freely given cooperation with God allowed God to bring a humanly unfathomable Resurrection from the desolation of Jesus' Good Friday. A comparison was made to our own encounters with suffering and the difference made when we freely seek to cooperate with God's will in responding to them. The findings of the study attest not only to the existence of a redemptive/liberating potential in our experiences of suffering, but also to the unfathomable love of God through Jesus which is reaching out to us even today, and encourages us even as we face horrendous challenges in life to take up our cross with hope.



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## PREFACE

It has been suggested that one picture is worth a thousand words. So is one experience. One experience of lasting impression for me was my first recognizable encounter with redemptive suffering. A full appreciation of that experience took years to achieve, but it came with the realization that what I had once considered to be the darkest period of my life was actually my greatest blessing. My suffering ultimately was redemptive for me - it spiritually liberated me in ways I had never imagined possible. That initial experience was instrumental in helping to free my mind and my heart from elements that I hadn't even realized were keeping me shackled. Through the lens of my own discernment I am now able to recognize similar experiences being replayed in varying degrees and in countless variations, in my own life as well as in the lives of others. And I now realize that the roots of this thesis are anchored in a desire to more fully understand my experience of a connection between suffering and liberation.

Recurring examples of redemptive suffering are happening in today's world but are not always identified as such. As a result, an acknowledgement of suffering's liberating potential seems to be fading. Is the concept of redemptive suffering becoming obsolete in our modern world? If so, what hope can we offer those in the midst of suffering? Is there a meaning that can be given to what they are experiencing? Or is suffering simply to be envisioned as a senseless mystery?

The thesis of this study is that suffering can be accepted in life with hope: there is a redemptive possibility – a liberating opportunity - presented to us in suffering even if the potentiality is not initially recognized. The foundation for this thesis will be developed through a contemporary examination of the traditional Christian concept of the

redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. Customary considerations of Jesus' suffering involve theories about what Jesus' suffering did to God (e.g., Did it appease God?) or what it did for us (e.g., Did it atone for our sins?). However, if Jesus is like us in all things but sin, it is also valid to ask what Jesus' suffering did to or for him, just as our wrestling with the mystery of suffering involves questions about what suffering does to or for us. It is proposed that an exploration of Jesus' own experience of suffering will provide insights helpful to addressing suffering in our own lives.

The contention of this paper is that traditional views on redemptive suffering are being too easily dismissed because current approaches to reality have changed so dramatically from traditional theological approaches. However, this paper will demonstrate that contrasting approaches do not necessarily mean conflicting conclusions. A thorough examination of the subject will be offered, exploring traditional as well as contemporary considerations and incorporating theological as well as secular resources, in order to minimize, as much as possible, biases from our own limited perspective. Such is the goal of this study.

Today it is commonly recognized that our time and experiences in history greatly influence our interpretations of reality. With that in mind, the following personal summary is offered as a background to this thesis, highlighting influences I recognize as contributing to the development of my understanding of redemptive suffering and the need for this study.

I was born into the Roman Catholic faith in 1949, and for most of the first two decades of my life I thrived in the Catholic environment of my family and my schooling. By the beginning of my college years, however, I began to experience personal and

spiritual doubts for which I could find no solution. During the ensuing years I was by all external evidence very successful in my marriage, family life and responsibilities in my community. Internally, however, doubts and growing depression assailed me for an additional fifteen years. In spite of external success life had no meaning for me – *I* had no meaning - and I longed to be free of existence as I knew it.

During this time I craved to find answers such as the ones provided by my Catholic faith: belief in a God who called me into existence and gave a meaning to my life. The answers did not come; in fact, the silence of God increased my suffering by slowly eroding the spiritual foundation that had once sustained me. I began identifying myself as agnostic because I could no longer say with integrity that I shared the Catholic faith.

Although I professed doubts in the existence of God, my search for meaning in life found expression in a search for a good and loving God. I realize now that my quest focused on the mystery of suffering, especially on what seemed to be the paradoxical Christian association of suffering with salvation. The questions I pondered more than thirty years ago are basic to this paper today:

1. How does the Christian concept of God make sense? My pre-Vatican II understanding was that Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. If God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-loving, couldn't God have forgiven sin without the violence of the crucifixion?
2. More specifically, how does the agonizing execution of an innocent person "atone" for sin? Isn't that somehow suggesting that two wrongs can make a right?
3. How could one man, even a God-man, being hung on a cross 2000 years ago possibly make a difference with the way God accepts us today? Especially if this God is understood to love us and be forgiving of us unconditionally?

With time God's silence ended. In fact, with the hindsight of faith I could identify God's subtle manifestations in my life even in the midst of my greatest encounters with doubts.<sup>1</sup> A job transfer to another state and other events outside of my control led me to a priest who did not fear doubts; he was someone who could help me face my own doubts head-on. It is notable that he had also been challenged with depression and doubts of his own. A successful resolution of his suffering allowed him to be a wounded healer for me. With time my faith began to grow. I was eventually offered a job in a Catholic parish, developing a program focused on pastoral care and social ministry. The ministry involved outreach to parishioners who were suffering through the death of a loved one, a disabling illness, unemployment or divorce. It also included outreach to those in the larger community who were suffering from homelessness or poverty. It soon became evident that the most effective volunteers were those who were wounded healers who were not deterred by the suffering others were encountering because they were grounded in the hope of their own redemptive experiences with suffering.<sup>2</sup> The wounded healer's conviction of hope was contagious: it encouraged those who needed help to be strengthened in carrying the crosses *they* faced.

The redemptive potential of suffering is just that: potential. A redemptive resolution does not come automatically. Free will allows us to choose the course we take when initially confronted with suffering as well as responses to additional challenges

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<sup>1</sup> I had been seeking dramatic evidence of God in the world, in the likeness of lightning and thunderbolts. I now more fully appreciate recognizing God in more subtle disclosures (cf. 1 Kings 19:12).

<sup>2</sup> These "wounded healers" had experienced a positive change or new strength that came out of their own encounter with suffering and tragedy. Having experienced their own "Resurrection" from their "Good Friday" they were able to authentically offer hope for those who were struggling with a similar situation. They could empathetically offer support and encouragement to those in need - accepting the other person's expressions of grief without trying to provide their own "answers" to the other person's challenges. Without successfully completing their own healing process a volunteer would run the risk of unconsciously having their own unresolved issues become entangled with the other person's grief.

every step of the way. But if one has no hope of some meaning or worth in the suffering, what is the sense in even taking up a cross in the first place? The first chapter of this project substantiates this concern as it describes how an avoidance of suffering is vigorously being encouraged in our society today.

Through the years I have grown more accepting of the fact that much of life is a mystery. Christian revelations such as the Trinity and Incarnation are examples to me that the task of faith is to be a witness to truth, even if we cannot always fully explain it. Human suffering certainly is such a mystery. And yet our faith seeks understanding. My darkest journey through doubts and depression turned out to be my greatest blessing and source of strength. Twenty years of experience in outreach to others who were suffering verified my own personal experience. Thus I have acquired spiritual and experiential confirmation of the Christian concept of redemptive suffering. This study now represents a quest for scholastic confirmation. What academic evidence is there for the concept that suffering can be redemptive – that one can have hope even in the midst of great suffering? The purpose of this effort is certainly not to promote false hope, or to simply offer “bandages” of “cheap hope” through Scriptural platitudes.<sup>3</sup> The conclusions have to be more substantial than a theologized version of the “power of positive thinking.”<sup>4</sup> If successful, this quest for academic grounding will not only encourage a hope-filled Christian approach to suffering, it will also help us to “be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for [our] hope...”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Suffering and Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>4</sup>Self- help books such as Norman Vincent Peale’s, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), promise *self*-fulfillment through a new outlook or through a type of self-fulfilling prophecy: you will become what you believe about yourself.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 3:15.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE REDEMPTIVE POTENTIAL OF SUFFERING

#### An Introduction to the Problem

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church ... (Col. 1:24)*

St. Paul's appreciation for the redemptive potential of suffering is noted by John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*: "The Apostle shares his own discovery and rejoices in it because of all those whom it can help - just as it helped him - to understand the *salvific meaning of suffering*."<sup>6</sup> Left to itself, however, Paul's statement can raise more questions than it answers. How can Paul find joy in his sufferings? How can his suffering benefit others? What could be lacking in Christ's suffering, allowing Paul's suffering to make a difference? Is Paul's approach to suffering unique to him and his mission in the early Church, or could it be valid for all of us today who are called to "take up your cross and follow me"?<sup>7</sup>

Answers to such questions have been sought since Paul first shared his experience of suffering, but they have never been more crucial than today. In 2011 the U.S. Bishops released "To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide." The Bishops were responding to what they recognized as an "aggressive nationwide campaign" which, if successful, would represent a "radical change" from traditional religious, societal and medical mores regarding suicide.<sup>8</sup> Although the language used by

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<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana: 1984), #1, accessed August 2, 2011, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1984/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_11021984\\_salvifici-doloris.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris.html).

<sup>7</sup> See Matt 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23, 14:27.

<sup>8</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *To Live Each Day with Dignity* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2011), 2, accessed August 2, 2011, [www.usccb.org/toliveeachday/bishops-statement-physician-assisted-suicide.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/toliveeachday/bishops-statement-physician-assisted-suicide.pdf).



proponents of assisted suicide stresses personal autonomy and liberty, the movement's support of an individual's "right to choose to die" is based on a desire to avoid "the pain and distress of the dying process." Derek Humphry, a leading proponent of assisted suicide, explains the movement's convictions:

In a spirit of compassion for all, this manifesto proclaims that every competent adult has the incontestable right to humankind's ultimate civil and personal liberty - the right to die in a manner and at a time of their own choosing. Whereas modern medicine has brought great benefits to humanity, it cannot entirely solve the pain and distress of the dying process. ... The degree to which physical pain and psychological distress can be tolerated is different in all humans. Quality of life judgments are private and personal, thus only the sufferer can make relevant decisions.<sup>9</sup>

In stark contrast to Paul's experience, Humphry associates no redemptive potential with suffering and identifies one's response to suffering as only a private and personal experience. In thus isolating the experience of suffering from a social dimension Humphry is able to conclude that society should legally support one's private and personal response to suffering, even to the extent of endorsing a right to commit suicide as a means to avoid the experience of suffering in the dying process.

A marked difference was presented in "To Live Each Day with Dignity," as the Bishops echoed Paul's recognition of a social element even in an individual experience of suffering:

This agenda [advocating for assisted suicide] actually risks adding to the suffering of seriously ill people. Their worst suffering is often not physical pain, which can be alleviated with competent medical care, but feelings of isolation and hopelessness. The realization that others—or society as a whole—may see their death as an acceptable or even desirable solution to their problems can only magnify this kind of suffering. ... There is an infinitely better way to address the needs of people with serious illnesses. Our society should embrace ... a readiness to surround patients with love, support, and companionship, providing the assistance needed to ease their physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Humphry, Derek, *Liberty and Death: A manifesto concerning an individual's right to choose to die* (Ergo@finalexit.org: 2009), last revised August 29, 2010, accessed August 2, 2011, [www.finalexit.org/liberty\\_and\\_death\\_manifesto\\_right\\_to\\_die\\_by\\_derek\\_humphry.html](http://www.finalexit.org/liberty_and_death_manifesto_right_to_die_by_derek_humphry.html).

<sup>10</sup> USCCB, *To Live Each Day with Dignity*, 5.

Assisted suicide proponents and the U. S. Bishops both desire to alleviate human suffering; their approaches to suffering, however, differ significantly. Is there a social dimension to the personal experience of suffering? Is it possible for suffering to have a meaning or value in one's life? Or does the presence of suffering and vulnerability only diminish the value of one's life? This paper does not suggest that suffering is to be sought as an end in itself, or that suffering should be passively endured in the hopes of a future reward. It does propose, however, that when one encounters suffering one also encounters an opportunity. It proposes that there is a redemptive potential for suffering. Whether it is the experience of suffering in one's own life, or an empathetic experience of suffering with others, our response to suffering has the potential to make a positive difference. In effect, suffering can be redemptive not only as it applies to us, but also as it applies to others, ultimately affecting the world as a whole.

The promotion of a right to take one's life in order to avoid the possibility of suffering demonstrates the extreme to which our culture is trying to escape suffering. Less extreme but also unhealthy are attempts to avoid suffering in everyday life by means of repression, addictions, aggression, rationalization, denial, and other personally devised efforts to avoid the reality of physical or emotional distress. Such an aversion to suffering is alien to Paul's experience, where he notes that through "the surpassing power" of God, "We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Paul describes these accounts of suffering as a shared experience. His statement that "*We* are afflicted ..." reflects his view of a union so complete with Christ and each other that we are "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor 4:7-9.

also be manifested in our body.”<sup>12</sup> Thus the meaning Paul finds in suffering is not to be found merely in an individual experience: “If [one part of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it ...”<sup>13</sup>

If suffering is believed to have no meaning, the experience of suffering can seem isolating and intolerable. If a meaning - a redemptive value – can be recognized, hope can be encouraged even in the midst of excruciating suffering. Paul’s model for this is an understanding that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was redemptive.<sup>14</sup> Jesus would have preferred not to suffer.<sup>15</sup> In resolutely taking up his cross, however, he demonstrated an unwavering strength even in his vulnerability. As Jesus endured intense agony, humiliation, isolation, and abandonment, the possibility for a positive outcome seemed inconceivable. The inconceivable, of course, happened. This thesis will demonstrate how Jesus’ encounter with suffering also offers hope for us in our own Good Fridays - from the experience of everyday personal struggles to traumatic encounters with tragedies, and even to suffering in solidarity with victims of horrendous natural disasters and global conflicts. This Christian approach to suffering - salvific hope in the midst of powerlessness – is the key to Paul’s liberating experience of suffering. It contrasts starkly with suggestions that suffering and vulnerability rob one’s life of dignity and are grounds for giving up hope for any further meaning in one’s life.

The goal of this study is to identify a foundation from which human suffering can be approached with hope, even in the midst of fears. In order to identify such a foundation, a Christian approach to suffering will be explored. This will require a

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor 4: 10.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor 12:26.

<sup>14</sup> Eph 1:7.

<sup>15</sup> Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 6:38.

thorough examination of a relationship between human suffering and an understanding of the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. The task at hand is to present a contemporary Christian approach to suffering which addresses culturally relevant concerns in culturally relevant terms.

### **An Overview of Contemporary Concerns**

Contemporary challenges to the traditional concept of redemptive suffering are obvious in secular thought as evidenced by the assisted suicide movement. Contemporary challenges have also been churning within theological circles, as theologians join others in wrestling with the existence of horrendous suffering in a world created by a good and loving God. Especially in modern times, with the development of instant global communication, people are more aware of monumental suffering than ever before. The devastation of massive tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural disasters can now be witnessed almost immediately by viewers on the other side of the world. Images of horrendous destruction are replayed over and over in newscasts, in direct proportion to the magnitude of the damage. Unimaginable global sufferings at the hands of other human beings are also kept before us. Accounts of warfare, genocide and terrorism are readily displayed to viewers haunted by the reality of the suffering but who feel powerless to intervene. Mass communication is bringing worldwide suffering into the consciousness of people who in less modern times would have been oblivious to the size and extent of the suffering in the world. Where is God in all this suffering? If God is truly all-powerful and all loving, then why does God allow such horrendous suffering? More true to contemporary times, the question is becoming: *Is there a God in all this?* If

there is no God, or at least if God can be excluded from the mystery of suffering, then suffering can more readily be divorced from having meaning.

Compounding the challenges today are seismic shifts in worldviews from the time that the traditional Christian thoughts about redemptive suffering were formulated. Especially influential for our study are developments and events that began at the time of the Protestant Reformation, which ushered in the questioning of some of the practices and established teachings of the Catholic Church. During the following centuries scientific and philosophic revolutions took place that further challenged ecclesial authority. From the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, revolutionary discoveries by scientists such as Nicholas Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Galilei Galileo, and Isaac Newton, helped change the way we understood the universe, contradicting traditional Scriptural interpretations that the earth was the center of the universe.<sup>16</sup> With mathematical proofs to explain their scientific findings, science was becoming accepted as a more reliable source of truth than the philosophically based deductions of the Church. Thus, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century scientists and other intellectuals of the time were becoming skeptical of ecclesial teachings which seemed to conflict with their scientific conclusions; more and more they endorsed intellectual freedom and empirical knowledge rather than traditional philosophic approaches. “Induction from data, not deduction from inherited premises” was being considered the better method of enlightenment, with reliance on experience verifiable in nature rather than “the presumptive authority of the past.”<sup>17</sup> Later scientific advances, such as Darwin’s theory of evolution and advancements in archaeological dating,

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<sup>16</sup> Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1930), 53-71, 141, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Kors, “Introduction to Lecture 37” in *The Great Courses, Philosophy & Intellectual History, Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition, Part 4: The Enlightenment and its critics* (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2000), 6.

continued fueling the fire of challenges to traditional understandings of Scripture, beginning with the very first chapters of the Bible - the Genesis accounts of creation.

These worldview changes regarding understandings of the natural world formed a basis for challenges to many traditional teachings of the Church, including the traditional understanding of redemptive suffering. The need for redemption fit in well with the concept of a fall from grace in a paradise created by God, but how could redemption fit into a world that is understood to be evolving toward a higher life without having first fallen from the perfect one described in Genesis? The concept of suffering and death itself was traditionally explained as the result of Adam and Eve's sin; but how does that interpretation account for suffering and death in the world before Adam and Eve? Animal fossils and other archaeological findings give evidence of destruction and death long before the advent of Homo sapiens and the first sin by a human being. If natural selection and survival of the fittest are biologically natural processes, is the Creator of that natural process, rather than original sin, responsible for decay and death in our world? Could a good Creator/God be the cause of pain and death? Or, once again posed – *is there a Creator/God?* At the very least it must be asked, how can the Creator/God of Scripture be reconciled with modern scientific discoveries? Theological explanations without the backing of scientific corroboration were no longer satisfactory in themselves.

Paralleling developments of an intellectual revolution in scientific knowledge of the physical world, philosophical thought was also undergoing significant upheavals. By the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Rene Descartes was leading the way to depose the established approach of the Aristotelian scholastics. Grounded in physics and a desire to “establish a criterion of truth” whereby one could “know with certainty the real nature

and the real causes of things,”<sup>18</sup> Descartes established a “categorical dualism: the world divided into mind or body, mental or physical domains.”<sup>19</sup> In his quest for knowledge, Descartes directed his focus to the subject. His conclusions shifted the perspective away from traditional understandings about the objectivity of knowledge to a consideration of the difference made by the subject.<sup>20</sup> Before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Immanuel Kant was proposing that the subject does not “discover” but “imposes structure or order on the world” introducing the concept that “language expresses the subject’s *experience* but not *what* is experienced.”<sup>21</sup> At the same time as our knowledge of the world around us was growing in leaps and bounds, our understanding of *how* we understand was taking a definite change in direction! Kant’s development of transcendental philosophy was transforming. No longer was knowledge considered something that is simply grasped objectively by one’s intellect: the history and perceptions of the one interpreting information came to be seen as greatly influencing the interpretations themselves. There was a dawning realization that what previously had been accepted as objective interpretations on any subject - from philosophical debates to historical reports - were not completely objective. Thus there was a growing appreciation for historical consciousness, confirming the need for a more critical assessment of traditional interpretations and claims.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic classic approach to knowledge and faith was being challenged at its foundations by the turn toward empirical science and the

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<sup>18</sup> Alan Kors, “Lecture 31: Descartes – The Method of Modern Philosophy” in *Great Courses, Philosophy & Intellectual History, Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition, Part 3: From the Renaissance to the Age of Reason* (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2000), 26.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Romanus Cessario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), xiv.

<sup>21</sup> George T. Montague, *Understanding the Bible* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 83.

development of transcendental philosophy. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII issued *Aeternis*

*Patris*, noting that:

... false conclusions concerning divine and human things, which originated in the schools of philosophy, have now crept into all the orders of the State, and have been accepted by the common consent of the masses.<sup>22</sup>

Leo XIII's solution to the problem was to establish the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas as the foundational catechesis of the Catholic Church. Thus, as the worldview was moving in a decidedly different direction, the Catholic Church was battenning down the hatches to promote what had worked so successfully in the past. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, there was growing recognition within the Catholic Church that a change was necessary to effectively address modern developments. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) issued a *Decree on Priestly Formation* that sought to encourage "a better integration of philosophy and theology."<sup>23</sup> Three theologians responded in such a way that they are recognized as perhaps the most significant Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan. Each left their distinctive mark in the theological world, responding to modern challenges in their own style. Balthasar rejected scholasticism's rationalistic approach altogether, embracing instead a neo-patristic return to the theology of the early Fathers of the Church. Rahner, developing a Neo-Scholastic Transcendental Thomist theology, influenced theologians in the development of Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology. Lonergan, also a Transcendental Thomist, focused on a systematic understanding of theological

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<sup>22</sup> Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, #2. See: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html). Accessed on August 7, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 3.



methodology. Theologians such as David Tracy and his Critical Correlation Theology were influenced by Lonergan's insights.<sup>24</sup>

Balthasar, Rahner and Lonergan recognized the need to address contemporary issues in a contemporarily relevant way. Their insights made a significant impact in our modern world. They are also significant to this theological investigation. The theological anthropology of Karl Rahner and the kenotic Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar are foundational to this study, while the framework of this project will reflect the methodology promoted by Bernard Lonergan. This acknowledgement of their combined influences reflects an appreciation for the benefits of diverse perspectives. This study follows their spirit by addressing the issue of redemptive suffering in a contemporarily relevant manner.

### **A Framework for this Study**

A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix. The classicist notion of culture was normative: at least *de jure* there was but one culture that was both universal and permanent; ... Besides the classicist, there also is the empirical notion of culture. It is the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life. It may remain unchanged for ages. It may be in process of slow development or rapid dissolution.<sup>25</sup>

The foregoing presentation highlighted examples of social and historical developments that helped turn worldview understandings away from an emphasis on the classicist notion of culture existing during the Middle Ages toward the empirical emphasis of contemporary times. These revolutionary developments represent significant differences between contemporary concerns and the theological worldview when traditional teachings on redemptive suffering were being formulated. Although the

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<sup>24</sup> The author is indebted to Dr. Daniel Speed Thompson for this information which was presented in his chart of the "Family Tree of Catholic Theologians" in his Principles of Theological Method course at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas during the Spring 2006 semester.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), xi.

development can be envisioned as slowly evolving from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the resulting need for a contemporary examination of redemptive suffering could not be more pronounced. The factors identified in this overview form the basis for establishing a framework for such an investigation.

When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method.<sup>26</sup>

A very fundamental shift of this study from the traditional approach is the emphasis on relationships as *experienced* (with a focus on an ongoing process), rather than *categorical definitions* of relationships (with an emphasis on their nature). The traditional approach to redemptive suffering was that some *thing* had been done to offend God (i.e., Adam eating the apple in disobedience to God), so some *thing* needed to be done to restore harmony with God. Categorical answers were sought: was Jesus' suffering and death a ransom that was paid? ... or a punishment that was inflicted? ... or an appeasement of God's wrath? ... or a satisfaction made to God's honor? From that frame of reference the suffering of Jesus could easily be envisioned as an end in itself – his submission to suffering and death was the action that accomplished our salvation.

This study's purposeful shift away from the categorical to the more experiential approach is not meant to contest the conclusions of the traditional thought. Both approaches address relationships between God, self, and others and our place in the world. This study's approach, emphasizing the process of relationships rather than the categorical nature of them, will represent a different perspective – the use of a different lens – through which a more contemporary illumination is sought. In an effort to seek an

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

understanding of redemptive suffering that is more viable in today's world, this study will draw from understandings of the suffering of Christ not only as it was approached traditionally but also as it is being approached by contemporary theologians. With an appreciation for historical consciousness, the worldview of the time and the unique influences of each theologian's personal history will be highlighted. Contemporary secular resources from behavioral and social sciences will supplement the theological resources, effecting a dialogue across contemporary fields of studies and acknowledging their significance to understanding human suffering today. These objectives will be addressed through the following framework:

1. *Clarifying the Problem:* Having presented an introduction to the contemporary problem of suffering in this chapter, in Chapter 2 the author will examine the classical theory of the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. The theologies of two scholastics living in the Middle Ages, Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas, will be presented as foundational to the traditional approach to redemptive suffering. In Chapter 3 contemporary theological and secular concerns will be highlighted that are vastly different than those addressed by the traditional approach. A low Christological approach to soteriology, represented by the Transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner, will then be introduced. His theological anthropological approach will be foundational to this study of human suffering, in which Jesus' personal experience of suffering will be related to our own. Rahner is hesitant to endorse the traditional understanding of Jesus' crucifixion as a salvific sacrifice, identifying instead three criteria as essential for inclusion when the salvific nature of Jesus' crucifixion is being considered. The chapter will conclude by highlighting the

- importance of his criteria along with a fourth concern specific to this project that was not addressed by Rahner's soteriology: identification of a redemptive significance for Jesus' suffering that can be related to our own suffering.
2. *Setting a Course for the Project:* In Chapter 4 the diversity of thought today will be introduced through insights of a contemporary theologian with a contrasting approach to Rahner: that of Hans Urs von Balthasar and his high Christological, neo-patristic theology. Balthasar's unique approach to salvation, based on his interpretation of Trinitarian kenotic love, will be described in terms of its differences and similarities to Rahner's theological anthropological approach. It will be proposed that contrasting but not conflicting elements of Balthasar's soteriology will provide insights to address the project's concerns. In Chapter 5 complementary insights of Rahner and Balthasar will be utilized to establish parameters from which the project's four identified concerns will be explored. Anthropological associations with the parameters will also be identified so that the project will be grounded in a theological anthropological approach to the redemptive suffering of Jesus and its extension to all human suffering.
  3. *Addressing the Concerns:* The insights of Rahner and Balthasar will be supplemented by social science resources in Chapter 6, as the author focuses on the project's first two concerns in developing a contemporary theology of the cross that addresses the redemptive nature of Jesus' suffering. A contemporary understanding of God's relationship with humanity will first be explored, followed by an examination of God's salvific initiative on behalf of humanity through Jesus of Nazareth. The chapter will conclude with a contemporary description of traditional understandings

- of Jesus' salvific mission. In Chapter 7 the project's third concern will be addressed, as the relationship of human freedom to human salvation is explored in terms of our salvific need to grow in faith, hope and love. Suffering will be described as a means for facilitating this transcendental growth, depending on our freely given response to conflicts/challenges in life. The chapter will conclude with a focus on the project's fourth concern as it makes a clear association between Jesus' redemptive suffering and the suffering we experience today. It will emphasize how Jesus personally experienced the universal experience of suffering that is shared by humanity today. It will also show, however, that Jesus' experience of suffering made a unique salvific difference for all humanity, as well as a personal difference for each of us today.
4. *Applying the Findings:* Having developed an association between Jesus' way of the cross and our own human experience of suffering, the author will provide in the final chapter further grounding and practical encouragement for taking up our own cross with hope. Referring to St. Paul's view of suffering in Chapter 1, an anthropological grounding for a new perspective of suffering will be presented along with a description of a *social* dimension even within *personal* experiences of suffering. Mirroring Paul's vision that we are God's co-workers in bringing about a new creation, our hope-filled response to suffering will be shown to facilitate the experience of new life in our own life as well as in the world.

The above framework was developed to reflect Lonergan's method for theological investigation. As Lonergan clarifies:

Method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt. It is a framework for collaborative creativity. It would outline the various clusters of operations to be performed by theologians when they go about their various tasks. A contemporary

method would conceive those tasks in the context of modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy, of historicity, collective practicality and coresponsibility.<sup>27</sup>

Such is the methodology to which this study is committed. This thesis is being approached in a spirit of collaborative creativity, recognizing the contributions of traditional as well as contemporary thought, and the pluralism of secular as well as theological research. The dynamic levels of “consciousness and intentionality” identified by Lonergan in a transcendental method are intrinsic to this study, as evidenced by an attention to theological and social scientific research, a studied emphasis on the interpretation of information, a respect for historical consciousness, and consideration of responsibilities implied by the findings of this project.<sup>28</sup> Lonergan’s conclusion that “method will bid us to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible”<sup>29</sup> is explicitly reflected in the project’s four-fold framework as outlined above, and implicitly incorporated in the process of each section’s development.

Lonergan observes contemporary Christian theology’s “shift toward systems” – and a focus on “making thematic what already is a part of Christian living.” Thus, through a conscious and intentional theological methodology:

... theology endeavors to make its contribution towards meeting the needs of Christian living, actuating its potentialities, and taking advantage of opportunities offered by world history.<sup>30</sup>

The author seeks to make such a contribution to the needs of Christian living in a specific time and place in history: in a society caught in the throes of a problem with human suffering.

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<sup>27</sup> Lonergan, *Method of Theology*, p. xi.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6-20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 144-145.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ROLE OF SUFFERING IN PRE-VATICAN II SOTERIOLOGIES

The focus of this chapter will be on the development of the traditional understanding that Jesus' suffering was redemptive, as reflected in pre-Vatican II catechesis. First, an overview will be provided of the development of the traditional approach and a description of how it was articulated. Next, after noting the diversity of attempts to explain how Jesus' sacrifice on the cross atoned for sin, attention will be focused on the soteriologies of two theologians of the Middle Ages who are most readily associated with the traditional approach to redemption: Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. The chapter will close with an examination of the role of suffering in the redemption theories of Anselm and Aquinas.

#### **An Overview of Pre-Vatican II Catechesis on Redemption**

Prior to the Council of Trent there was no officially pronounced dogma regarding the role that Jesus' suffering played in achieving our salvation. Unlike controversies over Trinitarian and Christological beliefs that required Council clarifications, agreement was sufficient that Jesus' suffering and death brought about the reconciliation of sinful humanity with God. Thus official church statements expressed the understanding that Jesus suffered and died for our sake, without delving into the particulars of *how* Jesus' suffering and death accomplished our salvation.<sup>31</sup> An example is the Creed of the Synod of Nicaea (325 A.D.) which specified:

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<sup>31</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition : 100-600* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 141.

We believe in ... one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, ... who for our salvation came down, and became incarnate and was made man, and suffered, and arose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead;<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the following statement pronounced by the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) was emphatic in confirming that a sacrifice was made by the Word of God on our behalf, but did not address any concern over how the sacrifice was related to our salvation:

If any man say that the Word Incarnate offered himself as a sacrifice for himself and not rather for us (for he who knew no sin had no need of sacrifice), let him be anathema.<sup>33</sup>

Although different theological understandings regarding salvation had been developing from the earliest centuries of Christianity,<sup>34</sup> it was not until the Catholic Church developed a response to the challenges of the Protestant Reformation that a basic soteriological approach was expressly articulated. In 1546 the Council of Trent called for the development of a catechism for parish priests to use in instructing their parishioners on the basic beliefs of their faith. This official manual was published in Latin for world-wide distribution in 1566. It is commonly referred to as the Catechism of the Council of Trent, the Roman Catechism, or the Tridentine Catechism. Since it was developed by the Council of Trent and approved by Pope Pius V, it “served as a norm of orthodoxy” for

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 30<sup>th</sup> Ed., trans. Roy J. Deferrari (New Hampshire: Loretto Publications, 2002), 26.

<sup>33</sup> Philippe de la Trinite, *What is Redemption?*, trans. Anthony Armstrong, (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), 67.

<sup>34</sup> It is beyond the scope of this section to address the variety of soteriological theories within the Church prior to the adoption of the classic theory of atonement for catechesis. Specific theories will be addressed throughout this project as they relate to the focus of this thesis. More detailed explorations of the early soteriologies can be found in the above referenced *The Christian Tradition: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, pp.141-155, as well as in Davis, H. F., “The Atonement” in *The Theology of the Atonement*, John R. Sheets, ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 4-22, and Daly, Gabriel, *Creation and Redemption*, (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), pp. 169-193.



the Church.<sup>35</sup> The instruction in the catechism regarding Christ's Passion very specifically describes why Jesus had to suffer and die:

CHRIST'S PASSION, - A SATISFACTON,  
A SACRIFICE, A REDEMPTION, AN EXAMPLE:

The pastor should teach that all these inestimable and divine Blessings flow to us from the Passion of Christ. ... The price which He paid for our ransom was not only adequate and equal to our debts, but far exceeded them.

Again, it (the Passion of Christ) was a sacrifice most acceptable to God, for when offered by His Son on the altar of the cross, it entirely appeased the wrath and indignation of the Father.<sup>36</sup>

The Catechism of the Council of Trent was intended to establish an officially authorized teaching throughout the Catholic Church. Other catechisms continued to be developed in different styles, much shorter than the 400+ pages of the Tridentine Catechism.<sup>37</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were one hundred different Catholic catechisms in use throughout the world,<sup>38</sup> so that by the time of the First Vatican Council (1869-70), concern was mounting over the "confusing variety" of catechisms. The Council recommended that a universal catechism be developed in the style of a short catechism developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Robert Bellarmine,<sup>39</sup> which was in a simple question and answer format. The Franco-Prussian War abruptly ended the First Vatican Council and this universal short catechism was never developed.

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<sup>35</sup> P. DeLetter and R. I. Bradley, "Catechism of the Council of Trent," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vol. 3 (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 239, accessed August 13, 2011, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.

<sup>36</sup> John McHugh and Charles Callan, translators, *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1923), 60. Note: formatting of quote, including the heading, reflects the original text.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Stephen Sloyan and Robert L. Fastiggi, "Catechisms" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2010*, ed. Robert Fastiggi, Vol. 1 (Detroit: Gale, 2010), 219-221, accessed August 13, 2011, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.

<sup>38</sup> Lara Vapnek, "Baltimore Catechism" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2010*, ed. Robert Fastiggi, Vol. 1 (Detroit: Gale, 2010), 102, accessed August 13, 2011, *Gale Virtual Reference Library*.

<sup>39</sup> Sloyan and Fastiggi, "Catechisms", 219, 221.

The failure to produce a universal catechism through the First Vatican Council did not discourage efforts in individual countries to address related concerns. Such was the case in the United States, which was populated by a diversity of immigrants who brought with them catechisms specific to their homeland. Even prior to the First Vatican Council, at the First Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1832, the United States bishops had desired to produce a standardized catechism for use by all Catholics in their dioceses. In 1884 the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore commissioned such a catechism, and one was published the following year. Other catechisms continued to be published, but the *Baltimore Catechism* was adopted by most dioceses for their religious education programs. Calls for a revision of the catechism were made as early as 1896 and a revised edition was issued in 1941. The revised version also met with criticism but the *Baltimore Catechism*, with its question and answer format, was standard sacramental preparation for generations of Catholics in the United States.<sup>40</sup> It provides a practical demonstration of Catholic catechesis in the United States prior to the changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council. A fundamental description of Jesus' passion and death included an understanding that Jesus' suffering was redemptive in the sense of making "satisfaction" to God for sin:

57. What has happened to us on account of the sin of Adam?

On account of the sin of Adam, we, his descendants, come into the world deprived of sanctifying grace and inherit his punishment, as we would have inherited his gifts had he been obedient to God.<sup>41</sup>

90. What is meant by the Redemption?

By the Redemption is meant that Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer of the whole human race, offered His sufferings and death to God as a fitting sacrifice in

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<sup>40</sup> Vapnek, "Baltimore Catechism," 102-103.

<sup>41</sup> Michael McGuire, *Father McGuire's New Study Help: Baltimore Catechism, No 2. 1941, Official Revised Text* (New York: Benziger, 1941), 45.

satisfaction for the sins of men, and regained for them the right to be children of God and heirs of heaven.<sup>42</sup>

These answers, taken from an edition of the *Baltimore Catechism* published two decades before the Second Vatican Council, were still popularly being taught in the United States after the Council. The catechism was used extensively to teach answers to human questions about God. The reason provided by the *Baltimore Catechism* for Jesus' suffering and death made no reference to God's "wrath and indignation" and no association of Jesus' sacrifice with a "ransom." Still, the fundamental teaching adopted by the Council of Trent remained: human beings inherited punishment due to the original sin of Adam, but Jesus' suffering and death was a "sacrifice" offered in "satisfaction" for our sins, thereby achieving our "redemption." Thus, despite the definitive worldview shift in perspective described in Chapter 1, official pre-Vatican II soteriological understandings in the United States were still expressions of concepts similar to the 16<sup>th</sup> century catechesis of Trent. In order to more fully explore a contemporary theological approach to Jesus' passion and death, however, it is necessary to go back centuries before the Council of Trent, to examine how the classic satisfaction theory was formally systematized.

### **People of Faith Seeking Understanding**

A clear understanding of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus has been sought from the beginning of the first gatherings of Jesus followers after the resurrection.<sup>43</sup> Theories regarding human salvation from sin are highly influenced by the understandings of God and human relationships prevalent within the culture in which

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Luke 24:13-35 provides an example of how such deliberations were occurring spontaneously, beginning on the "very day" of the resurrection as two disciples traveled on the Road to Emmaus.

they are developed. Thus, through the centuries a diversity of theories has been conceived. As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza notes:

The tradition has used metaphors such as sacrifice, expiation, propitiation, ransom, trickery, exchange, satisfaction, merit, instrumental causality, substitution, moral influence, etc. Each of these categories represents not only distinct understandings of redemption, but they also affect how the Christian community understands itself, its mission, and its role in the world.<sup>44</sup>

### **Early Christian Understandings**

The earliest followers of Jesus recognized the path to salvation as following “the Way” of Jesus’ teaching and example. Yet early church fathers such as Irenaeus and Clement recognized that “neither the teachings nor the example of Christ could be isolated from the message of the cross.”<sup>45</sup> Christian liturgies were already associating the crucifixion with a sacrifice, reflecting the Epistle to the Hebrews’ identification of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice<sup>46</sup> which was offered by Jesus on our behalf. Although it could thus be accepted that Jesus died as a sacrifice for us, an understanding of the nature of the sacrifice was not immediately clear. Scriptural references to Jesus associating his death with a “ransom for many” fueled an assumption that Jesus’ sacrifice was payment of a ransom for sinners.<sup>47</sup> But to whom was the ransom owed?

Since it could not be envisioned that a ransom needed to be paid for us to God, as early as the second century it was proposed that Jesus’ death was a ransom to buy us back from the devil. It was reasoned that since sin was a willful allegiance with the devil rather than God, sinful humanity had become slaves of Satan. As a matter of justice, human beings needed to be bought back from their contract with the devil. Origen,

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<sup>44</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot Lane, eds. (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987), 849.

<sup>45</sup> Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. (See: Heb 9-10).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 148. (See: Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45).

Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose are among those who supported this “rights of the devil theory.”<sup>48</sup> With its emphasis on contractual justice and the image of good battling the forces of evil, this ransom theory was well adapted to the Middle Ages.<sup>49</sup> However, it was soundly contested during that period by Anselm of Canterbury who argued that Jesus died as a sacrifice to God, not to the devil. He argued that Jesus’ sacrifice was offered to make satisfaction for sin, so that sinful humanity could be in harmony with God again.

### **Prominent Satisfaction Theories of the Middle Ages**

The scholastic period of the Middle Ages emphasized the value of organizing persuasive discourse systematically and analytically. In 1098 Anselm wrote *Cur Deus Homo*, commonly translated in English as *Why God Became Man*, which was a systematized explanation of redemption as atonement by satisfaction for sin. Thomas Aquinas provided refinement to Anselm’s thoughts, producing what is now regarded as a classical Catholic understanding of how Jesus’ Sacrifice on the Cross is a satisfaction to God for sin.<sup>50</sup> An understanding of the contributions of these two theologians is essential to a study of the traditional understanding of Jesus’ redemptive suffering.

**Satisfactory Atonement: Satisfaction Due the Honor of God.** St. Anselm was born around the year 1033 south of Burgundy (currently northern Italy). Largely due to the influence of his mother, Anselm was interested in entering a monastery while in his early teens. Lacking his father’s approval, however, Anselm could not gain admittance at such a young age. His life took a detour at that point, and it was two decades later when he finally entered the Benedictine Monastery at Bec. Anselm’s combination of spiritual

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Colleran, Introduction to *Why God Became Man and The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, by Anselm of Canterbury (New York: Magi Books, 1969), 43.

<sup>49</sup> Gabriel Daly, *Creation and Redemption* (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988), 189-90.

<sup>50</sup> Colleran, Introduction to *Why God Became Man and the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, 47.

dedication and administrative abilities did not go unnoticed: within three years he was made prior at the monastery and 15 years later, upon the death of the founding abbot, Anselm was elected to replace him. He reluctantly agreed to be abbot only in response to the urging of his community, and was consecrated abbot the following year. Anselm also unsuccessfully objected to his being appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, a post he held from 1093 until his death in 1109. Although he preferred living the contemplative monastic life, as Archbishop Anselm secured a reputation for his political engagements and confrontations with Kings William Rufus and Henry I of England, especially in his defense of church rights.<sup>51</sup> He was respected for his range of spiritual, pastoral and political expertise. As a Doctor of the Church he is also recognized for his theological and philosophical contributions to Church teachings.

Scholastic theological questions at the time of Anselm were primarily concerned with the incarnation and redemption. Why was Jesus born? How could the redemption be intellectually explained? As a Medieval monk and archbishop, Anselm was highly influenced by the feudal values of his time. Honor and obedience were of paramount value in both the monastic and feudal worlds of Anselm's experience.<sup>52</sup> Along with other Medieval theologians Anselm accepted without question "the historicity of paradise, the persons of Adam and Eve, a first sin, and a fall from divine friendship."<sup>53</sup> From this worldview a viable explanation of the incarnation and redemption naturally would be in the context of Adam's disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden, and the resulting consequence of Adam's sin for his descendents.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, vii-9.

<sup>52</sup> Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002), 78.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 76.

The will of every rational creature must be subject to the will of God. ... This is the only and the total honor which we owe to God and which God exacts of us. ... A person who does not render God this honor due Him, takes from God what is His and dishonors God, and this is to commit sin.<sup>54</sup>

Anselm described Adam's sin as dishonoring God through disobedience: Adam did not give God the honor that God was due. In fact, Adam insulted God by giving his allegiance to the devil instead of to God. Anselm was adamant, however, that this did not give the devil any rights over humanity. It is God who is dishonored by sin and humans are inescapably subject to God. Even if humans give their allegiance to the devil they, and the devil, are still subject to God.<sup>55</sup>

With the rejection of the ransom theory complete, Anselm proceeded to explain from the perspective of justice and order how satisfaction needed to be made to God for Adam's sin:

Now, as long as [the one who commits a sin] does not repay what he has plundered, he remains at fault. Neither is it enough merely to return what was taken away, but on account of the insult committed, he must give back more than he took away. For example, one who harms the health of another does not do enough if he restores his health, unless he makes some compensation for the injury of pain he has inflicted.<sup>56</sup>

Thus satisfaction for sin is only accomplished when the sinner gives back to God more than what was taken away. Sin does not literally take honor away from God, for "God's honor cannot be increased or diminished."<sup>57</sup> When created beings do not fulfill their purpose by subjecting themselves to God, however, they dishonor God and disturb God's dominion of the universe. If they do not voluntarily submit to God by making

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<sup>54</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man* in *Why God Became Man and the Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, trans. Joseph Colleran (New York: Magi Books, 1969), I, 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, I, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, I, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, I, 15.

satisfaction for their sin, then order must be restored by God imposing their submission through punishment – through a “deprivation of happiness.”<sup>58</sup>

Anselm contended that God had given Adam supernatural gifts of justice and blessedness to help human nature will what was right and to be oriented toward everlasting happiness in union with God. Adam’s punishment for his sin was the loss of these supernatural gifts. Without satisfaction for Adam’s sin, Adam’s descendants would inherit a human nature that was also deprived of these gifts. Without a supernatural orientation toward God, human nature would be lost to sin and would be deprived of eternal happiness with God.<sup>59</sup>

Anselm then identified an insurmountable dilemma for humanity. Satisfaction could only be made by giving more honor to God than what was taken away by sin. Since human beings owe complete allegiance to God anyway, even if they were able to offer God their perfect obedience, they would still only be giving God what was due to God, and nothing more. This meant that no human being would ever be able to offer God satisfaction for sin, and human beings would therefore never be freed from the punishment of separation from God.<sup>60</sup>

Anselm raised the question whether God, with mercy alone, would have been able to simply forgive transgressions. He then responded with numerous examples of why it would not be just for God to do so. If satisfaction is not made for a sin and the sin goes unpunished, then God would be allowing something unjust to pass under his dominion, which would not be suitable. In addition, if a sin is forgiven without satisfaction or punishment, then “one who sins and one who does not sin will be in the same position

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, I, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Wiley, *Original Sin*, 79-82.

<sup>60</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, I, 20.



before God” and that would not be just.<sup>61</sup> Even the maintenance of order in God’s universe requires God to address every sin:

If divine wisdom did not impose these sanctions where wickedness tries to disturb right order, there would arise in the very universe which God has to keep order, a certain deformity from the violation of the beauty of order, and God would seem to be deficient in His providence.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, either satisfaction or punishment needed to be made for Adam’s dishonor to God. Because a human being committed the transgression, it was necessary for a human being to make restitution. Since it would be impossible for any mortal human to offer sufficient satisfaction to God, however, it would seem impossible for human beings to be saved from punishment for sin.

In Book Two of *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm provided a solution to the human dilemma by exposing another dilemma regarding God’s design. Human beings were created rational and just by God so that they might be able to recognize God’s goodness and freely choose the Supreme Good. Anselm noted that God created human beings “for the purpose of being happy in the enjoyment of God” but God cannot accomplish “what He has begun” for human beings, unless satisfaction is made for sin and humans are restored to the state of justice and blessedness.<sup>63</sup> As already noted, in order to make satisfaction something must be offered to God that is beyond anything that a human being could offer, yet a human being must be the one to make the restitution. Anselm concluded: the only possible solution is a God-man making satisfaction to God.<sup>64</sup> “Salvation and human happiness are possible only through Christ.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, I, 12, 13, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, I, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, II, 1, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, II, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Colleran, Intro to *Why God Became Man and The Virgin Conception and Original Sin*, 27.

Anselm then posed a crucial question: *How* exactly does Jesus' offering save human beings? Anselm explained that since Jesus was sinless he was not obliged to die, just as Adam would not have had to die if he had remained sinless.<sup>66</sup> Jesus freely offered his life up in faithfulness to God's will even though he was not obliged to die. In doing so, Jesus was completely subjecting his will to God's,<sup>67</sup> giving God the honor due God, even in the face of the most extreme human challenges. He did something no one else could have done, because any other human being who might have offered to die in that way would have been offering God a life that was eventually going to end anyway.<sup>68</sup> Since Jesus did not owe a debt to God but offered his life for the honor of God, his sacrifice deserved a reward. Usually a reward is given in terms of a gift or in terms of a remission of a debt. As the Son of God, however, neither of these would apply to Jesus. "What recompense, then, will be given to one who is in need of nothing, and to whom there is nothing that can be given or remitted?"<sup>69</sup> The answer is that the reward can be given to others for whom the Son conveys it: in effect, *their* punishment can be remitted. The honor that Jesus offered God was so immeasurably good that it made satisfaction not only for the original sin of Adam, but also "for what is owed for the sins of the whole world," covering all personal sins committed after Adam's sin, "however numerous and great."<sup>70</sup> Jesus' sacrifice to God merited the remission of the punishment for all sin; the means for the remission of sin is identification with Jesus through baptism into the Christian faith. As Anselm noted, "surely God rejects no person who draws near to Him

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<sup>66</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, II, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34, 6:38.

<sup>68</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, II 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, II 19.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, II, 14.

under [Jesus'] name."<sup>71</sup> With the remission of punishment for sin through baptism, supernatural justice and blessedness were restored and human beings once more were given the ability of living a life of justice and happiness.

Anselm is recognized as the first theologian to present a systematized understanding of redemption through atonement<sup>72</sup> and his name became intrinsically associated with the doctrine of redemption.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Anselm has his share of critics. His rationally precise deductions, so appropriate to the Middle Ages, can seem stilted to the modern mind and do not address the needs of a contemporary worldview. Because Thomas Aquinas further developed Anselm's thoughts into what has become the foundation for the Church's traditional approach to redemption, it is essential for this study to also explore Aquinas' development of the atonement by satisfaction theory. Of special interest will be Aquinas' conclusions that go beyond Anselm's interpretation of the suffering of Jesus.

**Superabundant Atonement: Christ's Redemptive Passion.** Thomas Aquinas was born in late 1224 or early 1225 in Roccasecca, Italy, the son of a feudal lord.<sup>74</sup> He was sent to the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino for his education as a young child. The Aquinas family had long-standing political associations with Monte Cassino and hoped that Thomas would eventually enter the Benedictine order and possibly become the abbot at Monte Cassino.<sup>75</sup> Circumstances involving political hostilities against the Abbey led the family to transfer Thomas to the University of Naples in 1239. It was

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, II, 19.

<sup>72</sup> John McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1954), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Cessario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 261.

<sup>74</sup> M. -D Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 11.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Healey, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* (New York: Alba House, 1999), 162.

there that Thomas began his philosophical studies and was especially schooled in Aristotelian philosophy.<sup>76</sup> It was also in Naples that Thomas was introduced to the Dominicans, a mendicant order committed to preaching and studying that was founded less than ten years before Aquinas' birth.<sup>77</sup> Despite family pressures to the contrary, Thomas joined the Dominicans in 1242 or 1243. Family pressures continued, however, even to the point of their taking Thomas captive for two years. Their efforts to dissuade him from being a Dominican, utilizing even papal pressure, failed. Realizing defeat, Thomas' mother arranged an escape for Thomas so that he could return to the Dominicans. Thomas was then sent to Cologne where he studied under Albert the Great. It was there that his quiet nature was misinterpreted as reflecting slow mental abilities and he became known as "the dumb ox." His mental prowess eventually became obvious, as he obtained a Master's in Theology at the University of Paris when he was no more than thirty years old, five years younger than the official minimum age for obtaining such an advanced degree.<sup>78</sup> Thomas immediately began his teaching career and was committed to teaching and writing for the rest of his life at Paris and Naples. Since he died at the age of 49 in 1274 his career lasted only twenty years, but he is recognized as one of the most influential Catholic theologians of all times, leaving a legacy in the areas of "philosophy, systematic theology, moral theology, and scriptural exegesis."<sup>79</sup>

Aquinas, like Anselm, was a medieval theologian, but the two centuries separating their births ushered in a world of differences to their perspectives of life.

Anselm' experiences as abbot and archbishop led him to address conflicts between popes

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<sup>76</sup> Simon Tugwell, ed., *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988), 203-204.

<sup>77</sup> Healey, Charles, *Christian Spirituality*, 160-161.

<sup>78</sup> Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas*, 209-211. Note that this "Master's of Theology" degree is today's equivalent of post-doctoral work.

<sup>79</sup> Healey, *Christian Spirituality*, 162.

and kings. The lens of his understanding was focused on a feudal society where an individual's social and economic survival was dependent on one's "homage" to one's lord, through a personal contract of "allegiance."<sup>80</sup> Aquinas turned down offers of ecclesial appointments, the abbacy of Monte Cassino, and an invitation to be Archbishop of Naples,<sup>81</sup> rejecting the political inclinations of his family. In addition, his new "university" association placed him in an environment quite different from the monastic schools of Anselm's experience, with their links to paternalism and feudalism.<sup>82</sup> While sharing Anselm's firm foundation in the Christian faith, Aquinas' life was taking a very different path. His world was experiencing the decline of feudalism and a move toward urban centers of development. Most notable for this study, a cultural shift in his time<sup>83</sup> was replacing serfdom with an emphasis on individual rights and freedom:

The new regime discarded private contracts of allegiance in favor of collective charters, thus ensuring the precedence of the common good over private interests and guaranteeing the *jura et libertates* [rights and freedoms] of all.<sup>84</sup>

Developed in this environment, Aquinas' soteriology differed from Anselm's by reflecting an interest in the relationship of the individual to the common good and the value of collective memberships. Aquinas expressed this larger picture theologically through his assertion that all human beings are members of the Body of Christ<sup>85</sup> and therefore are potential participants in Christ's mission of salvation.

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<sup>80</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Tugwell, *Albert & Thomas*, 205, 207, 224.

<sup>82</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 13-17.

<sup>83</sup> It is helpful to note that a historical signal of a shift away from authoritarian rule, the signing of the Magna Carta, occurred in 1215, ten years before Aquinas' birth.

<sup>84</sup> Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 15.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), III 8.3, downloaded September 25, 2011 from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.html).

This difference between the two medieval theologians highlights a fundamental issue that is critical to soteriological investigations - the perception of God's relationship with humanity. Anselm's vision of this relationship reflected his view of authority on earth: God is envisioned in a hierarchical order that is maintained through the individual's subjection to God. With its dependence on merits, rewards and satisfaction Anselm's perception can be visualized as a ledger sheet, seeking balance and order through voluntary submission to God's will or by enforced punishments that imposed the individual's submission to God. The relationship presented by Aquinas is much more fluid and interpersonal. Aquinas stressed that God is not merely the author of life (and thus the authoritative Lord of creation); God is also creation's last end. As described in his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas envisioned humanity's coming forth from God and returning to God, with Christ being "the way of truth"<sup>86</sup> and with the mystical body of Christ, the Church, in personal solidarity with its Head.<sup>87</sup> Although this *exitus et reditus* envisions human unity with God's will, Aquinas perceived this union not in terms of a balanced ledger sheet, but in terms of balanced personal relationships – ones that are grounded in "the friendship of charity," which extends even to loving our enemies out of our love for God.<sup>88</sup>

Aquinas agreed with Anselm that Adam's nature originally had a supernatural gift to will what is right. Such a nature had an internal harmony which was lost with the sin of Adam. Reduced to merely natural capacities, fallen human nature needed supernatural assistance to reach the Divine. Both theologians agreed that descendants of Adam inherit his fallen nature and are therefore deprived of what is needed to fulfill their

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, Prol to III.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, III.8.3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, II-II.23.1.

transcendental purpose in life. Anselm focused his attention on this aspect of sin that was objectively shared by all humanity: the loss of moral integrity or harmony of the will in a fallen human nature. Aquinas agreed with Anselm regarding the involvement of the disordered human will in sin, but he also noted an involvement of the human heart and free will.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Aquinas stressed that in addition to the objective moral problem between God and humanity because of original sin, sin also involved human beings subjectively and personally.

Aquinas first identified an objective debt incurred by the *act* of sin. He did not share Anselm's understanding that justice can be restored by *either* giving God satisfaction *or* inflicting a punishment for sin. Instead he maintained that punishment of the sinner is always necessary:

... the act of sin makes man deserving of punishment, in so far as he transgresses the order of Divine justice, to which he cannot return except he pay some sort of penal compensation, which restores him to the equality of justice; so that, according to the order of Divine justice, he who has been too indulgent to his will, by transgressing God's commandments, suffers, either willingly or unwillingly, something contrary to what he would wish.<sup>90</sup>

Aquinas then addressed the subjective element of sin by making a distinction between an *act* of sin and the *stain* of sin, an effect of sin which remains after the act is committed:

Wherefore the stain of sin cannot be removed from man, unless his will accept the order of Divine justice, that is to say, unless either of his own accord he take upon himself the punishment of his past sin, or bear patiently the punishment which God inflicts on him; and in both ways punishment avails for satisfaction.<sup>91</sup>

Aquinas thus made a critical distinction between punishment for punishment's sake (i.e., solely inflicting suffering on a transgressor) and punishment that is restorative.

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<sup>89</sup> Wiley, *Original Sin*, 83-87.

<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.87.1.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, I-II.87.6.

Human beings are united to God through their free will, not through the infliction of suffering. Punishment is not sufficient, therefore, unless it removes the stain of sin, and that is not possible unless the human being willingly accepts the punishment. In terms of the human being's relationship with God, Aquinas is addressing the need for a conversion – a *reditus* whereby the heart and will of the sinner is once more turned toward God.

Anselm argued that an imposed punishment would enforce the individual's subjection to God and therefore would satisfactorily restore the Divine order. For Aquinas the restoration of harmony on a Divine level necessarily includes humanity's final union with God. Unless the restoration of the subjective harmony within the individual is addressed, this final union will not be realized. Restoration of the Divine harmony therefore requires restoration of a subjective harmony within the sinner.

Romanus Cessario explains that once Aquinas' approach to sin and its effects are understood, one can truly appreciate Aquinas' approach to Christ's Satisfaction through his Passion and Death. Cessario notes that Aquinas' depiction of the Atonement did not rely on Anselm's abstract sense of justice: Aquinas addressed the reality of sin's effects on the sinner as well as the entire human race. Aquinas' conclusion is that Jesus needed to voluntarily endure suffering as well as death in order to effect the "reditus," which involves the "re-imagining" of humanity's likeness and harmony with God.<sup>92</sup>

Aquinas explained how the sacramental life of the Church is integrally connected to Jesus' deliverance of us from sin:

[S]ince Christ's Passion preceded, as a kind of universal cause of the forgiveness of sins, it needs to be applied to each individual for the cleansing of personal sins. Now this is done by baptism and penance and the other sacraments, which derive their power from Christ's Passion.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Cessario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 145-149.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.49.1.



Aquinas was clear that Christ's suffering is not an automatic cure for us. In order to benefit from it we need to be actively living in Christ's redemptive love:

Christ's Passion is applied to us even through faith, that we may share in its fruits according to Rom. 3:25: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood." But the faith through which we are cleansed from sin is not "lifeless faith," which can exist even with sin, but "faith living" through charity, that thus Christ's Passion may be applied to us, not only as to our minds, but also as to our hearts. And even in this way sins are forgiven through the power of the Passion of Christ.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Role of Suffering in the Soteriologies of Anselm and Aquinas**

Anselm's theory of atonement is based on the constancy of God's will for justice and order. Anselm explained that since sin disturbs God's dominion of the universe it is a matter of justice to restore the honor that is due to God. If satisfaction could not be made by the sinner for an offense then punishment needed to be imposed on the sinner. That is why Adam's sin was understood to be tragic for all humanity. No satisfaction had ever been made for Adam's original sin. That meant that all of his descendents were living with the consequence of Adam's punishment – a deprivation of supernatural gifts that would have fostered an eternal relationship with God. Anselm's focus was on an objective level; he did not address any necessity for a subjective change in the sinner. Thus he was able to argue that imposed punishment/suffering restored the Divine order if satisfaction was not voluntarily made.

Anselm noted that suffering could play a role in satisfaction "if man sinned through pleasure," for then it would be fitting "to make satisfaction through hardship."<sup>95</sup> Since Jesus was not a sinner, however, it would be misinterpreting Anselm to suggest that Jesus made satisfaction to God through his suffering. Anselm's focus was directed to the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, II, 11.

satisfaction Jesus made through his steadfast obedience to God for God's honor and glory. However, he notes that Jesus' obedience was even more striking because it culminated in his death:

But there is nothing more bitter or more difficult for man to suffer for the honor of God voluntarily and without obligation, than death, and man absolutely cannot give himself more fully to God than when he commits himself to death for God's honor.<sup>96</sup>

Any human being sacrificing his life for God would be giving God ultimate homage. However, Anselm stressed that Jesus' death was immeasurably more significant than the death of any other human being. Because he had never sinned, Jesus was not obliged to die - just as Adam would not have had to die if he had not sinned. Therefore in giving his life to God on the cross Jesus gave God something even beyond the obedience that he was obliged to give to God. Anselm noted that such an incredible act of homage deserved a reward from God. Rewards were usually offered in terms of a gift or the remission of a debt, but neither of these could be suitably given to the Incarnate Son of God for his own sake. Instead, since Jesus' extraordinary offering was more than sufficient to make satisfaction for Adam's sin, God rewarded Jesus by remitting Adam's unpaid debt for all those who identified themselves with Jesus.

Because Anselm's logic is grounded in a worldview that prioritized allegiance and honor to one's lord, it is difficult today to relate to Anselm's satisfaction theory. Nevertheless, even with its requirement that dishonor to a lord needed to be rectified, nothing in *Why God Became Man* suggests that Jesus' crucifixion was a punishment or any kind of penal substitution for sinners.<sup>97</sup> To the contrary, Anselm interpreted Jesus' taking up his cross as an example for us to obediently follow God's will even when it

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> McIntyre, John, *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo*, p. 87.

means enduring injustice and great suffering in our lives: “Do you not understand that ... He gave to men the example of never turning away from the justice they owe to God, no matter what disadvantages they can experience?”<sup>98</sup> Rather than seeing Jesus’ suffering as evidence of God’s wrath (i.e., “God’s will to punish”<sup>99</sup> when satisfaction is not made), Anselm saw confirmation of God’s great mercy in providing such a wondrous redemptive solution for sinners: “We have found [the mercy of God] to be so great and so in accord with His justice, that it could not be conceived to be either greater or more just.”<sup>100</sup>

Aquinas shared many of Anselm’s understandings of the *objective* consequence of sin involving the debt owed to God in justice. It was his recognition of the *subjective* consequence of sin that sets his soteriology apart from Anselm and led him to focus on aspects of personal relationships rather than objective actions alone. Specifically it involved a shift to charity as a foundational element of atonement rather than merely attributing satisfaction to obedience and fulfilling a duty to honor God. Differing from Anselm, Aquinas emphasized that punishment was necessary to make satisfaction for sin; it was not merely an alternative when satisfaction was not made. Moreover, in order to be satisfactory, punishment could not merely be inflicted on the sinner – it had to be voluntarily accepted by him or her. Thus Aquinas argued that restoration of what was lost through sin required the sinner turning back to God. Aquinas’ soteriology went beyond mere obedience to commandments, placing an emphasis on a virtuous life which was lived in a loving relationship with God and others.

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<sup>98</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, II, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, I, 6. Anselm thus viewed God’s “wrath” as a will to maintain justice and order when satisfaction is not made, not as a reactive emotion of indignation against the sinner.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, II, 20.

How did Aquinas interpret Jesus' suffering on the cross? Focusing on the individual's relationship with God, Aquinas recognized that an objective debt needed to be paid to make satisfaction for sin. From Aquinas' perspective this necessarily included suffering. Aquinas considered sin as "an action lacking due order;" hardship is therefore needed to restore the order by offsetting the will's indulgence in sinning.<sup>101</sup> However, Aquinas argued that suffering/punishment becomes satisfactory only when it is voluntarily accepted in love – in the desire for restoration of the friendship with God that was broken by sin. In voluntarily enduring such horrendous suffering on the cross out of love for us Christ merited not only a sufficient but a "superabundant" satisfaction for the sins of all humanity.<sup>102</sup> No one but the Incarnate God could have made such an infinite satisfaction, thus restoring to human beings the supernatural gifts lost through original sin. Through his suffering Christ opened the way for the *reditus*; human beings now need to freely and personally complete their return to God by sharing "in His Passion by faith and charity and the sacraments of faith."<sup>103</sup> Christ's suffering is the "sufficient cause" of our final union with God, but Aquinas quoted St. Paul in reminding us that "we must first 'suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified' afterwards 'with Him.'"<sup>104</sup>

Aquinas did not see suffering as an end in itself; suffering is an instrument in effecting this return of human beings to God. Where sin is present, suffering is a curative medicine: it makes satisfaction and restores the disorder caused by sin. Suffering is also a preventive medicine that provides the necessary strength for the return journey to God. By voluntarily enduring sacrifices for the honor of God human beings are identifying

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<sup>101</sup> Cessario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 143.

<sup>102</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.48.2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, III.49.5.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, III.79.2. See: Rom 8:17.

with, and sharing in, the Passion of Christ. It is the necessary way of the virtuous life and final union with God. It is a journey that every human being has to take, but it is not a solitary one. Through our union with Christ the Head, we are also intimately connected with the other members of his mystical body. Aquinas noted that just as the superabundant satisfaction of Christ benefits all humanity, the sufferings of others fill up a “treasury of satisfaction” that can benefit all the members who are united in charity.<sup>105</sup>

Grounded in love and obedience to his Father, Christ re-imagined human nature to the state it was originally created by establishing “a complete submission and subjection of all human energies and interests to God.”<sup>106</sup> Human suffering plays an essential role in “ratifying” this re-imagining, as Cessario explains:

The supernatural gifts which the Body have from their Head are such as to effect a personal solidarity with him in the historically unavoidable situation of human suffering. The grace and charity which Christ’s members have from and in him are the grace and the love of his cross. These conform Christ’s Body to Christ’s own obedience and love. This conformity urges Christ’s members to “make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ” – that is, to supply their own free ratification of the experience of the Cross as the definitive historical shape of communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit in and through their Head.<sup>107</sup>

The Tridentine Catechism relied on Aquinas’ descriptions of Christ’s Passion as a “satisfaction,” a “sacrifice,” and a “redemption” (cf *Summa* III Q48.2, 48.3, 48.4) in atoning for the sins of the world. However, it differed from Aquinas and Anselm as well, in the way it explicitly defined Christ’s suffering as an appeasement of “the wrath and indignation of the Father.”<sup>108</sup> Just as Anselm found evidence of God’s mercy in the manner Christ made satisfaction for our sin, Aquinas emphasized God’s love for

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<sup>105</sup> Cessario, *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 141-142.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 260.

<sup>108</sup> These quotes from the Tridentine Catechism are those that are referenced by footnote 6 of this chapter.

humanity.<sup>109</sup> The disorder of sin needed to be addressed so that sinners could be reunited with God. And it was God's unconditional love and mercy – not wrathful indignation – that provided a satisfactory atonement for sin through Christ's passion. Unfortunately, a modern interpretation of the Tridentine language of “wrath and indignation” ties it to an emotional reaction by God that rejects the sinner as well as the sin. As a result some interpretations of atonement (which would be misinterpretations of Anselm or Aquinas) associate Christ's suffering as necessary for “‘changing the mind’ of an angry God.”<sup>110</sup> Such a concept became a stumbling block for much contemporary thought regarding redemptive suffering, as is evidenced in the following chapter.

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<sup>109</sup>Aquinas saw God, through Christ, providing the means for atonement that was necessary for humanity's salvation: “But in this that man was delivered by Christ's Passion, many other things besides deliverance from sin concurred for man's salvation. In the first place, man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love Him in return, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation ...” (*Summa*, Q46.3).

<sup>110</sup>Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 255.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A CONTEMPORARY SOTERIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

An overview of contemporary problems associated with the mystery of human suffering was provided in Chapter 1. Traditional soteriological approaches to the suffering of Jesus on the cross were presented in Chapter 2. In this chapter the contemporary soteriological environment will be highlighted. First, specific contemporary concerns will be identified that directly impact this project's goal of relating human suffering to the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ. Next, the soteriology of Karl Rahner will be presented as a contemporary systematized response to these concerns. The chapter will close with a presentation of three concerns raised by Rahner when applying a salvific significance to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Rahner's concerns will be identified as fundamental to this project, as well as an additional concern: the need for a more specific consideration of the suffering of Jesus than that provided by Rahner's soteriology.

#### **Modern Soteriological Developments**

As noted in Chapter 1, scientific discoveries and philosophical developments since the time of the Protestant Reformation fueled challenges to the theological understandings and methodologies basic to the classic soteriological approach. Propositions based on Scriptural interpretations and Divine revelation were abandoned by scholastics who desired to find intellectual assurance through experiential verification. Additional scientific discoveries continued to propel the movement to an anthropological approach to reality, leading the Modern Era to develop a more focused and systematized

approach to “social” sciences.<sup>111</sup> Charles Darwin’s findings in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century describing an evolutionary *biological* development occurring in the natural world were paralleled by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with theories of the *social* and *cultural* evolution of human beings. Evidence was literally being unearthed that “every dimension of human living had evolved” from a primitive to more advanced levels.<sup>112</sup> Parallels were drawn so that, in addition to recognizing *physical* life in terms of slowly evolving development, *moral* development also came to be understood as a slowly evolving phenomenon.<sup>113</sup> Such proposals countered the story of humanity’s fall from a more perfect state, and fueled interest in theories of evolving human development on personal and social levels. This growing appreciation for “the social nature of human existence” fostered the development of an understanding of original sin in terms of the “socio-cultural character of life.”<sup>114</sup> Within a secularized environment the focus was shifting away from the effects of alienation (i.e., sin) on the relationship of the human being with God. Social scientists began to focus on the effects of alienation on the development of the human being – on both personal (psychological and emotional) as well as *inter-personal* levels.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century investigations of social relationships and cultural developments were raising awareness of power structures that suppress the poor and marginalized through domination and/or violence. Liberation and feminist theologies

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<sup>111</sup> Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (Vol. 53, #329: March 1843) included a review of Auguste Comte’s proposal of a “new science” which was “to be called *Social Physics*, or *Sociology*.” Comte’s work was described as an “attempt” to apply the “*scientific method* of cogitation [to] the affairs of human society.” See “Comte” at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12761/12761-h/12761-h.htm#bw329s10> (accessed June 14, 2015). As found at <http://studymore.org.uk/sshtim.htm#1843> (accessed June 14, 2015) the first listing of “sociology” in the Oxford English Dictionary occurred in 1843.

<sup>112</sup> Wiley, *Original Sin*, 119.

<sup>113</sup> Such theories were not totally new, but “without explicit intent” reflected the patristic theology of Irenaeus, one hundred fifty years before Augustine’s theory of original sin became established. See Wiley, *Original Sin*, 119.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Horace Barnes, ed, *Theology and the Social Sciences* (Orbis Books: New York, 2001), xiv.



especially identified these as systemic evils that can be so established in a culture that their influence is not easily recognized. Focus was given to the extensiveness of patriarchal systems and the predominance of Western influence over Third World countries; concern was also extended to these systemic influences within the Church itself. Critical attention was drawn to the Church's traditional teaching that salvation was achieved through the Catholic Church and her sacraments. In a world that was increasingly more sensitive to diversity and pluralism, issues suggesting exclusivity were thus being identified and scrutinized. Such concerns regarding human and cultural development were instrumental in advancing social science resources as a complement for theological studies.<sup>115</sup>

Tatha Wiley succinctly describes the resulting contemporary scholastic setting:

Empirical apprehensions of human subjectivity by modern psychology and philosophy replaced the abstract metaphysical anthropology of the medieval scholastics. Moral theologians abandoned the juridical language of commands and disobedience in favor of thinking about sin in terms of relationship, commitment, and orientation.<sup>116</sup>

Specific theological concerns can be identified within these developments as directly impacting the study of redemptive suffering. Contemporary soteriological considerations reflect a shift away from abstract classifications based on a theocentrist worldview, toward an emphasis on anthropological considerations of the development of human relationships. A growing interest in human autonomy and freedom, accompanied by spiraling scientific developments in a highly secularized culture, worked together to fuel consideration of how much human beings are meant to be creators of their own

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<sup>115</sup> The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine observes in *Donum Veritatis* that “theology’s proper task” involves an investigation of “historical disciplines” and that “consultation of the ‘human sciences’ is also necessary to understand better the revealed truth about man and the moral norms for his conduct...” See: [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19900524\\_theologian-vocation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900524_theologian-vocation_en.html), accessed December 9, 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Wiley, *Original Sin*, 207.

destiny. Theological questions began to surface: Is God's "plan" for salvation as detailed as it was traditionally taught? It is fundamental to Christianity that Jesus is our Savior; but contemporary questions called for a reconsideration of exactly how Jesus saves us. Was the suffering and violence experienced by Jesus part of God's plan for salvation as atonement for sin? Modern studies of power structures have uncovered the camouflaged nature of systemic domination – powerful influences so entrenched that they could easily be misinterpreted or even totally escape identification. Some theologians posited that the violence of the crucifixion could not have been part of any plan by God. Noting that suffering and violence are evils that need to be ended, they pointed to examples where the concept of redemptive suffering was used to promote, rather than end, the abuse and dehumanizing of slaves. Others pointed to the prolongation of pain and subjugation of women by a patriarchal system which encouraged women to endure rather than challenge suffering. They adamantly and accurately asserted that "passivity and glorification of victims" is an "abuse of the cross."<sup>117</sup> Such abuses have been used to support the position that a redemptive value accorded the suffering of Jesus is a misinterpretation of Jesus' crucifixion that does not take into account the reality of systemic evil and its insidious influences.<sup>118</sup> A viable soteriology of atonement must consider such contemporary concerns. The violent crucifixion of an innocent man is irrefutably evil. Any theory of atonement for sin must avoid the implication that two wrongs can make a right, or that a salvific end could justify an unjust means. Specific to this project, the concept of redemptive suffering would not be morally viable if it were built on such a foundation.

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<sup>117</sup> Callahan, *Created for Joy* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2007), 79.

<sup>118</sup> As an example, see: Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 83-93.

Original sin was foundational to the medieval theologians' concept of salvation, but its traditional interpretation had become a challenge to contemporary thought. Social sin rather than original sin was becoming the dominant focus, as contemporary interests turned toward examining evolutionary and social reasons for the presence of evil in the world. The contemporary emphasis on an empirically based anthropocentric approach has impacted the focus of contemporary soteriological concerns. In recognition of these factors the theological anthropology of Karl Rahner will now be highlighted as a representative theological approach for addressing contemporary soteriological concerns.

### **An Ascending Neo-Scholastic Approach**

Karl Rahner was born in Freiburg in southwest Germany in 1904. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1922 and was ordained in Munich in 1932. Early in his training he developed an interest in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant; this eventually influenced his movement toward Transcendental Thomism which seeks to apply modern philosophical approaches to the teachings of Aquinas.<sup>119</sup> Beginning in 1934 he continued to study Kant and Aquinas at the University of Freiburg, but it was here that he was also deeply influenced by Martin Heidegger. Seeking a doctorate in philosophy, Rahner focused his dissertation on one question in Aquinas' *Summa*,<sup>120</sup> utilizing concepts influenced by Kant and Heidegger in his support of Aquinas' conclusions. When Rahner's dissertation was not approved at Freiburg he transferred to the University of Innsbruck in Austria, where he graduated with a doctorate in theology in 1936. His failed philosophical dissertation was published as *Spirit of the World* a few years later.<sup>121</sup> Thus began a prolific career of

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<sup>119</sup> Gerald A. McCool, ed., *A Rahner Reader* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), xiii.

<sup>120</sup> Rahner's focus was on "Whether the intellect can actually understand through the intelligible species of which it is possessed, without turning to the phantasms?" as found in Aquinas' *Summa*, I.84.7.

<sup>121</sup> McCool, *A Rahner Reader*, p. xviii.

publications and lectures that have earned Karl Rahner the distinction of being one of the most influential theologians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>122</sup> The concept that remained central to Rahner's work had its beginning in his rejected dissertation: human beings are "spirits of the world," created in a social culture with a specific history, but who possess the drive to self-transcendence to God.<sup>123</sup>

Rahner was becoming proficient at using modern philosophy to address traditional concepts of faith just as Vatican II was seeing the need for a more modern approach to catechesis. The Council of Trent's catechism provided answers for priests to address challenges at the time of the Protestant Reformation, but that solution was not appropriate for the modern challenges presented by secular modernity and religious pluralism.<sup>124</sup> Instead of writing another catechism for priests, Vatican II sought to revamp the way seminarians were trained so as to better equip them to deal with contemporary questions. Karl Rahner rose to the challenge and in 1976 published *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Rahner wrote *Foundations* to provide traditional Christian insights and teachings in a language of modern times. Rahner described *Foundations* as having "a somewhat more comprehensive and more systematic character" than his other theological writings.<sup>125</sup> *Foundations* will thus be a primary source for an examination of Rahner's soteriology in this chapter, supplemented by his other writings as necessary for a more detailed investigation.

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<sup>122</sup> For further reading, see "Karl Rahner," in Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology, Derek Michaud, ed., at <http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/bce/rahner.htm>, accessed October 22, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> D. S. Thompson, class notes: TH 6330 Principles of Theological Method, March 28, 2006, St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Tx.

<sup>124</sup> George Vandervelde, Review of *Foundations of Christian Faith*, by Karl Rahner, (Calvin Theological Journal 14: 1979), 244-245.

<sup>125</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, xv.

## A Transcendental<sup>126</sup> Thomist Soteriology: Jesus Christ as Absolute Savior

In this section of the chapter Rahner's theology will be explored in terms of three basic issues of classical soteriology: 1) *God's relationship with humanity*, 2) *Humanity's need for a Savior*, and 3) *The means to human salvation*. As summarized in Chapter 2, Aquinas' theology provided a classical understanding of those issues: 1) God desired human beings to share an eternal relationship with God. 2) Because of sin humanity lost the supernatural assistance needed to reach their supernatural goal; they needed a Savior to atone for their sin so they could be united with God. 3) The means of salvation is Jesus Christ's superabundant atonement of sin through his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus' saving action is mediated to human beings through the graces imparted by the Body of Christ (the Catholic Church) and her Sacraments.

Employing the methods of his time, Aquinas used a Scholastic approach to theology which provided systematically reasoned solutions to these theological considerations. Karl Rahner was born into a culture quite different from Aquinas, but he was grounded in the same theological traditions. Rahner's unique gifts and life experiences enabled him to approach the issues addressed by Aquinas with sensitivity to, and appreciation for, contemporary concerns. The following section presents an interpretation of his Transcendental Thomist responses.

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<sup>126</sup> Before presenting Rahner's theology, a clarification may be helpful to minimize confusion over Rahner's use of the term "transcendental." Ingvild Røsok notes the need for a distinction between the use of the word "transcendence" as associated with Immanuel Kant (and the subsequent transcendental philosophical approach utilized by Rahner) and Rahner's use of the term in association with "transcendental experiences" in relationship with God. Kant refers to "transcendental conditions" that describe a subject's a priori knowledge of an object which make the subject's experience possible. Understood in this context "no knowledge going beyond experience, beyond space and time, is possible." Thus, Røsok highlights that although Rahner's philosophy reflects a Kantian "transcendental" epistemology, Rahner's description of "transcendental" experiences is contrary to Kant, in that it denotes the possibility for *human* transcendence in terms of an ability to go beyond finite experiences. Quotes taken from *Surrender to Life*. 13-14, accessed November 5, 2011, <http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/161123/1/R%C3%B8sok,%20Ingvild.pdf>.

**God's relationship with Humanity.** Rahner's depiction of God is not only one of Unconditional Love, but of a Love that is so Self-giving that it is always and universally present in human existence. Rahner thus spoke of the "supernatural existential" - a capacity to share in the life of God that is intrinsic to every human being.<sup>127</sup> Rahner explained that human beings have an innate desire to go beyond themselves – to not be content with their present experience. Validation of this can readily be found in the human desire to grow in an understanding of life in all its dimensions – from the vastness of the universe down to the depths of microscopic biological realities. Human beings have a basic urge to know, experience, and accomplish more. Rahner described this transcendental urge to go beyond the familiar as a yearning to explore and experience mystery. He identified God as "Absolute Mystery," the final destination to which our transcendental urges are directed.<sup>128</sup> Rahner explained that as human beings realize they are "capable of knowing more," they are experiencing the reality of mystery. This experience can be understood as an invitation to enter more deeply into exploring the unknown. God is the ground of all human knowledge; as such, it is God who is extending this invitation implicitly to all human beings to transcend themselves, to share in God's divine life.<sup>129</sup> In his review of *Foundations*, G. J. C. Marchant expounds on Rahner's thought: even if it is not recognized, man is grounded in "a 'pre-apprehension' of an infinite horizon of 'something' rather than 'nothing'."<sup>130</sup> This conviction that there is "something" beyond our understanding is not coming from an external source: human beings have implicit experience of it in the depth of their own

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<sup>127</sup> Rahner, *Foundation of Christian Faith*, 126-133.

<sup>128</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 44.

<sup>129</sup> Mark F. Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 6.

<sup>130</sup> G. J. C. Marchant, "The Theology of Karl Rahner," Review of *Foundations of Christian Faith* by Karl Rahner, (Churchman 93.3, 1979), 256.

existence. Even without conscious awareness of it, therefore, human beings are made to seek communion with God.

**Humanity's Need for a Savior.** The classical description of humanity's need for a Savior, formed before an appreciation for historical consciousness, was based on a literal interpretation of the story of creation found in Genesis 3. Traditional soteriologies were therefore developed on the framework of an original sin which not only affected our first parents' relationship with God, it affected human nature itself. The human race had fallen from grace and needed Divine assistance, a Redeemer, to bring about a satisfactory atonement and reunion with God. Rahner sought to maintain the traditional teachings of the Church, but to describe them in contemporary terms. Rather than interpreting the Garden of Eden literally, he saw the account of Paradise as a mythical (but not a "mere myth") expression of human longing for transcendental fulfillment.<sup>131</sup> Addressing the traditional interpretation that suffering is a consequence of original sin, Rahner noted that the way we encounter "toil, ignorance, sickness, pain and death" in this life is directly related to humanity being situated in an environment of refusing God's gift of grace.<sup>132</sup> Rahner emphasized, however, that God did not banish us from a physically created Paradise as the Genesis account suggests.<sup>133</sup> He pointed to the Incarnation as evidence that God was not estranged from human beings even after human beings began to sin. By taking on our flesh God was irrevocably reaching out to us in a most concrete way.<sup>134</sup>

So what did Rahner see as our need for a Savior? Rahner described our need for a concrete (i.e., in human history) realization of the supernatural fulfillment human beings

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<sup>131</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 114-115.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>133</sup> See Gen 3:23-24.

<sup>134</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 300-301.

long for but have not been able to experience. Rahner argued that God's implicit invitation to human beings is an invitation to go beyond the limits of the self. It is an invitation for true freedom, with an ultimate fulfillment in God. However, throughout history humans have been guilty of using their freedom to reject authentic freedom and fulfillment in God. When we say "no" to God's invitation we place ourselves in a situation of guilt rather than grace. Our "no" is not only a rejection of God, but it is also a rejection of the true freedom of self-transcendence. Without God, however, we do not even recognize the situation in which we have placed ourselves.<sup>135</sup> Our situation of guilt is also compounded by sin's expansive nature: we make personal choices to reject God's calling by refusing to do the good necessary to reach our potential but these personal sins also impact the choices others make. Drawing on this concept Rahner defined original sin as being "touched by the guilt of others," even being "co-determined" by that guilt.<sup>136</sup> Human beings are made for ultimate fulfillment in God but are trapped in a situation of guilt. A Savior is needed to free human beings from their hopelessness – one who can explicitly and irrevocably communicate God's salvific will for humanity.

**The Means to Human Salvation.** The classical theory of atonement, developed in feudal times, focused on a need to restore the justice due to the Ultimate Sovereign Lord. No mortal human being could make satisfaction for sin; a God-man was the only means to our salvation. Rahner focused on an always present and unconditionally loving God rather than a judging Lord, but Rahner's qualification for who could save us agreed with the classical conclusion: a God-man was essential. Rahner explained that the Divine transcendental invitation is extended universally. As *Spirits in the World*, however,

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<sup>135</sup> Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner*, 27.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 34-35.



human beings require historically concrete (i.e., in the world) realities as well as transcendental (i.e., spiritual) ones.<sup>137</sup> As long as humanity remained trapped in a concrete reality of guilt rather than grace, human beings would not be able to realize their potential for transcendence to the Divine. Rahner identified the God-man Jesus Christ as our “Absolute Savior” from this situation.<sup>138</sup> Through Jesus’ free and authentically human response to God, human nature’s supernatural union with God is no longer merely potential. It has been concretely realized in history in a human being, and as such has been concretely communicated to humanity. The hypostatic union itself, where the Logos became a human being, is God’s explicit self-communication of this irrevocable union between God and humanity.

Rahner’s emphasis on the Incarnation underscored his conception of how our salvation is realized. Consistent with the modern empirical focus on process rather than nature, Rahner considered our salvation an event rather than a single act of atonement. The classical theory saw our relationship with God as broken; a Savior was needed to *do* some *thing* to restore the order. As the Tridentine Catechism demonstrated, this could be interpreted to mean that God’s relationship had changed toward us, and Jesus’ sacrifice was necessary to appease an offended Lord. Stressing that God is always on our side, Rahner wanted to make sure that the Savior’s mission was “not misinterpreted as ‘changing the mind’ of an angry God.”<sup>139</sup> Rahner insisted that God’s saving action toward human beings was not an isolated action related to the crucifixion; it was already initiated at the Incarnation.<sup>140</sup> In fact, Rahner described Jesus’ Incarnation, life, death

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<sup>137</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 208.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 255.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 196-197.

and resurrection as integrated demonstrations of God's "salvific will" throughout the "Christ event." Christ does not merely perform a "redemptive activity," he *is* the salvific event.<sup>141</sup>

How does the Christ event save human beings? Jesus Christ is God's ultimate self-communication of love: the gift of God's self to humanity. Jesus was unreservedly united with God, and Jesus' resurrection emphatically demonstrates God's "vindication [of Jesus] and acceptance of Jesus' claim to be the absolute savior:"

there is present with [Jesus] a new and unsurpassable closeness of God which on its part will prevail victoriously and is inseparable from him. [Jesus] calls this closeness the coming and arrival of God's kingdom, which forces a person to decide explicitly whether or not he accepts this God who has come so close.<sup>142</sup>

The supernatural existential is no longer a transcendental desire or simply an implicit promise. Jesus has made human union with God a concretely historical reality; as such, it is also a concretely historical invitation. "From both a secular and a theological perspective, man has come to himself, that is, has come to the mystery of his existence, not only in the transcendental of his beginning, but also in his history."<sup>143</sup> From a practical perspective, human beings need no longer be trapped in a situation of guilt: Jesus places them in a situation of grace. God has always and already been on their side; Jesus himself is concrete confirmation of God's unity with humanity. Human beings simply need to freely accept the invitation of love and mercy that God is concretely communicating through Jesus.

Rahner's contemporary soteriology reflected his perception of a development in Catholic understanding. The classical theory envisioned Christ's saving graces as only

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 293.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 170.

being accessible to baptized Catholics, since the Catholic Church and her Sacraments were the instruments of Christ's grace. This understanding meant that even infants who had never committed a personal sin could not enter heaven if they died without being baptized. By the time of Vatican II, theologians were re-examining attitudes about God's relationship not only with unbaptized babies but also with unbaptized adults. Vatican II specifically explored efforts to promote Christian unity and to improve relationships with non-Catholics. *Lumen Gentium* reflected the Church's contemporary softening of the traditional teaching in its declaration that although the Catholic Church is "the pillar and mainstay of the truth ... many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines."<sup>144</sup>

Rahner's appreciation for the soteriological implications of religious pluralism led to the development of his concept of the Anonymous Christian. Rahner was clear that the "event of Christ" is the "unsurpassable climax of all revelation."<sup>145</sup> He upheld the uniqueness of the Catholic Church in her *concrete* mediation of Christ's grace. Rahner also argued, however, that since the invitation to union with God is extended to all, it is possible that some will accept God's invitation (living life in harmony with the essence of Christianity) without realizing that they have done so. Such a person, Rahner explained, is *implicitly* Christian and can be referred to as an "anonymous Christian".<sup>146</sup> Salvation can thus be achieved by those who do not consciously accept God's invitation through baptism into the Catholic faith.

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<sup>144</sup> Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, #8, accessed November 5, 2011, [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

<sup>145</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 174.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

## The Role of Suffering in Rahner's Soteriology

Rahner's presentation of a God who is always present to us described a God who does not need to be appeased because of sin. Classical soteriology related the suffering and death of Jesus as a sacrificial offering to God in atonement for sin. Rahner rejected this approach if it is used to imply that God is an angry judge requiring the blood of Jesus to make satisfaction for sins. In noting that the concept of "atonement" and "blood being poured out for many" was part of the culture of the first Christians, Rahner explained a stumbling block for modern times:

[S]uch expressions [by the first Christians] were a help towards understanding the salvific significance of the death of Jesus, because at that time the idea of propitiating the divinity by means of a sacrifice was a current notion which could be presupposed to be valid. But on the other hand we have to say, first of all, that this notion offers little help to us today towards the understanding we are looking for, and secondly, that the connection between the idea of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice of propitiation and the basic experience of the pre-resurrection Jesus and for the risen Jesus is not immediately clear.<sup>147</sup>

In responding to the contemporary emphasis on pluralism, Rahner sought to identify the "universal significance and cosmic dimension of the Jesus Christ event."<sup>148</sup>

The traditional soteriology associated Jesus' crucifixion with a propitiatory sacrifice. Rahner considered such a link to be culturally influenced, and to be a "legitimate" but "somewhat secondary" interpretation "not absolutely indispensable" to universal salvific significance.<sup>149</sup> Rahner noted that Jesus' "death is an atonement for the sins of the world and was adequately consummated as such,"<sup>150</sup> but he considered Jesus' submission to death only an essential *part* of Jesus' saving event, that needed to be considered along

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<sup>147</sup>Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 282.

<sup>148</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?* (New York: Orbis, 2005), 149.

<sup>149</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 284. See p. 9 of *Foundations of Christian Faith* for Rahner's distinction between a "first" and "second level" of reflection. Rahner is seeking to provide a foundational first level of reflection, detached from cultural interests/influences of the various theological disciplines.

<sup>150</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 255.

with his incarnation, obedient life, and resurrection. Rahner arrived at this conclusion without attributing a specific connection between Jesus' suffering and our salvation.

In not assigning a soteriological significance to Jesus' suffering, Rahner was not denying that Jesus experienced tremendous suffering. One of Rahner's concerns with a descending Christology was that, historically, it lent itself to a mythological viewing of Jesus as God without appreciating that he had a full human nature as well as a divine one. Interpretations proposing that Jesus had attained the beatific vision while he was on earth "would have made all suffering [on the part of Jesus] impossible".<sup>151</sup> Completely opposed to this interpretation, Rahner stressed that Jesus had normal human experiences in an "absolute difference from [God]"<sup>152</sup> and that Jesus was vulnerable even to the point of being "overwhelmed by a deadly feeling of being forsaken by God."<sup>153</sup>

Since Rahner's goal was to express traditional Catholic teachings in contemporary terms, how did he address the Church's traditional understanding that Jesus' suffering and death had a particularly salvific significance? Rahner did not specifically challenge the classical teaching of Jesus' death as sacrificial; instead he pointed to the Incarnation as evidence that God had a salvific will toward us prior to Jesus' crucifixion. His primary concern was that God's desire for reconciliation (and not appeasement), would be identified as the cause of Jesus' sacrifice, and that God is seen as the initiator of the reconciliation.<sup>154</sup> With that understanding as the basis:

Then the only question ... is how the connection (and there is no doubt that there is one) between the death of Christ as God's grace and our freedom as liberated by grace is to be

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<sup>151</sup> Dupuis, *Who Do You Say I Am?*, 130.

<sup>152</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 292.

<sup>153</sup> Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 5*, Trans. Karl H. Kruger, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975), 203. Rahner clarifies how Jesus' vulnerability was possible despite his unique unity with God in 203 -214.

<sup>154</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 282.

understood more exactly. For then we can answer more clearly the question about the salvific efficacy of Jesus' death for us.<sup>155</sup>

Rahner's expressed "soteriological interpretation" of Jesus' death was that it was necessary to make God's "salvific will present in the world historically, really and irrevocably."<sup>156</sup> The finality of death, freely accepted by Jesus in obedience to God, irrevocably established Jesus' life of complete surrender to God. Jesus' resurrection emphatically and concretely confirmed that God's saving power was able to overcome even death. In focusing on Jesus' death without addressing his suffering, however, it is essential to note that Rahner's soteriology did not place any significance on the type of death Jesus endured. His basic consideration was that Jesus died in concrete human history, and Jesus freely accepted his death in obedience to God. This is significant in that it does not pose a challenge to those who argue that the crucifixion – and the suffering Jesus endured on the cross - cannot be associated with a salvific plan by God for humanity.

#### **Four Concerns Specific to this Project**

Karl Rahner's theological anthropology provided a contemporary understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ as the universal and absolute Savior. Rahner's ability to integrate contemporary philosophical thought in his interpretation of traditional theological understandings earned him a reputation as one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is credited with being a forerunner of liberation and feminist theologies, both of which are keenly focused on the suffering experienced by those in the margins of society. Rahner's theological anthropological approach has therefore been highlighted in this project as a foundation for developing a contemporary

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<sup>155</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 283.

<sup>156</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 283-284.

approach to the concept of redemptive suffering. Examination of Rahner's soteriology, however, reveals a lack of focus on any specific significance to the suffering of Jesus as being uniquely redemptive. One of the consequences of this is that Rahner can be misinterpreted as relegating Jesus' salvific efficacy to that of a perfect role model. As J. R. Sheets observes in his review of *Foundations*:

[T]here seems to be an intrinsic weakness in [Rahner's] whole system which seems to come to the fore in Rahner's treatment of soteriology. It is difficult to see how Jesus is truly redeemer, except on the level of exemplarity, or finality. Rahner perhaps feels this himself, because he deliberately plays down the idea of sacrifice, expiation, redemption. In his system, it seems that Christ has to emerge as *paradigm* of the appropriation of subjectivity, but it is difficult to see how [Jesus in Rahner's system] is truly redeemer, except insofar as God uses him as it were to gather up the whole of history.<sup>157</sup>

Rahner's soteriology was developed with an insistence that the crucifixion of Jesus should not be misconstrued as a sacrifice that was needed to change a wrathful God's mind toward sinners. He was concerned that such a suggestion "would appear mythological and unworthy of belief to the modern person."<sup>158</sup>

### **Three Fundamental Concerns Raised by Rahner**

Rahner's rejection of one particular theory associated with Jesus' suffering on the cross (i.e., that it was offered to "change God's mind") does not imply the absence of any salvific significance at all to Jesus' suffering. Rahner himself kept a door open for such a conclusion. Even though he expressed skepticism in satisfactorily addressing them, Rahner identified three criteria that he considered essential to be addressed if Jesus' crucifixion is viewed as a salvific sacrifice:

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<sup>157</sup> J. R. Sheets, Review of *Foundations of Christian Faith*, by Karl Rahner, (*Worship* 53:3, 1979: 277-80), 279-80.

<sup>158</sup> Karen Kilby, "Balthasar and Karl Rahner" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Edward Oakes and D. Moss, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), Kindle for PC, p. 264 of 282.

... the general idea of sacrifice in the history of religions cannot easily be shown to be tenable without some verbal subterfuge if we maintain clearly that God's mind cannot be "changed," that in salvation all the initiatives proceed from God himself ..., and finally that all real salvation can only be understood as taking place in the exercise of each individual's freedom.<sup>159</sup>

To adequately consider the redemptive nature of Jesus' suffering, Rahner's three concerns must be concretely addressed in this project.

### **Identification of a Fourth Concern**

Even in affirming the importance of Rahner's concerns, the needs of this project will not be satisfied unless an issue that Rahner failed to explicitly consider is also addressed: can a salvific reason be identified for the suffering Jesus endured with his crucifixion? The answer to that question is critical before consideration can be given to how human suffering today can also be redemptive. Our goal is not the "verbal subterfuge" that Rahner recognizes, but a practical understanding of, and appreciation for, the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Why did God ask Jesus to undergo the excruciating suffering of a crucifixion if, as Rahner seems to suggest, Jesus' resurrection from any kind of death would have been salvific?

In keeping with the anthropological grounding of the contemporary worldview, social science resources will need to play an essential part in the resolution of the concerns identified in this section. However, in keeping with the *theological* anthropological nature of this quest, a theological foundation must also be established. This will be accomplished by turning to the soteriology of Hans Urs von Balthasar as a complement to that of Karl Rahner.

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<sup>159</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 282.



## CHAPTER 4

### SEEKING ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

It is beyond the scope of this project to investigate a multitude of theological interpretations in order to address the concerns identified in the previous chapter. Instead, a simple dialogue will suffice between the concerns associated with Rahner's soteriology and insights from the perspective of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a contemporary of Rahner who utilizes a descending rather than ascending Christology. Although their contrasting methods resulted in disagreements on some theological details, the insights used in this project will be limited to areas where their agreement can be demonstrated. The goal is to produce, in contemporary fashion, a more thorough understanding of the role of Jesus' suffering through consideration of different perspectives.

In this chapter an overview of Hans Urs von Balthasar and his unique approach to theology will be presented. Balthasar's theology will then be summarized through descriptions of its similarities and differences with the theology of Rahner. Complementary insights of Balthasar and Rahner will then be used in Chapter 5 to set theological anthropological parameters for a theology of the cross that addresses contemporary soteriological concerns. The foundation for the parameters will be built upon the four concerns identified at the conclusion of the previous chapter.

#### **Hans Urs von Balthasar: "Love Alone" is the Answer**

Hans Urs von Balthasar was born in 1905 in Lucerne, Switzerland, "into a fairly aristocratic Catholic family" whose members represented various levels of involvement in both Swiss culture and the Catholic Church.<sup>160</sup> His family's cultural environment nurtured in him a deep-seated appreciation for music as well as a firm regard for "the

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<sup>160</sup> Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 1.

importance of high culture in general.”<sup>161</sup> He also became very comfortable with a diversity of cultures through his encounters with German, French, and English visitors at a family-run guest house.<sup>162</sup> Balthasar’s cosmopolitan immersion into high culture contributed to the development of his keen interest in literature, which ultimately led him to seek a doctorate in German literature. He resisted academic efforts to separate human culture from theological and philosophical questions, even as he also resisted efforts to divorce culture and literature from theology. This integrated approach to aesthetics, life experiences and academics was reflected in the topic of his doctoral dissertation: *History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature*. Although he noted feeling “trepidation” with his doctoral endeavor because of the “novelty” and “rashness” of his project, Balthasar’s academic prowess was recognized: his dissertation was passed *summa cum laude*.<sup>163</sup>

Threads of Balthasar’s “novelty” extended beyond his doctoral project, into his life-long theological endeavors. A possible contribution to Balthasar’s theological uniqueness can be attributed to the fact that his doctoral studies were in literature rather than theology. As Rodney Howsare observes:

First, it enabled Balthasar in an absolutely natural fashion to avoid the sort of separation between ‘secular’ and theological studies which had so determined the [neo-scholastic] Catholic theology of his day .... Second, Balthasar’s training explains the accord between his approach and those in the so-called hermeneutical tradition of contemporary philosophy. For Balthasar, all human thought occurs in the context of a conversation that has been going on for some 3,000 years ...<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Peter Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, David Schindler, ed., (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>164</sup> Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 2.

Balthasar was gifted with a “simple and straightforward” faith, which “to the very end, remained childlike in the best sense.”<sup>165</sup> His faith was a driving force for his insistence that “the ideal human person is one in which person and mission coincide.”<sup>166</sup> Discernment of his own mission was deeply influenced throughout his life by Ignatian spirituality. During a 30-day Ignatian Retreat in 1927, Balthasar felt called to enter the Jesuit seminary, which he did in 1929 following the completion of his doctoral program. It was also during a 30-day Ignatian Retreat that Balthasar discerned the need to leave the Society twenty years later.

Balthasar’s calling to the Jesuits and ultimate departure from them is a demonstration of the theological theme that is central to Balthasar’s Christology: kenotic, self-giving love. In order to respond to God’s call to join the Jesuits, Balthasar had to give up the cultural life of music and literature he so dearly loved, and instead be immersed in a type of studies that Balthasar described as “languishing in the desert of neo-scholasticism.”<sup>167</sup> After Balthasar said “yes” to God, however, God provided him with the people and opportunities to pursue his calling within the Society of Jesuits while still being faithful to his unique vision of life.<sup>168</sup> Following his ordination Balthasar’s life’s journey led him to promote the spiritual formation of lay men and women to better equip them for their work in the world, a concept not practiced in the Church at this

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<sup>165</sup> Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar,” 10.

<sup>166</sup> Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 1.

<sup>167</sup> Henrici, “Hans Urs von Balthasar,” 12.

<sup>168</sup> Erich Przywara and Henri de Lubac were two major influences on the development of Balthasar’s vision during his seminary days and beyond, helping him to challenge the neo-scholastic approach of his formal training. Przywara helped Balthasar learn how to have a contemporary dialogue with thinkers from ancient and medieval times, and was instrumental in influencing Balthasar’s analogical approach in his analogy of “Being.” See Howsare, *Balthasar*, 5-8. DeLubac’s friendship with Balthasar spanned fifty years; his influence can be found in Balthasar’s emphasis on the historical continuity of God’s salvific plan, the communal aspect of the Catholic faith, and the “indispensable” salvific role of Christ and the Catholic Church. DeLubac’s understanding of the relationship between nature and grace (i.e., avoiding an interpretation of grace too simply as either extrinsic *or* imminent), is basic to Balthasar’s concern over Rahner’s anthropological approach. See Howsare, *Balthasar*, 8-18.

time.<sup>169</sup> His collaboration on this mission with a lay woman, Adrienne von Speyr, led to the founding of a secular institute, the Community of Saint John, in 1945.<sup>170</sup> When Balthasar discerned a calling from God regarding the direction of the Community of Saint John that came into conflict with his obedience to the Jesuits, he once again had to renounce the life he knew in order to follow God's call: after "painful negotiations"<sup>171</sup> he left the Jesuits by foregoing his final profession to them. Thus Balthasar practiced the faithful sacrificial kenotic love of God that he preached.

As noted by Howsare, Balthasar's theology cannot simply be categorized as "conservative" or "liberal;" nor can he be associated with "standard 'schools' [such as] 'postliberalism,' 'postmetaphysical,' 'Radical Orthodoxy,' etc."<sup>172</sup> Balthasar's soteriology was not developed solely through the lens of Anselm and Aquinas' cosmological approach, nor through Rahner's anthropological approach. Instead he identifies a "third way of love,"<sup>173</sup> which he describes as God's Trinitarian self-giving love, made manifest to us in Jesus Christ. In "Love Alone is Credible" Balthasar identifies limitations of contemporary as well as traditional theological approaches, and thus explains why "love alone" is the foundation for the unique approach he has chosen to follow:

The Patristic Age, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, with offshoots that extend into the present age, established the reference point within the realm of the cosmos and world history; after the Enlightenment, the modern age shifted this point to an anthropological center. If the first approach bears the limitations of temporal history, the second also betrays a fundamental flaw, for neither the world as a whole nor man in particular can provide the measure for what God wishes to say to man in Christ ...<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 20-21.

<sup>170</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 122-123.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>172</sup> Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, ix.

<sup>173</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 51-60.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

Howsare indicates that as late as the 1990's the theology of Balthasar was "still fairly uncharted territory" compared to the attention paid to "Rahner, Lonergan, and the various Liberation Theologies." However, in more recent times "Balthasar is increasingly being seen as having been ahead of his time."<sup>175</sup> Balthasar is easily associated with his penchant for writing: Peter Henrici credits Balthasar with writing "more books than a normal person can be expected to read in his lifetime."<sup>176</sup> It is not merely the quantity of books that make Balthasar stand out; it is the depth and breadth of his knowledge and wisdom, and his ability to so easily integrate the secular with the spiritual. A summary of insights central to Balthasar's "third way of love" will now be presented through a consideration of the similarities and differences between Balthasar's theological perspective and that of Karl Rahner.

### **Balthasar's "Third Way"**

Karen Kilby adeptly summarizes foundational distinctions between the theologies of Balthasar and Rahner by first explaining their similarities:

Both men were deeply concerned with apologetics, with the questions of how to present Christianity in a world which is no longer well-disposed towards it. Both, furthermore, were dissatisfied with neo-scholasticism and its rationalist approach to apologetics. And both thought that modernity raised particular problems for being a believing Christian, and therefore for apologetics. In this very general sense they were in agreement.<sup>177</sup>

Kilby continues, however, by noting the definite contrasts between the two theologians in "*how* to do apologetics, *why* neo-scholasticism was unsatisfactory, and *what* problems precisely modernity posed."<sup>178</sup> As noted in the preceding chapter, Rahner sought to speak the language of the modern world by "turning to the subject" of the

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<sup>175</sup> Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 153.

<sup>176</sup> Henrici, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Sketch of His Life," 7.

<sup>177</sup> Kilby, "Balthasar and Karl Rahner," 262 of 282.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

human being. Kilby explains Rahner's belief that without such a connection to the life experience of the modern person, he or she would not be able to relate to Christian doctrine, and would therefore interpret it as lacking credibility. Instead of trying to speak the language of the modern world, Balthasar saw the problem as related to modernity itself. He considered modernity's focus on humanity as inherently flawed and an inadequate approach to theology. Instead of replacing the inadequate neo-scholastic approach with another flawed rationalistic approach, Balthasar thought the solution would be to teach about the limitations of both traditional and modern philosophical approaches, and then to encourage a holistic perception of Christianity. He therefore sought "to teach them to *see* properly, to see the whole, to perceive the beauty of revelation in all its fullness."<sup>179</sup>

Kilby's insightful description of the priorities of Balthasar and Rahner provide a foundation for understanding and better defining their different approaches. Rahner's emphasis on an understanding of God as grounded in a *universal* human experience culminates in a soteriology describing an *Absolute* Savior. Ironically, although Rahner's philosophy identifies God as Absolute Mystery, it is Balthasar, not Rahner, who presents Christianity in terms of wonder and a distinctive "newness."<sup>180</sup> For Balthasar human life is good, but human experience on its own could never have come up with the fullness of God's goodness and glory:

... the framework of God's message to man in Christ cannot be tied to the world in general, nor to man in particular; God's message is theological, or better theo-pragmatic. It is an act of God on man; an act done for and on behalf of man – and only then to man, and in him. It is of this act that we must say: it is credible only as love – and here we

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 263 of 282.

mean God's own love, the manifestation of which is the manifestation of the glory of God.<sup>181</sup>

Rahner presented a systematic expression of his theology in *Foundations of the Christian Faith*. Similarly, Balthasar produced a systematic presentation of his concept of God's glory as revealed in the "transcendental' qualities ... of being: the beautiful, the good and the true."<sup>182</sup> The development of his work, spanning a timeframe of nearly 30 years (1961 to 1987), and "representing arguably the masterpiece of twentieth-century Catholic theology," included 10,000 pages that were published in a "Trilogy" that included 15 volumes.<sup>183</sup> In introducing the Trilogy, Aidan Nichols notes a distinction between the Transcendental Thomism of Catholic philosophy (including Rahner) with that of Balthasar's approach. He notes that, similar to the methodology of Kant,

[Transcendental Thomism begins] by examining human subjectivity from within .... Balthasar, however, puts the human subject – and that by virtue of its created nature – in immediate relation with the truth that lies outside itself. The self-conscious subject exists, knowing that he or she exists as just such a unique subject, yes. But this is always *in relation to other manifestations of being*.<sup>184</sup>

Nichols explains that Balthasar agrees with "all metaphysicians in the Judaeo-Christian tradition" (including Rahner) that "the Ground and Source of such being is God." Balthasar reasons that basic human senses give human beings an opportunity to experience "being" in its different manifestations, (i.e., in relationship with other "beings"), and this provides "access to comprehensive, and even ultimate, reality."<sup>185</sup> Balthasar argues that the development of a child's self-consciousness through the child's

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<sup>181</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, Alexander Dru, ed., (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 7-8.

<sup>182</sup> Aidan Nichols notes that Balthasar's use of the word "transcendental" means "*universal*, in the sense of that which is not confined by but goes beyond (*transcends*) all particular categories." See Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

<sup>183</sup> Stephen Wigley, *Balthasar's Trilogy*, (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), Kindle for PC location 45 of 2286.

<sup>184</sup> Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar*, 2.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

relationship with his or her parent is a concrete example of a way human beings access reality through relations with another manifestation of being.<sup>186</sup> Even beyond the consciousness of self, however, *all* aspects of being have their source in relationship with an “other” – ultimately being grounded in the definitive Other - the origin of all – the “eternal essence (or Being), which is an equally eternal (that is, not temporal) ‘happening’.”<sup>187</sup> Our life and all its attributes are able to “happen” on earth because their potentiality is rooted in the eternal Being - or *life* - of God. To counter arguments that nothing can “happen” in God because God is immutable, Balthasar argues that “Eternal life, as the word itself says, is not a complete state of rest, but a constant vitality, implying that everything is always new.”<sup>188</sup> He notes that:

What happens in the Trinity is, however, far more than a motionless order or sequence, for expressions such as “beget”, “give birth”, “proceed” and “breathe forth” refer to eternal acts in which God genuinely “takes place”. We must resolve to see these two apparently contradictory concepts as a unity: eternal or absolute Being – and “happening”. This “happening” is not a becoming in the earthly sense: it is the coming-to-be, not of something that once was not (that would be Arianism), but, evidently, of something that grounds the idea, the inner possibility and reality of a becoming. All earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal “happening” in God, which, we repeat, is per se identical with the eternal Being or essence.<sup>189</sup>

Balthasar further clarifies his thought by focusing on the “begetting” of the Son by the Father in the Trinitarian processions:

In giving himself, the Father does not give something (or even everything) that he *has* but all that he *is* -- for in God there is only being, not having. So the Father’s being passes over, without remainder, to the begotten Son ... This total self-giving, to which the Son and the Spirit respond by an equal self-giving, is a kind of “death,” a first, radical “kenosis,” as one might say. It is a kind of “super-death” that is a component of all love and that forms the basis in creation for all instances of “the good death,” from self-

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<sup>186</sup>Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of the Redemption*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), Kindle edition for PC, location 507 of 1674.

<sup>187</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Vol. V.*, trans. Graham Harrison, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), Kindle edition for PC, location 842 of 10958.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid, location 7575 of 10958.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid, location 842-857 of 10958.



forgetfulness in favor of the beloved right up to that highest love by which a man “gives his life for his friends.”<sup>190</sup>

It was Balthasar’s desire to facilitate people’s awareness of, and captivation by, the glory of God’s boundless gift of self to humanity in Jesus Christ. His TrilogY was written as a depiction of God’s wondrous self-giving engagement with humanity throughout history. The TrilogY is based on the three transcendentals of being: beauty, goodness and truth. The first section of the TrilogY, *The Glory of the Lord*, written within seven volumes, is focused on the *Beautiful*. As Wigley summarizes:

... it is written from the perspective that it is only in the encounter with the glory of God, in all Christ’s divine beauty and splendor, that we discover what it means to be human beings made in the image and knowledge of God.<sup>191</sup>

The second section of the TrilogY, *Theo-Drama*, is written within 5 volumes and is focused on the *Good*. Balthasar sets the theme as a drama of God’s salvific engagement with humanity, but as a drama that requires participation, not simple observation, so that the truth of it can be experienced by us.<sup>192</sup> Wigley summarizes

*Theo-Drama* as depicting

that it is only in the light of our being touched and transformed by the glory of God that we can be taken up into Christ’s story and so become part of God’s great drama of salvation seeking to redeem and restore the world.<sup>193</sup>

The final section of the TrilogY, *Theo-Logic*, written within 3 volumes culminates Balthasar’s “summa” with a focus on the third transcendental, Truth. Wigley concludes his summaries with the observation:

And finally it is von Balthasar’s conviction that this search for the glory of God is what lies at the heart of all human endeavour and search for the truth, so that what is told in the Bible and proclaimed by the Church is at one with the human quest for meaning in all

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid, location 1101-1118 of 10958.

<sup>191</sup> Wigley, *Balthasar’s TrilogY*, Kindle Edition for PC, location 53 of 2286.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, location 1003-1017 of 2286.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, location 53 of 2286.

times and places, part of that great narrative in which we all discover our role and find we have an important part to play.<sup>194</sup>

Wigley points out that the first volume of *Theo-Logic* was actually written in 1947, before the publication of the first volume of Balthasar's Trilogy. He suggests it was initially written most likely as a response to Rahner's transcendental approach in *Spirit of the World*, which was published in 1939. Wigley describes Balthasar's concern that Rahner's focus on the human subject was too narrow, and "could obscure that wider vision of the totality of being upon which truth was grounded."<sup>195</sup> Thus, Wigley notes, the first volume of *Theo-Logic* "would use largely philosophical concepts" and was titled *Truth of the World*; the final two volumes, *Truth of God*, and *Spirit of Truth*, published 40 years later, are more clearly theological, with a focus on God's self-revelation rather than the human subject.<sup>196</sup> Wigley highlights Balthasar's critique of Rahner's anthropological approach that allowed Christ in the Church to be presented "as a merely categorical sphere" (i.e., experienced in terms of concrete human history) as if it could be distinguished from "an overarching, pan-historical transcendental sphere" (i.e., in relationship with the transcendent God).<sup>197</sup> This emphasis of Balthasar – on presenting concrete human reality holistically along with, not separate from, the ultimate reality of God - represents a basic distinction between the theological goals and subsequent theological approaches of Balthasar and Rahner.

Rahner's ascending Christology emphasized the solidarity Jesus shares *universally* with all humanity as their Absolute Savior. His Incarnation – the concrete

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Wigley, *Balthasar's Trilogy*, location 1672-1684 of 2286.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, location 1691 of 2286.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, location 1694 of 2286, quoting Balthasar in *Theo-Logic, Vol. I*, 13.

and irrevocable union of the Divine with the human – was the concrete manifestation of God’s irrevocable commitment to all of humanity. Jesus’ life – freely given over to complete union with God – gives witness to the ultimate fullness of life that each human being is called to experience with God. Balthasar’s descending theology emphasized the *uniqueness* of Christ in his mission to restore a relationship with God that humanity has broken through sin. Balthasar is emphatic: the glorious solution God gives humanity as a remedy for sin is so unique it is beyond anything humanity could have anticipated. Thus Balthasar highlighted the kenotic love of God not only in the Incarnation but also in Christ’s Passion, where the self-emptying of the Son of God extended even to his personally experiencing the *ultimate* depth of human suffering – an experience of estrangement from God. The two theologians took differing approaches to depict how God manifests an unfathomable love for human beings. Their ascending and descending theologies together express the immutable solidarity of God with God’s beloved created beings - to the transcendent heights as well as to the despairing depths of human possibilities. The insights of these contrasting theological perspectives will now be explored through the lens of modern theological and anthropological considerations, in order to set specific parameters for developing a Contemporary Theology of the Cross that addresses identified concerns.

## CHAPTER 5

### IDENTIFYING CONTEMPORARY SOTERIOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

Fergus Kerr suggests that since Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar were

rooted in the school of Jesuit spirituality, they were never as far apart as they may seem ... As time goes by, in the perspective of history, their projects may well come to seem more complementary than conflicting, overlapping much more than their admirers and adversaries think at present.<sup>198</sup>

Concurring with Kerr's observation, a dialogue between the insights of Rahner and Balthasar will now be utilized to develop a contemporary theology of the cross.

#### **Addressing Rahner's Concerns through Complementary Insights of Balthasar**

Rahner's concerns regarding the concept of salvific sacrifices will be examined in this section in the order in which they were quoted at the conclusion of Chapter 3: 1) "God's mind cannot be 'changed,'" 2) "in salvation all the initiatives proceed from God himself," and 3) "all real salvation can only be understood as taking place in the exercise of each individual's freedom." A foundation for addressing the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ will be sought through the exploration of these three issues in the light of compatible insights from both Rahner and Balthasar. Fundamental questions will be implicitly raised throughout this investigation: How do our human experiences relate to the theological insights of Rahner and Balthasar? To what extent can anthropological connections be identified? And, reflecting this project's ultimate concern: How can these theological insights and our human experiences shed light on a contemporary understanding of the suffering of Jesus on the cross? Thus the purpose of this chapter is to identify parameters for this project that have an empirical as well as theological and anthropological foundation.

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<sup>198</sup>Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 104.

**“God’s mind cannot be ‘changed.’”**

What is God’s relationship with humanity? Does God react to human beings, such that God can be angry with sinners, and God’s “mind” could be changed when the human situation changes? Or is the infinite God immune to the variations humans experience in their ever-changing journey through time in history? An understanding of God as immutable, however, raises a more defined question: what kind of a relationship can an immutable God have with finitely ever-changing creatures?

Rahner and Balthasar both adhered to the concept of God’s immutability, which would preclude any suggestion that God’s relationship toward humanity – including “God’s mind” - could be changed in any way. Such a clarification is essential when the salvific role of Jesus’ suffering on the cross is being considered. Reflective of their contrasting approaches, however, differing priorities are revealed in the manner in which they clarified their convictions, even as they both pointed to the Incarnation for support of their conclusions.

Rahner insisted that it is incorrect to describe Jesus’ crucifixion as a sacrificial offering that was meant to appease God’s wrath toward sinful humanity. As confirmation of this he simply pointed to the Incarnation. The physical reality of the Son of God “becoming flesh” was God’s self-communication of God’s irrevocable union with humanity. Since the Incarnation took place before the traditionally identified “redemption” of humanity through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, Rahner emphatically argued that no changing of God’s mind toward sinners was ever necessary – God was, and is, always and already on humanity’s side.

Balthasar's interpretation of the Incarnation was also grounded in an exploration of relationships. Instead of focusing on the universal and ontological relationship between God and humanity, however, Balthasar's *descending* Christology led him to describe the Incarnation in terms of the dynamic Trinitarian relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Balthasar concurred with Rahner that God's relationship with humanity is immutable, even as he also pointed to the Incarnation as a central tenet of the Christian faith. Balthasar emphasized, however, that an understanding of the kenotic nature of the *Trinity* sheds light on an understanding of the Incarnation. How can an immutable God *become* anything, much less a created being born into finite time? Balthasar emphasized a critical distinction: "God does not 'become' in the sense that creatures 'become.'"<sup>199</sup> Grounding his explanation in an understanding of the eternal life - or Being - of the Trinity, Balthasar explained that the "emptying" of the Son of God in "coming in human likeness"<sup>200</sup> was not a change in God - it was a continuation of the self-emptying love as revealed in the Trinitarian procession of the Son from the Father:

... the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial "kenosis" within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he "imparts" to the Son all that is his. "All that is thine is mine" (Jn 17:10). The Father ... *is* this movement of self-giving that holds nothing back.<sup>201</sup>

The self-emptying love of the Father does not end with the generation of the Son: it "expands to a kenosis involving the whole Trinity," with the Spirit being "the pure manifestation and communication of the love between Father and Son." Balthasar concluded: "This primal kenosis makes possible all other kenotic movements of God into

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<sup>199</sup> Balthasar, *Theo-Drama, Vol. V*, location 7575 of 10958.

<sup>200</sup> Phil 2:7.

<sup>201</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, Ignatius Press: 1994), 323.

the world; they are simply its consequences.”<sup>202</sup> Thus, according to Balthasar, the self-emptying of the Second Person of the Trinity in the Incarnation did not represent a change in God – God *is* “total self-giving” love, and the Incarnation is a continuation of God’s self-giving movement of love into the world.

Rahner’s *ascending* Christology differs from Balthasar’s *descending* Christology in that Rahner focused on the kenosis in the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity rather than the kenotic activity within the Trinity. Rahner’s conclusion is similar to Balthasar, however, in its emphasis that the “self-emptying” of the infinite Son to become “the finite” does not represent a change in God.<sup>203</sup> This was foundational to Rahner’s soteriology since he pointed to the Incarnation as evidence of the immutability of God’s relationship with humanity. However, in order to arrive at this conclusion Rahner had to deviate from his goal of presenting Christian beliefs in universal anthropological and philosophical terms. Rahner identified a philosophical limitation in addressing the nature of the “Being” of God: “Here ontology has to be adapted to the message of faith and not be schoolmaster to this message.”<sup>204</sup> Rahner observed that a “merely rational ontology” would interpret God’s immutability “in an isolated way by itself, understood statically and undialectically.”<sup>205</sup> Instead Rahner noted that in addressing the “absolute perfection” of the Being of God, there are two “dialectical assertions” that are “really correct” only when considered together: “God’s immutability” in the Incarnation and “the unity of God in and in spite of the Trinity.”<sup>206</sup> Admission of

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 331.

<sup>203</sup> Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation” in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 4*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 113-114.

<sup>204</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 221.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 221.

those two revelations of the Christian faith shifted Rahner's focus from "onto-logical realities ... of being and consciousness,"<sup>207</sup> which was so basic to his soteriology, to examining the freedom God has of "giving *himself* away."<sup>208</sup> Rahner was thus able to identify a creative freedom in the immutable and absolute God that is "the self-giving fullness" of love:

The primary phenomenon given by faith is precisely the self-emptying of God, his becoming, the kenosis and genesis of God himself. He can become insofar as, in establishing the other which comes from him, he himself *becomes* what has come from him, without having to become in his own and original self. Insofar as in his abiding and infinite fullness he empties himself, the other comes to be as God's very own reality. ... God goes out of himself, he himself, he as the self-giving fullness. Because he can do this, because this is his free and primary possibility, for this reason he is defined in scripture as love.<sup>209</sup>

Thus, although Rahner's theology is founded on the immutable absoluteness of God, Rahner was also able to recognize a dynamic "self-emptying" of God in terms of God's creative love. This interpretation of the self-emptying and self-giving of God as "love" represents a common thread between Rahner's and Balthasar's thought.<sup>210</sup> It led Rahner to describe the Incarnation as evidence of God's "always and already" love for humanity, just as it led Balthasar to describe Jesus' death as a covenantal "statement of God" assuring us of "God's faithfulness" to humanity in spite of our sins.<sup>211</sup> Although the approach and focus of the two theologians is different, their conclusions agree: God

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 302-3.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> It is beyond the scope of this project to explore details of differences in the two theologians' understanding of the trinity, but, where possible, the complementary elements of their contrasting Christological approaches will be noted. This commitment reflects an agreement with Rahner's assertion that the contemporary worldview calls for a departure from the "usual ... isolation ... without connection" of a descending Christology from an ascending one. See Rahner, "The Two Basic Types of Christology" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 13*, 220.

<sup>211</sup> More details of Balthasar's soteriology will be provided in the following chapter, but this quote, part of Balthasar's description of the crucifixion as a "monument of love," can be found in: Hans Urs von Balthasar, John Riches, trans., *Elucidations*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1975), Kindle for PC, location 698-706 of 3638.



*is* immutable, self-giving love; there is no possibility for God's mind to be changed toward humanity.

Since Balthasar and Rahner are in agreement that Jesus was not crucified as an appeasement to change God's mind toward sinners, the focus of the first parameter of this project is taking shape in terms of a consequent question: "What kind of a relationship can an absolute and immutable God have with finite and ever-changing creatures?" Traditional soteriologies were developed from an emphasis on God's hierarchical relationship with humanity. The world was viewed in terms of God's dominion: human beings had an obligation of obedient allegiance to God's authoritative will. The soteriological focus was on restoring the honor that was owed to God following humanity's disobedience through sin. The contemporary theological perspective, situated in the midst of a secular worldview, is seeking a better understanding of human rights and responsibilities, including an emphasis on the significance of human freedom. As the author of creation God indeed has authority over all. However, in giving humanity a gift of freedom that was not bestowed on other creatures, God provided human beings a response-ability in ultimately determining their personal relationship with God. Although this does not suggest that the relationship between God and humanity is one of equality, it does indicate a relationship that is more mutually based, and more personally distinctive, than the Sovereign Lord to Servant identification that was emphasized in the traditional hierarchical approach.

This section's theological exploration of Rahner's first concern is helping shape the first parameter for the development of a contemporary theology of the cross. The focus of the first parameter will be on a consideration of God's immutable yet mutual

relationship with humanity - the consequence of God's unfathomable gift of human freedom. Freedom in a mutual relationship will not be approached simply as a means for humanity to be able to give God what is due *to* God through obedience *to* God (the hierarchical perspective), but rather as a means for human development of an authentic loving relationship *with* God, extending even to reconciliation of all creation *with* God (a more contemporary "co-creative" perspective). Incorporation of Balthasar's focus on the love of God will serve to clarify Rahner's insistence that the self-communication of God is not simply revelation *about* God, but an invitation to a relationship *with* God. It will affirm Rahner's ontological description of the "self-communication" of God as "corresponding to man's essential being" and as actually describing humanity's need to respond to God's invitation of "knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love."<sup>212</sup>

Rahner's theological anthropology used a philosophical foundation for exploring humanity's existential relationship to God as the ground of all Knowledge. What type of contemporarily relevant foundation can be utilized to explore humanity's mutual relationship with a God who is love? Scripture opens the door for identifying a viable theological anthropological foundation: "No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us."<sup>213</sup> And again: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God - whom he has not seen."<sup>214</sup> A human relationship with God is directly related to human relationships with one another. In order to explore the soteriological implications of God's mutual relationship with humanity,

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<sup>212</sup> Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117-118.

<sup>213</sup> 1 John 4:12.

<sup>214</sup> 1 John 4:20.

this project will therefore present anthropological insights describing the development and maintenance of healthy human relationships. Social scientific resources will be associated with theological understandings of the kenotic nature of God's love, suggesting an intrinsic involvement of the self-giving aspect of love in the development of authentically free and loving relationships. The anthropological findings will be shown to mirror scriptural accounts of the parent/child relationship Jesus of Nazareth shared with God. Scriptural references will also affirm that the teachings of Jesus envisioned the same type of a mutually loving familial relationship for *all* of humanity with God.

The direction being proposed for the first parameter of the project – consideration of God's relationship with humanity within the context of a mutual/familial love - is setting the stage for addressing Rahner's second concern. Rahner identified the human situation of guilt as an environment of hopelessness. Consideration of healthy familial relationships affirms the feasibility of Rahner's insistence on God's salvific initiative: if a child is mired in a hopeless situation and a parent has a means to provide hope to the child, any truly loving parent would take the initiative to do so. Thus consideration of the first of Rahner's concerns will now lead to consideration of his second concern and the formulation of a second parameter for this project.

**“... [I]n salvation all the initiatives proceed from God himself.”**

God's gift of human freedom makes supernatural transcendence possible, but the same gift thwarts the achievement of that potential when human beings freely embrace sin rather than God. How can God's desire for human fulfillment be realized when humanity is mired in a consequence of sin that Rahner described as hopelessness? Rahner and Balthasar agreed that human beings cannot save themselves: human

salvation depends on the gracious initiative of God. Once again, however, the focus of each of the two theologians is in different, but not necessarily conflicting, directions.

Rahner clearly described his perspective:

The human need of redemption should not be conceived first and foremost, purely and inherently, as the need of human beings to have their own sinfulness removed. ... To experience and understand Christianity's ultimate essence more is necessary than human sinfulness and deliverance from guilt. ... [G]iven the distinction between nature and grace real salvation, even prior to personal human guilt and also to what is known as original sin, is an event of free divine love to which human beings have no claim on the basis of their nature. In other words, salvation is grace.<sup>215</sup>

After thus emphasizing that God's salvific relationship with humanity is much deeper than a reaction to human sin, Rahner suggested that ultimately it is a "mere terminological question"

... whether one chooses to call the need of a perfection by God in grace prior to guilt a need of *redemption*, or whether one chooses to use the term *need of redemption* only in reference to the necessity of the removal of an actual state of sin, of an explicit contradiction between God and human freedom.<sup>216</sup>

God's salvific initiative was at work in human beings from the beginning - providing humanity, even prior to sin, the freedom for human transcendence. Rahner sought to highlight that fact by embracing the first "term" for redemption described above, emphasizing that the *need for redemption*, or "self-redemption,"<sup>217</sup> describes only part of humanity's dependence on God's gracious love and mercy. Such a focus also helped Rahner avoid any association in his soteriology between *redemption* and the concept that God needed to be appeased because of sin:

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<sup>215</sup> Rahner, "The Christian Understanding of Redemption," in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 21*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values, (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 244-245.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 248.

Wherever we find primarily the idea of an angry God who, as it were, has to be conciliated by great effort on the part of Jesus, we have an ultimately unchristian, popular notion of redemption that is incorrect.<sup>218</sup>

Rahner clarified, nevertheless, that the two concepts of redemption – what he distinguished as “grace and remission of guilt”<sup>219</sup> - are different issues:

The Christian idea of redemption has a history behind it and it will continue to have a history. There is room for this in Catholic theology’s traditional conception of redemption, because redemption and redemption from actual guilt are not identical concepts.<sup>220</sup>

An understanding of Rahner’s distinction between the two concepts of redemption facilitates an understanding of the different paths taken by Rahner and Balthasar.

Rahner’s soteriological focus on humanity’s reliance on God for redemption *even prior to sin* led him to present Jesus as the fulfillment of humanity – the actualization of the potential for which humanity was created. Rahner rejected the Anselmian conclusion that “humankind is not able to do what it is nevertheless obliged to do”<sup>221</sup> in terms of repaying a debt owed to God because of sin. Instead Rahner emphasized the *universal* mission of Jesus – living an authentic human life, responding to the events of his life and death as *every* human being is called to respond – in obedient submission to God.

While Rahner highlighted Jesus’ mission of fulfilling God’s plan for human destiny, Balthasar highlighted the consequence of humanity’s freely chosen rejection of God’s plan. Described according to Rahner’s terminology, Balthasar’s soteriology highlighted the *need of redemption* from sin. God’s initiative was necessary to address humanity’s freely chosen break in their relationship with God, while still honoring God’s

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 248.

gift of human freedom. The difference between the focus of the two theologians is highlighted by Rowan Williams:

The heart of the difference here seems to be that Rahner thinks of human frustration in terms of incompleteness, Balthasar in terms of tragedy. Freedom is not simply a smooth trajectory of finite towards infinite; it is, more importantly, the possibility of self-deceit, self-destruction, refusal. And the ‘question’ to which God’s incarnation is the ‘answer’ (the terms are hopelessly imperfect) is of how ‘God can gather back into himself the whole freedom of his creatures including all the consequences of such freedom, including, that is, rebellion and self-damnation, can gather it up and bear it up. And still remain God.’<sup>222</sup>

As noted in his description of two approaches to redemption, Rahner described sin as an “explicit contradiction between God and human freedom.” Rahner’s soteriology, however, did not focus on God’s resolution of the contradiction. Instead Rahner admitted “the hopeless insuperability of [human] guilt”<sup>223</sup> but placed it within the context of “Christian doctrine [which] says that God is always ready and willing to overcome it, to forgive it, to be reconciled with humankind and to reconcile humankind to himself.”<sup>224</sup> Thus Rahner’s focus remained on God’s unchanging relationship with humanity. This singularity of focus, however, did not address the contradiction posited by sin: God is immutably loving toward sinners, but God is also immutably incompatible with sin. How is God able to “overcome” sin and “be reconciled” with humanity? How does God’s mercy “work” in loving the sinner but being incompatible with sin?

Balthasar agreed that God is always loving and merciful to humanity, but he offered a description of God’s resolution of the contradiction sin presents. His soteriological explanation was not formulated in terms of conciliation of an angry God,

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<sup>222</sup> Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and Rahner” in *The Analogy of Beauty: the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, John Riches, ed., (T. & T. Clark, Ltd: Edinburgh: 1986), 32.

<sup>223</sup> Karl Rahner, “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation” in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 21*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values, (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 258.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 260.

but rather was once again found in God's kenotic engagement of love with humanity. Thus, while Rahner pointed to the Incarnation as the ultimate and unsurpassable revelation of God's union with humanity, Balthasar argued that the Incarnation needs to be focused in union with the Cross of Christ – with the “costliness of our redemption” that was required in order for God to liberate humanity from the “Godlessness” of sin.<sup>225</sup> Balthasar emphasized that only by viewing the Incarnation with its “ultimate consequences”<sup>226</sup> (i.e., the Passion and death of the Son of God made "flesh") is the actual depth and power of God's Incarnational love for humanity revealed. According to Balthasar, God's relationship to humanity never needed changing; instead, God's salvific initiative was needed to reconcile sinful *humanity* with God.<sup>227</sup> Thus, although Balthasar's focus on a *need for redemption* contrasts with Rahner's emphasis on *redemption* prior to sin, his conclusion wholeheartedly affirmed Rahner's emphasis on the always and already love and mercy of God toward humanity.

Rahner and Balthasar were on common theological ground in recognizing humanity's need for God's love and mercy, but their soteriologies differed markedly in describing *how* God takes the initiative on humanity's behalf. The difference between them is most pronounced in their interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Rahner emphasized Jesus' solidarity with human beings even on the cross, in that Jesus had to deal with suffering and death in his life similar to any other human being, but that Jesus remained united with God in spite of his horrendous fate. Rahner's soteriology was based on Jesus dying and being raised by God, but he did not argue specifically that

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<sup>225</sup> Aidan Nichols, trans., Introduction to *Mysterium Paschale*, by Hans Urs von Balthasar (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>226</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of the Redemption*, location 1178 of 1674.

<sup>227</sup> Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (Crossroad Publishing: New York, 2002), 160.

Jesus' *crucifixion* death was integral to human salvation; instead he emphasized the universal salvific importance of Jesus' submission to his own (i.e., human) death:

Even though the specific form of Jesus' death *may* [emphasis added] be an essential part of salvation history, Jesus' *death* [emphasis added] is of fundamental importance to salvation history because it makes definitive the acceptance of God's offer of himself to Jesus (and in him to humankind).<sup>228</sup>

In stark contrast to Rahner, Balthasar attributed a salvific significance to the *particular* type of death Jesus endured, including the suffering inherent in a crucifixion. Jesus' experience of God abandonment in the midst of his suffering on the cross plays an intrinsic role in Balthasar's concept of human redemption from sin. According to Balthasar, God's initiative through Jesus involved more than a universal mission requiring Jesus to be in solidarity with both God and humanity. Balthasar described a salvific mission unique to Jesus' relationship with God - one that involved the God-man's submission to being "sin [not sinner!]"<sup>229</sup> as a means of reconciling humanity's broken relationship with God. According to Balthasar Jesus' feeling of abandonment by God on the cross was a specific part of Jesus' unique reconciling mission from God.

As previously noted, Rahner emphatically agreed to the authenticity of Jesus' experience of abandonment. Rahner also agreed to the "thoroughly valid statement that the human race is redeemed by the 'vicarious' suffering of Jesus."<sup>230</sup> The difference between the two theologians is on their presentation of *how* Jesus' suffering is redemptive. Rahner adhered to the concept that Jesus' submission to his suffering was

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<sup>228</sup>Karl Rahner, "Christology Today" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 21*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 226.

<sup>229</sup> Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery of the Redemption*, location 1242 of 1674, in reference to 2 Cor 5:21.

<sup>230</sup> Karl Rahner, "The Christian Understanding of Redemption" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 21*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 248.



similar to his submission to his death – it was Jesus’ fulfillment of the universal mission of *every* human being to the Mystery of God, since suffering is a mystery experienced by every human being. Balthasar identifies Jesus’ suffering and death as uniquely redemptive, reflective of a *unique* mission from God. The question is thus presented – was Jesus’ salvific mission universal to all humanity or was it a particularly unique one from God? Rather than selecting *either* one *or* the other of the two soteriologies, the insights of both Rahner and Balthasar will be utilized. Such an integrated approach will address not only the need for God’s initiative in fulfilling God’s plan for humanity, but also the need for God’s initiative to address humanity’s rejection of that plan. In effect, significance of both concepts of redemption as defined by Rahner will be explored, not merely the “redemption” prior to sin that his soteriology highlights. Affirmation will be given to Rahner’s emphasis on humanity’s intrinsic reliance on God even for the ability to transcend human limitations, but it will also be emphasized that the realization of that potential is only possible for the sinner through liberation from what Rahner described as the hopeless bondage of guilt.

Consideration of Rahner’s second concern has therefore helped formulate the second parameter for this project’s development of a contemporary theology of the cross. Its focus will be an examination of how God’s salvific initiative addressed humanity’s need for a Savior on two levels – one, universal, and the other, uniquely personal to Jesus. This will entail an exploration of Jesus’ mission from God in terms of the calling Jesus shared universally with all humanity: to live in a free and loving solidarity with God and other human beings. Since God’s commitment to humanity is truly unconditional, however, God does not love human beings only in terms of what God

wants them to be (their potential) but also as they actually are. Thus, an *authentic* solidarity with humanity would require the Savior to experience life not only as humanity is called to experience it (as Rahner emphasized), but also as they *actually* experience it – mired in the Godlessness of their sin and seemingly hopeless consequences of their choices (addressing Balthasar’s perspective). Thus this project will explore the suggestion of a unique but seemingly impossible need: a Savior who is in loving solidarity with God in sinlessness, but who is also able to be in *authentic* solidarity with sinners by sharing their experience of the consequences of sin even without committing sin himself.

The Savior’s solidarity with God was traditionally defined in terms of a need for obedience *to* God in a hierarchically-viewed mission of reconciliation between God and humanity. Rahner’s contemporary conclusions reflected this need for submissive obedience *to* God, but Rahner grounded the submission within the context of humanity’s freedom. This project will direct attention to a need for trust within such a relationship with God, especially when submission to God is required in the midst of a sense of hopelessness. Thus, salvific obedience will be described as a *trusting* obedience within a more mutual relationship of love, rather than obedience out of fear (of God’s wrath) or powerlessness (i.e., enslaved submission to a dominant authority) in a hierarchical relationship. A Scriptural passage will be presented as representing the soteriological concerns of both Rahner and Balthasar: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>231</sup> As an authentic human plea begging an answer, this cry represents Jesus’ experience of God-abandonment on the cross (Balthasar’s emphasis) just prior to Jesus’ trusting submission of his life and death to the *mystery* of God (Rahner’s emphasis).

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<sup>231</sup> Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34.

Contemporary issues to be reflected in this approach will include not only an appreciation for human freedom and an emphasis on mutuality in human relationships, but also the grounding of conclusions in lived experience rather than abstractly formulated theories. An anthropological affirmation of the authenticity of Jesus' solidarity with all human beings will be presented as explicit revelation of the extent of God's salvific solidarity with humanity. The salvific significance of Jesus' *trusting* solidarity with God will also be emphasized, however, ultimately providing confirmation of God's boundless self-sacrificing love for all human beings. Addressing Rahner's second concern regarding God's salvific initiative for humanity will therefore be built upon verification of Rahner's first concern regarding God's immutable love for humanity, even as it leads to support of Rahner's third concern: the need for human beings to freely respond to what Rahner described as the unfathomable love of God.

**“... [S]alvation can only [take place] in the exercise of each individual's freedom.”**

Traditional soteriologies, reflecting a hierarchical and categorical worldview, easily depicted salvation in terms of places to which individuals were assigned on a day of judgment. Emphasis was on the morality of their behavior on earth, which was considered to be explicit evidence of their obedience to, and union with, God's will. Reflective of authoritarian judicial sentences, those deemed worthy of eternal life with God were admitted through the heavenly gates while those judged unworthy were sent to the eternal fires of hell. Problems surface with this perspective, however, when it is considered within the context of human freedom and the understanding of salvation as a relationship with God rather than a categorical place to which someone is sent. How can a person be “assigned” to have an eternal relationship with God?

Rahner understood that human freedom is fundamental to eternal salvation even within the traditional concept of a final judgment after an individual's death. His emphasis remained focused on God's consistent readiness and willingness to "overcome human [guilt], to forgive it, to be reconciled with humankind and to reconcile humankind with himself."<sup>232</sup> As he explained:

God's love which forgives and reconciles is really incomprehensible. ... From the beginning God has made himself the world's innermost heart in such a way that the freely incurred guilt of humankind pierces God's heart, and even in the face of this thrust his heart is merciful, forgiving and reconciling love. For love would then turn into the judgment of damnation only if a person were to reject it in a final act of freedom.<sup>233</sup>

Although human beings can freely embrace sin rather than God, God has the desire and the ability to overcome the guilt of human sin – but the reconciliation, i.e., salvation, requires the involvement of an individual's freedom to do so. Thus, this third stipulation of Rahner is a very fundamental soteriological issue: one's concept of human freedom directly impacts one's concept of how salvation "takes place."

The traditional approach to salvation was based on a logical deduction that sin's dishonor of God left humanity owing God a debt that no human being could pay. Human salvation was therefore explicitly linked to identification with the *one* who *did* pay the debt: Jesus Christ. Thus, baptism and participation in the sacramental life of the Body of Christ on earth, i.e., the Catholic Church, was identified as a necessary means to human salvation. The contemporary development of a respect for the diversity of human cultures encouraged a reevaluation of identified systemic divisions and an emphasis on inclusiveness rather than exclusivity wherever possible. As noted earlier, affirmation of this worldview shift is evidenced in the proclamation in *Lumen Gentium* that many

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<sup>232</sup> Karl Rahner, "Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation," 260.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 260-261.

elements of God's sanctification can be found outside the explicit salvation promised through the Catholic Church. An extension of this thought in terms of the possibility of universal salvation is found in Rahner's concept of the anonymous Christian.<sup>234</sup>

In focusing on *personal* salvation, the subject of Rahner's third concern, the contrasts between Rahner and Balthasar can once again be clarified through an area where they concurred. Both theologians agreed with the traditional teaching that, although Jesus made eternal salvation possible for all, the final determination of an individual's existence is inextricably tied to the choices one freely makes on earth. Rahner depicted the human means to salvation in terms of *transcendence* beyond natural limitations through freely given submissions to the Absolute Mystery of God. Balthasar's focus was on human engagement with a *kenotic* or self-emptying process of love as a response to God's self-giving relationship with humanity. The Theology of the Cross being developed in this project will present an integration of both of these views, emphasizing basic similarities that are more complementary than contradictory. The common thread in this undertaking is Rahner and Balthasar's agreement that salvation is linked not only with human freedom, but also with faith, hope, and love. Rahner explained this connection by clarifying that Jesus' redemption of humanity "from outside" still requires the free participation of individuals in their "self-redemption":

... one can quite properly assert that every human being redeems himself or herself by his or her own free activity, that self-redemption and redemption from outside are not two mutually exclusive concepts. "Redemption from outside" by Jesus Christ does not mean that human beings would be exempted from doing something that they are obliged to do by means of their own freedom ... It means that God by his grace, in view of Jesus Christ and his cross, grants and offers people the possibility, in the most radical self-

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<sup>234</sup> For Balthasar's thoughts on universal salvation, see: Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). Rather than developing a theory on *how* universal salvation can be brought about, Balthasar provides evidence for the legitimacy of our "daring to hope" that it will be accomplished.

surrender of their existence through faith, hope, and love, of constituting their own ultimate validity in the order of salvation.<sup>235</sup>

Rahner clarified that the means to salvation through faith, hope and love is not arbitrary:

... according to Christian teaching redemption in the sense of ultimate salvation is impossible without faith, hope, and love, and ... redemption in its ultimate phase is nothing other than the perfection of faith, hope, and love ...<sup>236</sup>

Although the above references describe the specifically *Christian* theological virtues in terms of the *Christian* understanding of redemption, Rahner also stressed an implicit *universal* aspect of these virtues in that “everything in human life is indeed the history of salvation”:

When a person’s free act is not sinful, it too is an event of grace in the present order of salvation under God’s absolute salvific will to communicate his own self. When a person believes, when he hopes, when he loves, when he turns to God, when he turns away from his sin, when he acquires an inner and positive relationship to his death, when he opens himself in eternal love to another person in an ultimate way, when any of these things happen salvation takes place, there is a dialogical relationship to God in grace, and there is an event of salvation and an event in a person’s real and most intimate history of salvation.<sup>237</sup>

Balthasar also described salvation as taking place even on earth through a freely engaged relationship with God involving faith, hope, and love. Not surprisingly, Balthasar contrasts with Rahner by describing God in terms of Trinitarian kenotic love and by associating the theological virtues specifically with Christianity. Despite the contrasting emphases, Balthasar’s conclusions are similar to those of Rahner, even in identifying human transformation from a temporal to eternal union with God as a universal mode of existence that is intrinsic to all human beings:

But this much at least we can say: human participation in the life of the triune God ‘is already beginning within the sphere of temporality in the life of faith, hope, and love, so

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<sup>235</sup> Karl Rahner, “Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation,” 266.

<sup>236</sup> Karl Rahner, “The Christian Understanding of Redemption,” 241.

<sup>237</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 429.

much so that the transformation of this temporal mode of participating in God into the eternal mode is more the unveiling of something already existing than it is the creation of something new and external to the creature' (ET4, 439). This is because 'what Christian theology calls the "theological virtues" of faith, hope, and love are ways of handing over one's freedom to God's freedom' (ET4, 440). In this sense, heaven is begun below, for God's eternal handing himself over in Trinitarian love *is* heaven. And the theological virtues are God's ways of enacting, or rather re-enacting, that life in the human soul on earth: 'thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Thus faith becomes the human way of entering into God's truth, hope into God's fidelity to his promises, and love into his own self-surrender to us (ET4, 440).<sup>238</sup>

Consideration of Rahner's third concern is bringing into focus a third parameter for a contemporary theology of the cross: consideration of how the means to human salvation is related to human freedom in the context of a growth in faith, hope and love. Rahner and Balthasar adeptly provided concrete examples of where the theological virtues can be identified salvifically in ordinary human life – in the going out of oneself to another. An earthly foundation for salvation will therefore be presented in terms of everyday growth in faith, hope, and love. These virtues are distinctively theological (defined in their relationship to God), but because of their intrinsic link to salvation, discernment of implicit universal associations will be sought that are presentable in anthropological terms.

Similar to the direction taken as a result of Rahner's first concern, the relationship human beings have with God will be directly associated with the relationship human beings have with others. A distinction between this project's parameters for Rahner's first and third concerns, however, is that the first parameter is focused on the effects of *mutual* relationships – how human beings' psychosocial growth and development is influenced through relationships with *others* in a more universally identified way. The

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<sup>238</sup> Geoffrey Wainright, "Eschatology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Editors Edward T. Oakes, S.J. and David Moss, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Kindle edition for PC, location 121 of 282. Notations refer to Balthasar's *Explorations in Theology, Vol. IV: Spirit and Institution*, tr. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

third parameter will reflect a shift to the individual subject. It will focus on how the individual human, duly influenced by the benefits and challenges of social relationships, still is responsible for shaping his or her *personal* eternal destiny through the exercise of his or her own freedom. Thus this section will emphasize the *personal* and *unique* development of the individual, which ultimately reflects the unique relationship of the individual with God. This is consistent with the conclusion regarding the second parameter as developed in the previous section: Jesus' life shared aspects in common with all human beings, but it also included aspects that were distinctly personal to Jesus himself. The project is affirming that there are unique as well as universal elements - an individuality within a shared commonality - intrinsic to all human beings.

As the project “turns to the [individual] subject” in considering personal salvation, a direction for the third parameter can be found in Scripture:

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it? He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”<sup>239</sup>

The path to eternal life is not paved merely with external actions, even when interpreted according to obedience to “the law.” Jesus repeatedly pointed to the Pharisees as exemplar followers of the letter of the law with their actions, but he was quick to point out that what appeared on the surface to be ethical behavior in reality was far from the kingdom of God. In emphasizing that the “whole being” of a person must be involved in a relationship with God, this Scripture counters what can be interpreted as theological tendencies in the past to reference the human person as a simple union of body and soul. The contemporary approach emphasizes a more holistic approach to the human

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<sup>239</sup> Luke 10:25-8.



individual, validating the importance of a person's intellectual, emotional and psychological aspects as well as the physical and spiritual. The exploration of the means to salvation in this project will be grounded in this more holistic approach, as referenced in the above Scripture passage. Evidence of God's grace at work implicitly in the human being will be associated with a human quest for love and spiritual growth that stretches the individual's mind, heart, and strength – the whole “being” of a person - beyond his or her present reality.

Rahner's understanding that salvation takes place in the daily history of a human being's life and Balthasar's vision that heaven begins on earth both reflect the reality of the human being's journey toward God in this life. This project is developing a description of this journey in terms of transcendental *and* kenotic movements that are two sides of the same coin. They will be depicted as reflecting conscious as well as unconscious, miniscule as well as momentous, transcendental and kenotic steps that empty the human being to make room for the fullness of God: “He must increase; I must decrease.”<sup>240</sup> An ever-deepening transcendental/kenotic evolution in the human person will be shown to take place in freely engaged growth and conversions in daily life. Growth in faith, hope, and love, will be shown to parallel the depth of our growth in loving God with our whole being – with our mind, heart and strength.<sup>241</sup> The inclusion of the command to love your neighbor as yourself explicitly presents the salvific needs of the individual as being met in movements reaching out beyond the self to others. The third parameter will address these human transcendental/kenotic movements within the

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<sup>240</sup> John 3:30.

<sup>241</sup> This project's focus on Luke 10:25-8 facilitates a direct parallel between faith, hope and love and the command to love God with one's mind, heart, and strength. This is not meant to suggest a categorically distinct parallel, but rather emphasizes the holistic nature of the command to love with one's whole “being,” as is also suggested not only in Luke but also in Mark 12:30, Matt 22:37, and Dt 6:5.

context of an individual's exercise of freedom. In this context a clearer understanding of authentic human freedom will emerge.

A basic paradox of Christianity is being unearthed in linking an authentic freedom (i.e., transcendence from human limitations and even bondage to the natural world) with a kenotic sacrifice of the self. New life is possible through intellectual, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual movements away from the old self on many levels. Even on the smallest level, however, liberating transcendence can only be realized with a kenotic self-emptying – a letting go, a death of the old -- in order to embrace the new:

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat ...<sup>242</sup>

#### **Addressing a Fourth Concern: The Salvific Significance of Jesus' Suffering**

Three parameters for developing a contemporary Theology of the Cross have been proposed as a response to Rahner's three concerns regarding the concept of salvific sacrifices. In considering Rahner's soteriological concerns, however, an additional issue emerged that was not explicitly addressed by Rahner: identifying a salvific significance specifically to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Resolution of that issue is critical to this project in that it will be the basis for addressing how human suffering today can also be considered redemptive.

How did Jesus' suffering make a universal difference 2000 years ago for every member of the human race? How does Jesus' suffering make a personal difference for me today in my own unique encounters with suffering in my daily life? Addressing these two questions is fundamental to satisfactorily addressing the fourth concern of this project. Emphasizing an *empirical* perspective, attention will be "turned to the subject" –

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<sup>242</sup> John 12:24.

shifting to a more focused examination of the experience of Jesus himself. Rahner's universal treatment of Jesus' suffering resulted in his pointing out how Jesus' suffering can be related to *every* person's experience of suffering. In addressing the fourth concern, the emphasis will also be on how Jesus' suffering was like ours, since solidarity with the human experience of suffering is essential if an association is to be made between Jesus' suffering and our own. However, consideration will also be given to how Jesus' suffering was different than ours, so that it can be argued that Jesus' suffering also can make a *unique* redemptive difference personally for *each* individual throughout history.

Traditional and contemporary soteriologies support the concept that Jesus' suffering was a sacrifice for our sake, made for the universal benefit of those in need of a Savior. Unique to this project, however, will be a consideration of the effect of Jesus' suffering on *his own self*. The author is arguing that in taking up our cross with hope *we* will experience a benefit in addition to any positive effect our efforts have on others. If Jesus was like us in *all* things but sin, how did his own suffering make a difference in his life? The empirical approach of this project will be maintained, so that the examination of Jesus' suffering will be grounded in references to anthropological resources that can be related to actual lived experience. Consideration will not be limited to the redemptive nature of Jesus' *physical* death and resurrection (the traditional emphasis) but, paralleling the manner in which human suffering is being presented in this project, Jesus' suffering will be examined as salvific in terms of his *holistic* experience. Such a focus is crucial for this project so that an association can be made between the suffering Jesus experienced in

a horrific crucifixion 2000 years ago and the suffering *we* experience in being called on a daily basis to take up our cross today.

The focus for this fourth parameter is developing into consideration of the salvific significance of Jesus' suffering on two levels – a *universal* benefit for all in terms of humanity's reconciliation with God, as well as a *personal* benefit unique to the “self-redemption” of *each* human being, occurring centuries after Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The first level of consideration will require incorporation of all three of Rahner's concerns since it will consider Jesus' suffering as a universally salvific sacrifice on our behalf. Despite Rahner's focus on the *universal* aspect of our redemption, however, a foundation for examining Jesus' suffering on the more personal second level can also be found in Rahner's thought. It is not taken from his soteriology, but from his broader theology – as he identifies a need for modern times in his vision of “the kind of Christology required today:”

... such a Christology ... would have to say much more than in the past about the *highly personal loving relationship* [emphasis added] of the individual human being to Jesus of Nazareth. This could perhaps be described very simply and yet radically in such a way as to actually include in it the whole of classical Christology with the result that this classical Christology would lose some of the alien appearance that it often has today even for firmly believing Christians. If this relationship of the individual to Jesus were from the outset clearly understood as *a dying with Jesus (in absolute hope) in a surrender to the incomprehensibility of the eternal God* [Rahner's own emphasis], Christology would no longer appear to the other world religions and the other forms of human desire for God as something compatible only with a particular religion, which cannot be the religion of all human beings.<sup>243</sup>

The parameters developed in this chapter have already set a foundation for incorporating Rahner's vision into a contemporary Theology of the Cross which will be described in the following chapter. It is anticipated that the fundamentals of “classical Christology” will be reflected in the proposed theory, but from a more contemporary and

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<sup>243</sup> Karl Rahner, “Christology Today,” 227.

inclusive perspective. It is also anticipated that the focus of the fourth parameter will shed light on an association between Jesus' sacrificial suffering on the cross and a more "highly personal loving relationship" with Jesus. It is also hoped that the findings related to the fourth parameter will foster a better understanding of, and personal encouragement for, "dying with Jesus (in absolute hope) in a surrender" to the mystery of God. If even a partial success is reached in reflecting the Christological vision that Rahner is promoting, it will be ironic that its roots are in an issue Rahner hesitated to include in his own Christology: an affirmation of Jesus' suffering as a sacrifice that was redemptive and liberating for all of humanity.

## CHAPTER 6

### A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

A theological anthropological response will now be given to the three concerns expressed by Rahner when a salvific significance is given to Jesus' suffering on the cross. Although the theological conclusions of this project have been built on the theologies of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, its approach reflects the insights of Bernard Lonergan's distinction between an empiricist and classicist conception of culture. This contemporary Theology of the Cross employs the use of an *empirical* lens focused on experienced processes - representing a contrasting but not necessarily conflicting perspective from the traditional *classicist* focus on categorical conclusions.

Following the parameters developed in the previous chapter, the focus of this chapter will be Rahner's first two concerns will be addressed. First, God's immutably loving relationship with humanity will be examined; second, a contemporary understanding will be sought regarding God's salvific initiative on behalf of humanity. In Chapter 7 attention will be "turned to the human subject" and address Rahner's third concern regarding the relationship between human freedom and salvation. The chapter will close with a consideration of the fourth issue that is intrinsic to this project: exploring the salvific significance of Jesus' own experience of suffering on the cross.

#### **Parameter 1: God's Immutable Relationship of Love with Humanity**

An examination of Rahner's concern that "God's mind cannot be changed" resulted in an understanding that although God is immutable, God is also in a dynamic personal relationship with human beings. The contemporary focus on human freedom fostered a shift from traditional soteriological emphases on the hierarchical dominion of

God over humanity, to emphasizing humanity's ability to respond to God in a loving mutuality. Since Scripture directly relates human love for others with love for God, an anthropological understanding of mutuality and love will now be presented to further an understanding of humanity's *mutual* relationship with God. This section will first describe a social scientific recognition of a human need for love, and then explain how an individual's own growth depends on healthy relationships with others. The ability to trust will be identified as a cornerstone of the development of healthy mutuality. Attention will then be drawn to how trust in God is encouraged through God's own relationship with humanity and is confirmed by God's Revelation in Scripture and Jesus Christ.

### **Social Scientific Understandings of the Human Need for Love**

Man is a singular creature. He has a set of gifts which make him unique among the animals: so that, unlike them, he is not a figure in the landscape – he is a shaper of the landscape. In body and in mind he is the explorer of nature, the ubiquitous animal, who did not find but has made his home in every continent.<sup>244</sup>

The “singularity” of human creatures in their ability to transcend the confines of their environment is possible because of unique human characteristics (in Christian terms: human gifts from God) that allow them a freedom not shared with other animals. Humans have an innate desire to explore not only the landscape surrounding them, but also the depths of their own being. The starting point for Rahner's theology was the human transcendental desire to search for such knowledge regarding the mysteries of life. This section will highlight social scientific efforts that sought a better understanding of the human creature itself. Scientific speculations with their subsequent social theories abound; of special relevance to this project are those that focus on the human individual's relationship with others. This section highlights psychologist Abram Maslow's presentation of a human being's “hierarchy of needs;” it will be followed by psychologist

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<sup>244</sup> J. Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 19.

Erik Erikson's identification of eight "stages of human development." Basic to both theorists is an awareness that human beings have not only a desire for love, but a recognized *need* for love.

Maslow identified seven levels of human needs based on a pyramid presentation, but distinguished them as representing two tiers of motivational forces. He identified the most basic physical and psychological survival needs as "physiological, safety, love and belongingness, and esteem;" the second tier addressed a person's "self-actualization" or "becoming everything that one is capable of becoming."<sup>245</sup> Maslow's contention that love is included in the foundational first tier - as one of the universal "survival needs" of a human being - is significant:

If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs ... In our society the thwarting of these [love] needs is the most commonly found core in cases of maladjustment and more severe psychopathology. ... Also not to be overlooked is the fact that the love needs involve both giving *and* receiving love.<sup>246</sup>

Other theories differ from Maslow's concept that these needs emerge in hierarchical tiers, beginning with basic physiological needs and progressing up a pyramid as the needs are met. Clayton Alderfer proposed three categories of needs: Existence, Relatedness (including love), and Growth. In contrast to Maslow, Alderfer claimed no hierarchical aspect to these needs - their value may vary depending on the individual and other conditions.<sup>247</sup> In 2011 a study by the University of Illinois involving cultures from around the world found that "self-actualization and social needs [including love] were

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<sup>245</sup> Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, (Great Britain: Hodder & Stoughton Educational, 1999), pp. 97-8. Note: In 1954 Maslow's theory was presented in terms of five levels of needs, but in 1968 he added an additional two levels. The original five levels are still popularly representative of Maslow's theory. See:

[http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/leaders\\_maslow\\_hierarchy.html](http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/leaders_maslow_hierarchy.html), accessed 3/26/13.

<sup>246</sup> A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in *Classics in the History of Psychology*, originally published in *Psychological Review* 50, 370-396, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>.

<sup>247</sup> See: [http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods\\_alderfer\\_erg\\_theory.html](http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_alderfer_erg_theory.html), accessed 3/27/13.



important even when many of the most basic physiological needs were unfulfilled.”<sup>248</sup> It is noteworthy that the inclusion of love as an intrinsic human *need* was not questioned in any of these studies. Just as Rahner grounded the human quest for knowledge in God, the source of All Knowledge, this project is proposing that the human quest for love is grounded in an intrinsic, even if unconscious, need for the source of All Love.

### **Healthy Human Development: A Dependence on Mutual Relationships**

Of special interest to this section’s emphasis on God’s *mutual* relationship with humanity, is Maslow’s emphasis above on the importance of – “giving *and* receiving love” – a mutuality that is intrinsic to the human need for love. A fundamental means of mutuality in human relationships was also identified by Erik Erikson as inherent in the healthy parent-child relationship, beginning in infancy:

The simplest and the earliest modality is “*to get*,” not in the sense of “*go and get*” but in that of receiving and accepting what is given; and this sounds easier than it is. For the groping and unstable newborn’s organism learns this modality only as he learns to regulate his readiness to get with the methods of a mother who, in turn, will permit him to coordinate his means of getting as she develops and coordinates her means of giving. The mutuality of relaxation thus developed is of prime importance for the first experience of friendly otherness ... in thus *getting what is given*, and in learning to *get somebody to do* for him what he wishes to have done, the baby also develops the necessary groundwork to *get to be* the giver, to “identify” with her.<sup>249</sup>

Erickson’s observations led him to propose a psychosocial theory of development for the healthy personality based on an interrelatedness of biological, psychological and social functions. Erickson’s emphasis on a *social* influence contrasted with Freud’s emphasis on a sexual foundation for development that was influential in one’s early life. Erickson maintained the developmental influences extended throughout one’s life.<sup>250</sup> Central to this thesis is his observation above, that even the “simplest and the earliest”

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<sup>248</sup> Kendra Cherry, *Hierarchy of Needs: The Five Levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://psychology.about.com/od/theoriesofpersonality/a/hierarchyneeds.htm>.

<sup>249</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 60.

<sup>250</sup> John W. Santrock, *Essentials of Life-Span Development*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 17.

development of mutuality - that of a newborn learning to receive nourishment - is of “prime importance” but “sounds easier than it is.” Such challenges and struggles are intrinsic to *all* human development and were duly noted as such by Erickson. They will also be central to this project’s consideration of human suffering.

Erickson identified eight stages of development in the human life cycle based on the individual’s encounter with his or her social environment and the individual’s readiness to address the challenge of the next stage. Each of the stages “centres (sic) around a developmental crisis, involving a struggle between two opposing or conflicting personality characteristics.”<sup>251</sup> The stages, their respective crises, and approximate age for healthy development, are as follows:

1. Basic trust versus Basic mistrust: newborn to 1 year old
2. Autonomy versus Shame and doubt: 1 – 3 years old
3. Initiative versus Guilt: 3 – 6 years old
4. Industry versus Inferiority: 6 – 12 years old
5. Identity versus Role confusion: 12 – 18 years old
6. Intimacy versus Isolation: in the 20’s
7. Generativity versus Stagnation: Late 20’s – 50’s
8. Ego integrity versus Despair: 50’s and beyond<sup>252</sup>

It is again significant that Erickson described *healthy* human growth as resulting from successful “struggles” with a “crisis” of “opposing or conflicting” characteristics. He also explained that these encounters draw the individual outward, into a widening social environment:

Personality can be said to develop according to steps predetermined in the human organism’s readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius, beginning with the dim image of a mother and ending with mankind, or at any rate that segment of mankind which “counts” in the particular individual’s life.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, 529- 530.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 531.

<sup>253</sup> Erickson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, 54.

## Trust as Foundational for Human Growth and Relationships

The extent to which the human individual can successfully address the world beyond childhood is related to the child's ability to address what Erickson identified as the most basic stage of development: trust vs. mistrust. Erickson noted that conscious and unconscious elements combine to allow human beings the ability to trust the world as well as themselves. Through clinical experience with individuals in whom a sense of trust has been impaired, Erickson noted that "...we have learned to regard basic trust as the cornerstone of a healthy personality."<sup>254</sup> Thus, according to Erikson's depiction of the human life cycle, trust is the foundational building block upon which other healthy social development throughout life is based, including the individual's capacity for autonomy, industry, identity, and intimacy. Erickson cautioned against a misunderstanding of the functioning of the levels of development as an "achievement scale" of positive characteristics over negative ones, as if they were "secured once and for all" at each stage of development. He continued with a clarification:

[S]ome ... blithely omit all the *negative* senses (basic mistrust, etc.) which are and remain the dynamic counterpart of the positive senses throughout life. ... What the child acquires at a given stage is a certain *ratio* between the positive and the negative which, if the balance is toward the positive, will help him to meet later crises with a better chance for unimpaired total development. The idea that at any stage a *goodness* is achieved which is impervious to new conflicts within and changes without is a projection ...[which] can make us inept in the face of a heightened struggle for a meaningful existence in our time.<sup>255</sup>

The healthy human life cycle is replete with crises beginning in childhood and continuing in adulthood; Erikson challenged "daydreams" that suggest otherwise:

Only in the light of man's inner division and social antagonism is a belief in his essential resourcefulness and creativity justifiable and productive.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 181-182.

Erikson was thus arguing that conflict is inevitably encountered in healthy human development. At the same time, however, he also was stressing the human being's ability to successfully engage in struggles since successful engagement with the challenges of life is essential for continued human development and a "meaningful existence." The thesis of this project is focused on a *Christian* approach to suffering, but it dovetails with Erikson's anthropological insights: conflicts in life, even great sufferings, can be met with an "essential resourcefulness" of hope. The Christian identifies a specific foundation for this "basic trust" in the trustworthiness of God's unconditional love for, and commitment to, human beings.

### **God's Encouragement to Humanity for a Trusting Mutual Relationship**

*Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. ... And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.<sup>257</sup>*

Traditional theological interpretations, immersed in the perception of a body/soul dichotomy, tended to stress that the "likeness" humanity shared with God was the spiritual soul. Contemporary emphasis on social relationships facilitates an appreciation for the *social* aspect humanity shares with the triune God. Although the Trinity is a great mystery, revelation allows us to understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are free and distinctively unique "Persons" in the midst of a communal unity. Social scientists attest that in spite of the freedom and uniqueness of each human individual, human beings are not meant to exist in isolation. A theological description of this sociological finding is that human beings, made in the image of the triune God, are distinctly individual even as they are intrinsically in relationship with others.

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<sup>257</sup> Gen 1:26, 31.

Rahner identified the supernatural existential as evidence of God's transcendental invitation to humanity. In this project it is being suggested that humanity's creation in the "likeness" of God can be interpreted as God's invitation to a personal relationship with human beings. Scripture attests to the chasm separating human reality from God: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts".<sup>258</sup> If humanity shared nothing in common with its transcendent Creator, there would be no common ground upon which a creature could establish a relationship with God. Ideals of human relationships that are identified as "likenesses" to God (e.g., freedom, love, justice, mercy), allow a sense of a relationship with God upon which a sense of trust can be developed.

Building on the anthropological findings that human beings thrive by "going out" of themselves in relationships with others, God's Revelation provides further information about the nature of God's mutual relationship with human beings. Scripture does not simply liken God's relationship with humanity to a casual interaction among strangers. Accounts in Jewish Scripture describe God's familial relationship with humanity, mirroring the relationship between a parent and a child or a lover and the beloved.<sup>259</sup> The New Testament abounds with teachings about God's relationship to all humanity,<sup>260</sup> as well as descriptions of Jesus' own relationship with God as Abba.<sup>261</sup> Most significant is the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus taught his disciples to pray as a family unit (i.e., *Our* Father, give *us* our daily bread), addressing God in a parental role in the midst of the

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<sup>258</sup> Isaiah 55:9.

<sup>259</sup> As examples, see: Dt 32:10 ff; Isaiah 43:1, 49:15, 62:5, 66:13, Job 31:18, Psalms 27:10, 139:1 ff.

<sup>260</sup> See: Mt 6:6, 23:9; Luke 11:13; Gal 4:6, Heb 2:11, Rom 2:7, 8:15; 1Cor 1:3; 2Cor 1:3-4, 6:18; Eph 4:6.

<sup>261</sup> See: Mt 11:27, 17:5; Mark 14:36, Luke 2:49, John 6:37-38, 8:28-29, 15:1, 17:5, 21-23, Heb 1:1-3.

family. Christian trust in God is rooted in the belief that God not only created human beings in God's own image - God is the loving sustainer of even daily human needs.

Anselm and Aquinas recognized God's parental involvement with humanity, but their emphasis on hierarchical roles resulted in a focus on obedience in the relationship. Contemporary understandings of relationships underscore the importance of *trust* in a relationship; they also can be used to help identify trust as a significant factor in a healthy obedience to God. Lawrence Kohlberg noted how cognitive, developmental, and social influences contribute to moral development. Describing a stage of *early* moral development, he explained that a child determines the difference between what is right and wrong based on an "avoidance of punishment."<sup>262</sup> Fear of negative consequences is a prime motivator for a child's obedience, until it is able to develop a more mature response (which some adults never reach). A Scriptural depiction of this immature stage of development occurs in the Genesis account of a "first" sin. After Eve tells the snake that God forbade them to even touch a certain fruit "or else you will die," the story continues:

But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.<sup>263</sup>

The story clearly reveals that Adam and Eve did not eat the forbidden fruit because they were hungry: they disobeyed God because they trusted the snake's contradiction of God, rather than trusting God. In denying a negative consequence ("You

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<sup>262</sup> As a child grows in cognitive ability, the middle stages of moral development include social influences such as peer approval and then recognition of obeying laws for the common good. Attainment of "full moral responsibility" is not reached until the final stage where "right or wrong is based upon self-chosen, ethical principles which we arrive at through reflection – they are not demanded by society as such." See Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, 698.

<sup>263</sup> Gen 3:4-6.

certainly will not die!’’) the snake facilitated a path for their child-like disobedience. A need for obedience is fundamental to humanity’s relationship with God, but obedience based on trust - rather than fear of negative consequences or any other motive - is essential for a more mature and lasting relationship.

Consideration of Rahner’s first concern regarding God’s immutable love of humanity led to this more focused examination of God’s relationship with humanity. Elements necessary for healthy mutual relationships were presented as a basis for understanding what is necessary for a healthy relationship with God, with a special emphasis on the importance of *trust* in maintaining and developing that relationship.

God’s loving relationship with humanity has been defined as immutable. Humanity’s relationship with God, however, is not. God’s gift of human freedom allowed sin, the contradiction of God, to enter the world. Attention will now be turned to Rahner’s second concern and an exploration of the initiative God took to reconcile the break humanity made with God when they sought their fulfillment in sin rather than in a trusting relationship with God. Reconciliation was essential to address the injustice of sin, not only in terms of what is rightfully due to be given to God (as was emphasized in traditional soteriologies) but also for humanity’s own sake. Since human beings are made in the image of God, sin is not only a contradiction of God - it is also a contradiction of the human being’s own self.

### **Parameter 2: Humanity’s Need for God’s Salvific Initiative**

Rahner’s two definitions of redemption parallel two issues addressed by Anselm in “Why God Became Man.” Anselm first described a need to make satisfaction for sin, but then explained that by taking the initiative God also was able to fulfill God’s plan for

humanity. In stressing that humanity was totally dependent on God's mercy even before sin, Rahner did not emphasize a need for satisfaction to be made for sins; instead he focused on Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity. Although there are contemporary challenges to Anselm's conclusions, in this section it will be argued that Rahner's soteriology is not complete without addressing both issues raised by Anselm. Thus, God's salvific initiative will be described in this project in terms of a two-fold mission for Jesus: a universal mission to fulfill God's plan for humanity, as well as a unique mission that became necessary because of humanity's rejection of God's plan.

Anselm focused on a unilaterally hierarchical effect of sin: since sin is a breach of the honor that is owed to God, satisfaction must be made to God for sin. In this project consideration will be given not only to an injustice toward God that sin represents, but also the damage sin inflicted on humanity itself. First to be presented is Rahner's description of a Savior who fulfilled God's universal plan for humanity through a life of authentic solidarity with both God and humanity. This will be followed by Balthasar's description of a Savior who was uniquely needed to free humanity from the consequences of their sin, especially since the environment of sin was blinding them to even recognizing the plan God had for them. A contemporary understanding of God's salvific initiative on behalf of humanity will then be presented, incorporating contributions from both Rahner and Balthasar.

### **Rahner and Salvific Solidarity: the Universal Mission of Jesus**

Traditional soteriologies approached the Incarnation as if it were God's reaction to sin. Rahner and other contemporary theologians, including Balthasar, argue that the Incarnation was not an "afterthought" of God once sin entered the world; it was part of



God's plan *along with* creation.<sup>264</sup> Rahner viewed the Word taking flesh as "God's way of owning the world [so that] the world is not only his work, a work distinct from him, but becomes his own reality."<sup>265</sup> Rahner was intent on demonstrating God's solidarity with human beings. If being made in *God's* image can be seen as an invitation for humanity to be in relationship with God, the Son of God taking on *humanity's* image is irrevocable confirmation of the commitment God gives to that mutual relationship.

**Jesus as the Epitome of Solidarity with Humanity.** As explained in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity.<sup>266</sup>

Solidarity is more than simply expressing compassion or concern for those who are struggling; it is a "*firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*."<sup>267</sup> The *Compendium* makes it clear that "the life and message of Jesus Christ" is the "unsurpassed apex" of solidarity.<sup>268</sup> It emphasizes that Jesus himself "illuminates" for humanity a clear connection between solidarity and love for others:

One's neighbor must therefore be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her; and for that person's sake one must be ready for sacrifice, even the ultimate one: to lay down one's life for the brethren.<sup>269</sup>

The extent of God's commitment to humanity is almost beyond comprehension when it is realized that the Incarnate Son of God's solidarity with human beings required going beyond such "ultimate" love *for* humanity. God's desire to make the reality of the

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<sup>264</sup> Rahner, "Current Problems in Christology" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. I*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 165.

<sup>265</sup> Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," 106.

<sup>266</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, compiled by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Washington DC: USCCB Publishing, 2005), 84.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*. See 1 Jn 3:16.

beloved human creatures “God’s own reality” necessitated God first becoming authentically one *of* them. Evidence is easily found in Scripture that Jesus displayed authentic human responses to everyday life experiences by weeping, showing compassion, being frustrated or angry. The following references, however, will highlight parallels between Scriptural accounts of Jesus’ life and Erickson’s life stages, as a sign that even the psychosocial growth and development of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, was that of a normal human being. Note that inclusion of the Scriptural references in this section does not depend on establishing documentation of their *historical* authenticity. What we encounter in the gospels is an inspired interpretation of the words and events of Jesus' life. Even in those interpretations, significant parallels of their understanding of Jesus' human development can be seen to parallel Erickson's stages of human development, almost 2000 years before they were empirically identified as such.

Given the foundational influence Erickson attributes to the development of the first psychosocial level of *basic trust*, it is noteworthy that the Gospel account of Jesus’ conception places Jesus in the care of a woman who offered an extraordinarily trusting fiat to God.<sup>270</sup> Although Scripture offers no description of Jesus’ development in his first six years of life, his successful progression through the levels of *autonomy* and *initiative* is implicitly recognizable in the Gospel story of Jesus amazing the teachers in the temple when he was twelve years old.<sup>271</sup> Jesus’ precociousness among the adults also reflects his mastering Erickson’s level of *industry* where youngsters between the ages of 6-12 “socially reach out beyond the parents’ influence.” Words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel story also describe a special sense of *identity* developing in his relationship with

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<sup>270</sup> See: Luke 1:38.

<sup>271</sup> See: Luke 2:14-51.

his Abba: “Did you not know I had to be in my Father’s house?,”<sup>272</sup> causing even his parents to wrestle with “what he said to them.”<sup>273</sup> As an adult, Jesus’ *intimacy* and *generativity*<sup>274</sup> are evidenced in the inclusiveness of his love even toward social outcasts, as well as in his preaching to the multitudes, healing people in need, and challenging the unjust powers of the community.

**Jesus as the Epitome of Solidarity with God.** Most significant to this project is how closely Scriptural descriptions of Jesus’ suffering on the cross can be paralleled with Erickson’s description of a final developmental level, *ego integrity vs. despair*. A final psychosocial conflict can be related to Jesus in the midst of his crucifixion in terms of Jesus maintaining his trust in God (and thus challenging Jesus’ ego identity as the Son doing his Father’s will). This final struggle was evidenced most dramatically in Jesus’ anguished cry from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”<sup>275</sup> Because of the extraordinarily horrific turn of events in his life, culminating even in feeling forsaken by his Abba, Jesus’ final experience was ripe for giving in to Erickson’s depiction of “despair.” Nevertheless, Jesus maintained his “ego identity” as a trusting and obedient Son. Just before his last breath Jesus cried out: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”<sup>276</sup>

Richard Gross outlines various meanings for Erickson’s understanding of ego identity; three of these identifiers of ego identity are especially significant for this study:

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<sup>272</sup> Luke 2:49.

<sup>273</sup> Luke 2:50.

<sup>274</sup> Erickson’s *intimacy* is “the ability to [maturely] share with and care about another person;” *generativity* reflects a concern for future generations rather than focusing only on one’s own needs. See Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, 620.

<sup>275</sup> Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34.

<sup>276</sup> Luke 23:46.

The conviction that, in the long-term view, life does have a purpose and a meaning and does make sense ...

The belief that all life's experiences offer something of value ... including the bad times ...

Coming to see that what we share with all other human beings, past, present and future, is the inevitable cycle of birth and death. Whatever the differences, historically, culturally, economically, etc., all human beings have this much in common; in the light of this, 'death loses its sting'.<sup>277</sup>

These anthropological elements of ego identity, associated with the final level of human maturity, can be paralleled to the theological elements identified in Chapter 5 as the fundamental mission of every human being: to live a life of *faith* (recognizing that human beings are not here by accident – there is “a purpose and meaning” to life), *hope* (trusting in the “value” of life even in the midst of great trials), and *love* (in recognizing our commonality with others, treating others as we love ourselves). The significance of Jesus of Nazareth is that for the first time in history a human being authentically lived such a life – the life God willed for every human being. Jesus' final act on the cross was a trusting submission to God of all his life represented, even though his life seemed to be ending in failure - in a horrendous execution reserved for criminals. God's resurrection of Jesus, however, is concrete validation of Jesus and his mission. It is also a sign of hope that what was true for Jesus is true for all humanity: there is more to the human story even when it seems to be ending in failure. God wills that human beings live their life in a union with God that transcends earthly experiences, including human death and temptations to despair.

A direct correlation can be noted between Rahner's soteriological description of Jesus' final submission to God in his death, and the description of human psychosocial fulfillment through a struggle with ego identity vs despair. As Rahner observed:

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<sup>277</sup> Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, 619-620.

... by freely accepting the fate of death Jesus surrenders himself precisely to the unforeseen and incalculable possibilities of his existence ... Jesus maintains in death his unique claim of an identity between his message and his person in the hope that in this death he will be vindicated by God with regard to his claim.<sup>278</sup>

Ego identity is evident in someone who attained a sense of meaning for his or her life; lack of ego identity “is signified by a fear of death, which is the most conspicuous symptom of despair. ... This despair is, in fact, a form of basic mistrust, a fear of the unknown which follows death.”<sup>279</sup> Rahner described Jesus as maintaining his ego identity with hope of vindication from God. Even as he suffered a horrendous ending to his life, his death was accomplished with trusting submission to God rather than in despair. Jesus had an indestructible *faith* in God’s love for him – even when he felt abandoned on the cross. He had a trusting *hope* that God would affirm his fidelity to God and his mission of bringing fullness of life to all.<sup>280</sup> He also had unconditional *love* of God and humanity despite unimaginable challenges. Rahner argued that this is not only the way Jesus atoned for sin<sup>281</sup> - it is the universal way of salvation for all of humanity.

**A Problem with Rahner's Focus only on Jesus' Universal Mission.** Agreement can easily be given to Rahner’s explanation that by living an authentic human life in union with God, Jesus concretely manifested God’s salvific will in the world universally for all humanity. However, a problem is suggested with Rahner not also considering a unique salvific meaning for Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. Most problematic is Jesus’ anguish in the midst of his unanswered plea: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Rahner’s soteriology highlighted the salvific necessity for submission to the Mystery of God. Trust has been identified as essential for healthy mutual

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<sup>278</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 255.

<sup>279</sup> Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, p. 620.

<sup>280</sup> John 10:9-11.

<sup>281</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 255.

relationships; as such, trust can also be understood to be essential for the type of submission to God that Rahner described and that Jesus modeled. But is God completely trustworthy? Where was God while Jesus hung in agony on the cross? God's silence in response to Jesus' cry is even more astounding since Scripture describes Jesus' submission to the crucifixion as part of God's will.

Rahner and Balthasar interpreted the Scriptural account of Jesus' abandonment by God as an authentic human experience of Jesus.<sup>282</sup> If Jesus was praying Psalm 22, as was traditionally proposed, it was because he was truly relating to it. Not surprisingly, Rahner focused on Jesus' experience in terms of how it is common to every human being.<sup>283</sup> Ultimately he viewed Jesus' suffering in terms of submitting to the Mystery of God: "The incomprehensibility of suffering is part of the incomprehensibility of God."<sup>284</sup>

The mystery of suffering is, indeed, a reality of life, but Rahner's approach leaves the door open for the type of misinterpretations he sought to avoid. Why did God abandon Jesus? Was God condoning the torture of Jesus? Was God punishing Jesus as a substitute for sinners? Was that a sign of God's wrath? Even if Jesus was only *feeling* forsaken by God's silence, as Rahner suggests, why did God remain silent? If human beings are to develop a mature, trusting relationship with God, a genuinely loving solution must be found for Jesus' anguish on the cross. Scripture records ample opportunities for Jesus to be stoned to death or to be killed by being pushed over a cliff. Jesus was firm in his conviction, however, that God was calling him to endure the cross.

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<sup>282</sup> Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Reflections on the Knowledge and Self-consciousness of Christ," 203; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 125.

<sup>283</sup> Karl Rahner, "See, What a Man!" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 7*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by the Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 138.

<sup>284</sup> Karl Rahner, "Why Does God Allow us to Suffer?" in *Theological Investigations, Vol. 19*, The Electronic Centenary Edition by Centre for Culture, Technology and Values (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College, 2004), 206.

If, as Rahner maintained, the *type* of Jesus' death was not significant, why did God call Jesus to be crucified instead of having him submit to a less horrific death? In search of answers to these questions, insights from Balthasar will now be presented to complement Rahner's soteriology.

### **Balthasar and Salvific At-one-ment: the Unique Mission of Jesus**

Balthasar emphasized that Jesus' mission was not simply to *stand* in solidarity - it was to *stoop* and wash the feet of human beings. Balthasar clarified that "There is no selection for the feet washing; each of these brothers with his dirty feet is 'the brother for whom Christ died.'"<sup>285</sup> In expressing this image of Jesus, Balthasar highlighted a distinctly personal dimension for Jesus' suffering that complemented Rahner's focus on the universal. Jesus was not only living in universal solidarity with humanity; he sacrificed himself out of a very *personal* love for *each* human being.<sup>286</sup>

Balthasar stressed the kenotic depths to which Jesus stooped to serve humanity. Jesus' sacrifice was not merely meant to convince us that we are already forgiven (as Rahner suggested); Balthasar explained that Jesus "worked" this reconciliation for us:

... for us who are incapable of reconciling ourselves with God, Christ effectively works this reconciliation, and Scripture instills in us the idea that at the Cross it was not merely a question of a symbol by which God demonstrated that he was already reconciled.<sup>287</sup>

Rahner's soteriological focus did not highlight the need for God to do more than communicate God's always and already irrevocable solidarity with humanity. His essay on "Forgiveness through God's Grace," however, *did* acknowledge such a need:

Therefore we must say that guilt is so radical that it can only be forgiven in that God himself in the infinite power of his love and holiness must communicate himself *and*

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<sup>285</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, location 2795 of 3638.

<sup>286</sup> Balthasar referred to Gal 2:20 as an example of interpreting Jesus' sacrificial reparation for sin *pro nobis* as being very personally "for me." See Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery*, location 98-103 of 1674.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, location 131 of 1674.

[emphasis added] must make himself a part of the offense of guilt in order that forgiveness and reconciliation may take place.<sup>288</sup>

An explicit description of how God's forgiveness of sin required God to "make himself a part of the offense of guilt" can be found in Balthasar's soteriology. Balthasar specifically tied human reconciliation with God to the abandonment of Jesus by God. Not surprisingly, Balthasar approached even this particular suffering of Jesus from a Trinitarian perspective. As already noted, Balthasar associated the cross with the continuing engagement of kenotic Trinitarian love into the world. Balthasar described the self-giving of the Son of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth on Calvary as a continuation of the self-emptying Divine love explicitly initiated in human history with Jesus' biological conception. The sacrifice of Jesus' physical freedom in submitting to be crucified vividly reflects a self-giving process that was begun, and was dependent upon, the Divinity taking on human flesh. It was a self-giving process that continued in an authentic human life, extending even to his final suffering and death on the cross. The kenosis of the God-man's sacrificial love culminated in something humanly unfathomable: the ultimate Self-emptying of God to the point where the Son of God actually experienced the absence of God the Father.

**Confirmation of God's Trustworthiness.** In exploring an understanding of Jesus' experience of abandonment on the cross, Balthasar's Trinitarian approach can first be used to confirm the trustworthiness of God. Balthasar agreed with Rahner in describing Jesus' experience as an authentic experience of the absence of God, in some ways very similar to the absence of God experienced by other human beings in times of extreme suffering. Balthasar highlighted a difference, however: Jesus' experience was

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<sup>288</sup> Karl Rahner, "Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation," 261-262.



an experience of the Son of God. This Trinitarian perspective facilitates a realization that the Son of God's role in salvation was not merely a participating subject who was blindly led to slaughter following the commands of a "supreme God."<sup>289</sup> The Son of God and the Spirit were perfectly united with God the Father in conceiving the salvific plan from the very beginning – even before sin entered the world. Out of love for us God, indeed, "did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all,"<sup>290</sup> but Balthasar explained that this salvific initiative was a unified *Trinitarian* initiative of love that was conceived even before the Word of God became flesh.<sup>291</sup> This means that also out of love for us the Son of God had agreed to this plan even before he became a human being. This insight clarifies a distinction between God seeming to desert Jesus on the cross and the Son of God, emptied of his divinity in becoming human, relinquishing even his "grasp"<sup>292</sup> of the salvific plan so that he could have a completely *human experience* of abandonment. Thus, the Son of God's self-emptying of his "equality with God" allowed his anguished human questioning when God did not intervene in the events of the crucifixion and even remained silent when Jesus called out to his Father. All of which, Balthasar proposed, was part of the agreed upon Trinitarian salvific initiative.

**A Soteriological Paradox: At-one-ment through Abandonment.** Even though God did not actually desert Jesus, questions still remain: What was the purpose of the experience of abandonment? Why was it even necessary? Such questions can be addressed most clearly by returning to Rahner's insight that the Incarnation of the Son of God was "God's way of owning the world [so that] the world is not only his work, a

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<sup>289</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery*, location 371-380 of 1674.

<sup>290</sup> Rom 8:32.

<sup>291</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery*, location 359-386 of 1674.

<sup>292</sup> Phil 2:6.

work distinct from him, but becomes his own reality.”<sup>293</sup> If there had been no sin in the world, the Son of God would have accomplished this solidarity with creation through the Incarnation alone. God’s gift of human freedom, however, presented a problem: the human “work of God’s hand” took on a life of its own – one in contradiction with God. How can God “own the world” so that those who are living in sin’s contradiction of God become part of God’s own reality? How can God bring about reconciliation with creatures who freely reject God, without violating their freedom?

The astounding answer is that God desired union with humanity to such an extent that, in Balthasar’s words, God *stooped* to make the work of the *creature’s* hands God’s own reality. Humanity chose to embrace sin rather than God. Even without consciously realizing it, their choices left them shackled in an environment of alienation from God. God could not literally “take on” the contradiction of God (i.e., sin) as God’s own reality – that would be an impossibility; but God could reestablish a relationship with humanity by “taking on” the reality of the *consequences* of their contradiction of God. By somehow taking on the human reality of suffering, despair, hopelessness, and even death - and bringing goodness out of it - God would be able to bring about a new creation.

Paul speaks of a “new creation” that was brought about by God “reconciling us to himself through Christ.”<sup>294</sup> Balthasar’s soteriology directly relates Jesus’ experience of abandonment on the cross with the reconciliation that Paul describes. Balthasar stressed the distinction between God’s love for the sinner and God’s intrinsic incompatibility with sin. He explained: “What is contrary to [God’s holiness] can only be rejected by it.”<sup>295</sup> A clarification is in order here: *sin* by its very nature is contrary to God’s holiness;

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<sup>293</sup> Karl Rahner, “On the Theology of the Incarnation,” 106.

<sup>294</sup> 2 Cor 5:14-20.

<sup>295</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery*, location 313-341 of 1674.

*humanity* is not intrinsically contrary to God – humanity by its very nature is made in the image of God. A distinction can therefore be made between God’s wrath (i.e., judgment) toward sin and God’s love for the sinner. God’s “wrath” is not an emotional reaction against sinners; it is a fact of sin’s intrinsic incompatibility with God. Balthasar clearly identified the problem, however, that this represents:

But that detested sin is found precisely in the beloved man: it is he who has committed it. It was thus necessary to be able to find a method to separate the sin from the sinner ...<sup>296</sup>

Balthasar pointed to God’s “method” in 2 Cor 5:21: “[God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Balthasar grounded a *unique* mission of Jesus – to reconcile sinners with God – in Old and New Testament references to God’s judgment of sin. He referred to Johannine texts as describing the cross as God’s judgment of sin.<sup>297</sup> Balthasar explained that out of love for the sinner, Jesus desired to bear God’s judgment against their sin. In this manner, God was able to separate the “judgment of sin” from “God’s merciful justice or clemency for the sinner.”<sup>298</sup> Balthasar agreed with Paul’s identification of Jesus *as* sin so that sin could be rejected by God: Jesus “takes on” God’s judgment of sin on behalf of all sinners. By thus enduring God’s judgment of sin - taking into his own sinless reality the consequence (i.e., “judgment”) of sin’s alienation from God – Jesus atoned for the sins of all humanity, thus restoring their unity with God

### **A Contemporary Understanding of God’s Salvific Initiative.**

Although Balthasar carefully dissociates God’s judgment of sin from God’s love for the sinner, his interpretation can be challenging for those seeking a contemporary

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, location 216 of 1674.

<sup>297</sup> John 12:31-32.

<sup>298</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *To the Heart of the Mystery*, location 318 of 1674.

understanding: if Jesus endured God's judgment of sin for our sake does that mean Jesus substituted for us in receiving the punishment that *we* deserved for sin? A closer examination of Balthasar's explanation suggests that it reflected a more "classical" approach to soteriology, in that his conclusion described the *nature* of redemption (i.e., as the *judgment* of God against sin). It is proposed that a contemporary *empirical* approach – specifically, one that focuses on the *process* that took place and its effects on our mutual relationship with God - will help clarify how Jesus' suffering "for our sake" does not necessarily mean that Jesus was punished "in our place." Through this different perspective the "costliness" of sin (Balthasar's description) can be highlighted without suggesting the crucifixion was required by God as a punishment that sinners deserved (a concept that Rahner denounced). This will be accomplished by relating Balthasar's insights on redemption to Rahner's interpretation of what was necessary so that "forgiveness and reconciliation may take place."

**Incorporating Contributions from Rahner and Balthasar.** Balthasar's focus on Jesus having to "be" sin did not mean Jesus had to "become" the contradiction of God, which would have been impossible. Nor does Rahner's suggestion that God had to "make himself a part of the offense of guilt" imply that Jesus had to, in fact, be guilty of sin. The insights of both theologians can find a contemporary expression in a need for Jesus to somehow make the reality of the human consequential *experience* of sin, but not the *commission* of sin, a part of God's own reality. Such an experience would necessitate the Son of God experiencing sin in its genuine reality, which is the absence of God. This, of course, is what occurred in Jesus' experience of abandonment on the cross. Without committing sin himself Jesus accepted the human reality of estrangement from God

because of sin. Trapped in the hopeless environment of sin (Rahner's description), humanity was not even able to fully comprehend the consequence of their sins, much less transcend their sinfulness to reunite themselves with God. God had to take the initiative and seek a reunion on humanity's own turf.

Balthasar's perspective stressed that God's initiative involved a humanly unfathomable self-emptying of the Divine – with the Son of God embracing the consequences of humanity's alienation from God in their sin. Thus, Balthasar interpreted Jesus' atonement of sin as “God mak[ing] his own the being of the humanity opposed to him through sin, but without in any way collaborating in our opposition.”<sup>299</sup> Rahner's description of God's salvific initiative can be seen to closely parallel that of Balthasar. As referenced above, he argues that God “must make himself a part of the offense of guilt in order that forgiveness and reconciliation may take place.” Humanity could not undo the reality of their free choice for sin. Reconciliation “must” be accomplished through God's initiative even though it is “for our sake.” The following description of God's salvific initiative draws on these complementary conclusions of both Rahner and Balthasar, even as it continues to explore their different emphases.

**Jesus' Victory of Hope in Sin's Environment of Hopelessness.** The understanding of “human redemption” being presented in this project supports Balthasar's emphasis on the soteriological significance of Jesus' experience of abandonment by God on the cross. However, it is also maintained that even in its necessity, Jesus' astounding at-one-ment with sinners on the cross was not sufficient *of itself* for humanity's salvation. For if Jesus had given in to despair rather than trusting

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<sup>299</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Divine Fruitfulness*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 177.

God even in the midst of his feeling of abandonment, Jesus would not have been victorious over sin and hopelessness - he would have become another victim of sin along with the rest of humanity. Thus, concurring with Rahner, this project also emphasizes the significance of Jesus' final trusting submission to the "Mystery of God." As Rahner stressed, Jesus' salvific work was not complete until he made his final submission to God with his death: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."<sup>300</sup> Jesus' maintenance of his trust – his unflinching hope in God – was central to our salvation: it allowed Jesus to complete his mission of faithful solidarity with God even as he reached the ultimate kenotic depths of solidarity with sinners. Jesus' mission on earth was accomplished with his final, hope-filled response to his suffering: he atoned for sin in the world, establishing an irrevocable at-one-ment between God and sinners. Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was God's concrete confirmation of Jesus' victory and validation of a reason for hope for all humanity.<sup>301</sup> Reflection on Jesus' experience with his suffering, however, reveals the significance of Jesus' own *hope-filled* (trusting in God) *response* to his suffering that was essential for providing this hope to all.

Traditional soteriological interpretations of Jesus' suffering focus on Jesus' ability to be obedient to God's will to the bitterest end, contrasting the disobedience of Adam's original sin. Noting an "objective nature of the reconciliation" Rahner concurred on the significance of Jesus' obedience:

It might be sufficient to say here that the Son's obedience, both in radical love for the Father and at the same time in unconditional solidarity with the human race, is the historical event in which God's forgiving love has itself appeared in the world and become irreversible.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup>Luke 23:46.

<sup>301</sup>1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>302</sup> Karl Rahner, "Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation," 262.

Given the fundamental anthropological value given to trust, this project sees the need to highlight Jesus' ability to maintain his *trust* in God as intrinsically related to his ability to maintain his *obedience* to God. This is especially pertinent when considering Rahner's emphasis on the hopelessness of sin. The common denominator that was necessary to save humanity from the hopeless clutches of their own life experiences of alienation, was Jesus' ability to endure his own most bitter experience of God's absence without succumbing to despair. An appreciation is therefore needed for Jesus' *trusting* obedience to God, even in the midst of what must have been an unimaginable temptation to give up hope. Starting with events in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was assailed intellectually, emotionally, as well as physically, by the brutal reality of human choices that betrayed or rejected him, culminating in Jesus' experience of abandonment not only by humanity, but even by God. Yet Jesus sustained a loving solidarity with God and humanity to the end. His victorious trust in God was also a victory of God's own hope for humanity in terms of God's salvific plan for us. It is now our hope as we struggle to maintain our own trust in God and submit our own will to God's will in our life.

**Why the crucifixion?** Once a salvific significance is identified for Jesus' experience of abandonment by God, the necessity for the suffering of the crucifixion can be further explored. Traditional teachings, such as that of the Baltimore Catechism as presented in Chapter 2, presented Jesus' suffering as God's punishment for sin which Jesus endured in our place. Contemporary social scientists have determined that the use of physical punishment can be counter-productive to moral development, and may be a

misuse of power or even abusive.<sup>303</sup> An association of God with such an extreme infliction of suffering as a crucifixion is abhorrent to the modern mind.

How, then, can a contemporary theology of the cross explain Jesus' having been called by God to endure the suffering of a crucifixion? God's calling Jesus to submit to the crucifixion does not mean that God preordained the crucifixion to happen or that God wanted Jesus to die a horrific death. No loving father would want that for a son. Indeed, God did not make Jesus' disciples betray, deny, and abandon Jesus. Nor did God make Pontius Pilate wash his hands of his responsibility toward an innocent man, or make the soldiers participate in the merciless beating and humiliation of Jesus, or make the crowd demand that Jesus be crucified. God did not cause the crucifixion; God simply did not shield Jesus from these sinful choices that were freely made by human beings.

If God did not want the crucifixion, why not ask Jesus to submit to a stoning or being thrown off a cliff, either of which would have Jesus submitting to an unjust and painful death, but without the prolonged anguish and public degradation associated with a criminal's execution? This project emphasizes that God didn't *want* the crucifixion – God wanted reconciliation with sinners – not only forgiveness of their sins, but somehow renewing the relationship that had been broken by sin. The cost required for that reconciliation, however, was not simply suffering a painful and unjust death as a punishment for sins. The cost was for Jesus, the Son of God with his humanly unparalleled relationship with God, to somehow *personally* enter the sinner's environment of alienation from God. It therefore required God “handing over” God's

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<sup>303</sup> Richard Gross, *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, 687. Observations include: 1) punishment only reinforces what should *not* be done, rather than what should or may be done; 2) the undesirable behavior may be suppressed only when the child is under “surveillance”; 3) punishment often produces “fear of the punisher, instead of moral concern”; and 4) the child learns from the punisher a model of “social power” they can use to control others' behavior.



beloved Son “for our sake” to an experience of such unimaginable all-encompassing darkness that it would succeed in making fallen humanity’s reality God’s own.

Balthasar explained how God “handing over” the Son in order to reconcile sinners with God was a Trinitarian initiative that was conceived even before the Incarnation. The desire for humanity to be united with God was also voiced by the *Incarnate* Son, however, as recorded in John’s account of Jesus’ last discourse to his disciples:

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.<sup>304</sup>

Jesus was praying for a union of the whole world with God throughout all time.

Rahner noted that “western individualism” hinders a grasp of the soteriological significance of “an ‘assumption’ of the *whole* human race *in* the individual human reality of Jesus.”<sup>305</sup> Yet that is what occurred when the Son of God “assumed” a human nature. Erickson noted the struggle involved in human individuals facing life’s developmental “conflicts.” Identification with the totality of the whole world’s alienation from God throughout all of time represented a struggle of transcendental proportions. But such was the extent of Jesus’ mission, if reconciliation was to be a reality for every individual human being. It is humanly inconceivable to be able to grasp what occurred on Calvary 2000 years ago. But the type of death Jesus endured *did* make a difference. And Jesus’ resulting feeling of abandonment by God was not simply his version of a universally identifiable feeling of human estrangement from God. *God* did not require it in order to

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<sup>304</sup> John 17:20-23.

<sup>305</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 293.

forgive us for our sins. It was the price necessary to restore humanity's at-one-ment with God. Out of love for us God did not hesitate to pay the price in full.

Jesus' sacrifice for reconciliation was not meant to change God; God had never ceased loving humanity. Balthasar, in fact, emphasized that when the Incarnation is understood in relation to the Passion, the mind can be "flooded" with a realization of how God's "supreme glory" is manifested in God "washing the feet of his creatures."<sup>306</sup> Scriptural accounts of the last day of Jesus' life include experiences that can evoke an appreciation of Jesus' gift of sacrificial love for us. The horror of those recorded events is not meant to invoke fear of God's wrath. When understood in the context of God's tremendous sacrifice in handing over the Son for our sake, the accounts convey not only the tragic costliness of sin but also the boundless depths of God's love.<sup>307</sup> They are God's ultimate revelation of how valuable human beings are to God – revealing the length to which God will go in order to be united with them. Jesus instructs his apostles: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for a friend."<sup>308</sup> Yet the Son of God *did* have greater love: he laid down his life not only for friends, but also for those who implicitly reject him in their sins as well as those who explicitly rejected him in nailing him to a cross. Greater love than this is not humanly conceivable.

**Contemporary Descriptions of Traditional Soteriological Terms.** This project has described God's salvific initiative in terms of a reconciling at-one-ment with humanity. Traditional elements, such as those described in the Tridentine Catechism in Chapter 2, are included in this proposed Theology of the Cross but from a contemporary perspective – one that emphasizes a *lived experience* of reality rather than a categorical

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<sup>306</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 11.

<sup>307</sup> Rom 8:31-32.

<sup>308</sup> John 15:13.

description of its nature. Thus the salvific mission of Jesus can be described in contemporary terms as:

*A Sacrifice:* Jesus' astounding self-sacrifice on the cross was not meant to change God's mind; to the contrary it was an offering of love to the Father in confirmation of the Son's commitment to their joint love of the world. It was a sacrificial offering not only *for the sake of* humanity, but in a very real sense it was also a sacrificial gift of love presented *to* humanity to encourage their joining the Son's trusting submission to God "so that they may be one as we are one."<sup>309</sup>

*A Redemption:* In becoming one with humanity "while we were still sinners."<sup>310</sup> Jesus' sacrifice bought us back from the shackles of sin and hopelessness and ushered in a new creation of love and hope. Human sin was costly to our relationship with God, but Jesus paid the price required for reconciliation. God's mind did not need changing - to the contrary, God's initiative was necessary to liberate humanity from their sin and restore a relationship between humanity and God. Jesus' victory over human alienation from God concretely affirms the depth of God's love for humanity, making it abundantly clear that nothing can separate us from the love of God.<sup>311</sup>

*An Atonement:* Jesus' victory over his experience of abandonment by God was an "atonement" for sin in that it restored an "at-one-ment" between humanity and God. Scripturally Adam is shown to have disobeyed God after trusting the snake's contradiction of God rather than trusting God. Jesus contrasted with Adam by experiencing the whole world's contradiction of God, and yet trusting God to his death. Jesus' final trusting submission of his life into God's hands irrevocably sealed Jesus' life

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<sup>309</sup> John 17:22.

<sup>310</sup> Rom 5:8.

<sup>311</sup> Romans 8:31-39.

of obedience to God and confirmed his solidarity with humanity, thus bringing about an irrevocable reconciliation between God and humanity.<sup>312</sup> Jesus' hope-filled victory is concrete encouragement for our hope in God, countering the hopelessness of our sin.

*An Example:* God's love of humanity goes beyond the Middle Ages' requirement of servants honoring their lord: our Master became, and still remains, the servant of the beloved creatures. God did not ask human beings to do what God would not do – the Son of God showed humanity the extent of God's love and the Way of salvation for them. "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."<sup>313</sup> Jesus' solidarity with humanity provides hope through all eternity – it is irrevocable and unconditional: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."<sup>314</sup>

Every human being shares Jesus' mission to trust God and to live a life of self-sacrificing love. Jesus' admonition to "take up [one's] cross daily and follow me"<sup>315</sup> is confirmation that God's salvific initiative continues its work in us to this day. Jesus is our companion as we take up our cross, but human beings must freely choose to follow *his* Way of seeking to do God's will on earth. Jesus' atonement of sin did not usurp God's gift of human freedom. It reestablished a relationship with God, but each human being needs to exercise his or her own freedom in responding to God's salvific invitation. It is to this third concern of Rahner that attention is now turned.

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<sup>312</sup> Rom 5:11-15.

<sup>313</sup> John 13:15.

<sup>314</sup> Matt 28:20.

<sup>315</sup> Luke 9:23.

## CHAPTER 7

### A TURN TO THE HUMAN SUBJECT

The development of a Contemporary Theology of the Cross continues in this chapter but with a slightly different approach than the previous chapters. Having explored the human condition objectively through systematic soteriological considerations, the focus of this chapter will be “turned to the subject,” and delve into the *subjective* realm of our actual *lived* experience. The project’s third parameter will be addressed by exploring what it means for us to *personally* reach out to God specifically through the development of the theological virtues. Practical associations with our ordinary, everyday lives will make a connection between “letting go” of our old life in order to embrace ever more completely the fullness of life that we were meant to experience. In order to address the project’s fourth parameter, the focus of the final section of this chapter will be “turned to the subject” of Jesus himself. Implications of Jesus’ own self-sacrificing love for God and humanity will be explored as attention is directed more closely to Jesus’ own experience of suffering on the cross and the difference it makes for us today.

#### **Parameter 3: Salvation’s Dependence on the Exercise of Human Freedom**

Responding to the third concern of Rahner, attention will now be focused on each human being’s *personal* call to holiness. Consideration of Rahner’s first concern led to an understanding of how God’s relationship with humanity is immutably loving and reflects a mutuality that is intrinsic to *all* healthy relationships. Consideration of Rahner’s second concern revealed how Jesus’ response to God reflected the *universal* mission of every human being to live in harmony with God, but also involved a *unique* calling from God,

requiring Jesus to respond to a *personally unique* mission on earth. In this section an application of that observation about Jesus' experience will be extended to *all* human beings: despite an intrinsic commonality shared with all human beings, the ultimate destiny of each individual depends on his or her freely given *personal* response to God's *personal* invitation. As Rahner attests, "salvation can only be understood as taking place in the exercise of each individual's freedom."

### **Salvation through Growth in Faith, Hope and Love**

Rahner and Balthasar concur that the means to human salvation is a growth in faith, hope and love. Both theologians provided concrete examples of where these salvific virtues can be identified in ordinary human life: in going out of oneself to God and to one another. In this section an association will be explored between the theologically identified means to personal salvation (a growth in faith, hope and love) and its scriptural counterpart (loving God with our whole mind, heart, and strength and our neighbor as our own self). Since salvation has been directly associated with our growth in these areas it is essential to have a clear understanding of what that entails. The focus of this section will therefore be on the Christian understanding of the theological virtues, especially as they apply to one's daily life. The goal is the correction of a distorted lens: sin has caused the focus of human beings to be directed away from God onto ourselves. The life and mission of Jesus was to correct the vision of humanity, restoring the focus to God, through a self-emptying love that reaches out beyond the self to others. Such is also the focus of the theological virtues. The description of these virtues will necessarily be in theological terms (defined by their relationship to God). Because of their intrinsic

link to salvation, however, the descriptions will also be framed in secular terms with practical associations that underscore their universal implications.

**A Christian Understanding<sup>316</sup> of the Theological Virtues.** All human beings can live virtuous lives: one does not have to consciously believe in God to be honest or sincere or generous. *Human* virtues are based on the interaction of human reason and human will toward some “good.” Any human being, therefore, can acquire even the “cardinal” virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, on a natural level<sup>317</sup> without consciously being aware of how God’s grace is sustaining them. The *theological* virtues, however, reflect a realm of life that transcends ordinary human nature.<sup>318</sup> Sin has affected the ability for human beings to even recognize a salvific calling to each of us from God; an appreciation for the theological virtues is easily lost in such an environment. A clear understanding of these gifts is therefore necessary to help renew an appreciation for these three virtues in our lives.

Certainly human beings can be *faithful*, *hopeful* and *loving* in the secular sense of the words. Traditional understandings of the theological virtues, however, emphasize a distinction between moral actions directed to happiness of a *human* nature or toward any “good end,” and moral actions directed to our eternal happiness or the *ultimate* Good: God. Human beings can acquire human virtues through the efforts of their reason and their will, and can thus work toward perfecting their human nature. Transcendence to the

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<sup>316</sup> This section will present traditional understandings of the theological virtues as referenced by Thomas Aquinas, especially in his *Summa*. This will be supplemented with insights from two contemporaries of Rahner and Balthasar: an American Dominican, Walter Farrell, with references to his 4-volume series: *A Companion to the Summa*, and a lay German philosopher, Josef Pieper, with references to his essays on the theological virtues.

<sup>317</sup> Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa, Vol. II - The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953), 228.

<sup>318</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Theological Virtues, Vol. I - On Faith*, (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1965), 5-6, referencing Thomas Aquinas’ conclusion to the question “Are there any Theological Virtues?”

Divine, however, involves something beyond our human nature. Thus, the “theological virtues” are described as *supernatural* gifts to us from God.

Thomas Aquinas defined human virtue as “a habit perfecting man in view of his doing good deeds.”<sup>319</sup> A critical distinction he makes between the virtues depends on the *object* of the action. If the activity is directed to a *human* “good,” the virtue associated with the activity is a human one, and the person doing the activity could be developing human virtues such as justice or compassion. If the conscious object of the activity is God, however, a “super-human” or “godlike”<sup>320</sup> (i.e., theological) virtue is consciously being developed. Mother Theresa’s dedicated service to the poor is an example of the theological virtue of love since she saw Jesus in every one she served; her ministry of love reflected her faith in God and grew out of her conscious dependence on the love of God.<sup>321</sup> Every human being has this same potential for a Love that goes beyond the human virtues of love and compassion. Rahner’s concept of the anonymous Christian makes the case that someone who is authentically reaching out in self-emptying love can be participating in the supernatural reality of love, even if he or she is not conscious of it.

Growth in the theological virtues facilitates a self-emptying of the individual while promoting the development of our higher, supernatural nature. But these virtues do not act independently of us; they need our freely given cooperation. Walter Farrell bemoans the effects of the secular world that hinder human beings from achieving their higher potential. He notes that society’s preoccupation with pleasure distorts our perspective so that experiences of sorrow or pain can seem to be “utter catastrophes.”

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<sup>319</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II 58.3.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid*, I-II 61.1.

<sup>321</sup> Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed, *Mother Theresa: Where There is Love, There is God*, (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 141-155.



Compounding the situation, our society's emphasis on the material things of life conditions us to "need more things, need new things, to have [our] desires always on the increase." Thus an "artificial" emphasis on physical conditioning desensitizes us to the spiritual needs that should be our greatest concern:

Consequently the activity of modern man is not likely to be aimed at a spiritual goal that will alone perfect his nature. In fact it is less and less likely to be aimed at all, for the increase in artificial sorrow means a constant weakening of our resistance, of our power to command or to aim our actions, and a constant approach to a more complete slavery to things unworthy of our high destinies.<sup>322</sup>

Farrell goes on to decry the consequences of humanity's "preoccupation" with material possessions and desires. Left unchecked, such a focus unwittingly promotes enslavement to the material by encouraging us to

concentrate on the immediate, the concrete, the so-called "practical," to the detriment, even to the impossibility, of coping with the universal, the absolute, the enduring thing which is truth, the proper object of our intellects, the goal of our human lives.<sup>323</sup>

The theological virtues are a means of seeking an authentic and everlasting fulfillment, rather than focusing on the attainment of material "things" that do not last. Given the material preoccupations of modern life, however, it is often difficult to clearly understand how these spiritual gifts can be developed in our personal life.

**Theological Descriptions and Practical Aspects of Each Virtue.** Farrell notes a fundamental difference that is not easily recognized between the theological virtues and terms we commonly use: "faith and hope, in the human sphere, have something defective about them, a note of uncertainty" that should not be confused with supernatural virtues of faith and hope.<sup>324</sup> Because their distinctiveness from secular usage is critical to an understanding and practice of them, the following presentation will address each of the

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<sup>322</sup> Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa, Vol. II – the Pursuit of Happiness*, 127-128.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 209-210.

theological virtues on two levels. First, the virtue's *theological* description will be clarified, and then a *practical* association will be given that illustrates the difference this virtue makes in the Christian life.

***The Conviction of Christian Faith.***

*Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself...*<sup>325</sup>

Josef Pieper addresses the distinction Farrell made between the “uncertainty” of faith in secular usage and the conviction of theological faith. Pieper observes that the word “belief” is misused when it implies a lack of conviction, as when we say, “I believe it is so.” He suggests that instead of “I believe it is so,” one should more accurately say “I ‘think’, ‘assume’, ‘consider probable’, or ‘suppose’ it is so.”<sup>326</sup> Proper use of the word “belief” includes “an unrestricted, unreserved, unconditional assent.” Illustrating his point he notes that “A person who says, ‘I believe just at this moment...but I cannot answer for myself that I shall believe tomorrow,’ does not believe”<sup>327</sup> even in the secular sense.

To have “faith” is to believe in something that cannot be *physically* proven. That does not mean, however, that faith is groundless. As St. Paul describes it, faith is embracing the “evidence of things not seen.”<sup>328</sup> Pieper explains that while belief implies “unfamiliarity with the subject matter” (i.e., things “not seen”), it also asserts “at the same time, unconditional conviction of its truth.”<sup>329</sup> He points out that “To believe always means: to believe someone and to believe something,” and the essence of belief

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<sup>325</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), #1814.

<sup>326</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 26-27.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>328</sup> Heb 11:1.

<sup>329</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 23.

is that the believer “accepts a given matter as real and true on the testimony of someone else.”<sup>330</sup> Pieper’s conclusion is the same as that of Aquinas in his “Tract on Belief”: “In all belief, the decisive factor ... is who it is whose statement is assented to; by comparison the subject matter assented to is in a certain sense secondary.”<sup>331</sup> Pieper notes that: “Herein lies the decisive difference between religious belief and every other kind of belief: the Someone on whose testimony the religious believer accepts a matter as true and real – that Someone is God himself.”<sup>332</sup> God reveals to humanity testimony about “[God’s] own being and works, which are normally hidden from man; and men believe the self-revealing God.”<sup>333</sup> Attesting to its truth, however, is the witness of the whole communion of saints – in the traditions, life stories and insights of those who have gone before us as well as in contemporaries who share the convictions of their lived faith experiences.

What practical difference does the theological virtue of faith make in one’s daily life? Aquinas describes faith as a “habit of mind,” attesting to the *intellectual* character of faith,<sup>334</sup> this project accordingly associates faith with Jesus’ affirmation of the need to love God with our whole mind. Because God respects the gift of human freedom, however, even the gift of faith is not forced upon anyone. Walter Farrell thus notes that “every act of faith must come from our free will, not at all forced upon us by our intellect faced with indisputable evidence.”<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, 31, quoting from Aquinas’ *Summa* II, II, II, I.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa, Vol. III – The Fullness of Life*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1945), 16.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, 11.

With the interplay of the intellect and will, faith may be described as an intellectual conversion. Through this conversion the person of faith turns from reliance upon his or her own understanding of the truth, and assents to what God has revealed as ultimate truth. Some Christian beliefs, such as the existence of God and God's Providence can be shared with other religions today. Even the earliest civilizations believed in gods who impacted their lives. Two beliefs, however, are distinctive to the Christian faith: the Trinity and the Incarnation. These are truths human beings cannot arrive at from our own understanding, but they are accepted as true from the most reliable of sources since they are Divinely inspired.

Revelations about the Trinity and the Incarnation are the foundation of further Christian understandings not only about God, but also about our self and others. Today's secular assumption that "seeing is believing" encourages a reliance on only scientific or physical "realities." A conclusion is often assumed that we are here by accident – at most, the result of a biologically-driven evolutionary process dependent on the survival of the fittest. It is not surprising that many with this understanding conclude this to be a "dog eat dog world" and that happiness results from determined efforts of the "self made man." With the eyes of faith, however, Christians can say that "believing is seeing" – and Christian "sight" produces the vision of a whole different reality. Christians believe we are made in the image of one God who is a unity of three persons. This has obvious implications that we are not to be "islands unto ourselves," but rather exist in relationship with one another. St. Paul aptly describes this as being "many parts of one body."<sup>336</sup> We also believe that our God took on human flesh. This validates our belief in the goodness of our createdness, and of our very worth as human beings. Contrary to those who

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<sup>336</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-27, Rom 12:4-5.

believe we are here by “accident,” Christians have a conviction that a loving God has called us into being as part of a Divine initiative.<sup>337</sup> Such convictions of faith are a tremendous asset in life! If each human being is purposely called into existence by God,<sup>338</sup> then each human being has a purpose - a meaning - in life. Recognizing our inter-relatedness with all who are made in God’s image, Christians believe that what we do affects not only ourselves and our relationship to God, but affects others as well.<sup>339</sup> That is why our reverence for life extends from the very youngest, still in the womb, to the very oldest who is approaching the end of his or her life. It extends from those living in our own household to those living on the other side of the world.

Christians believe we are called to be witnesses to God’s involvement in our life – to be a light to a world that does not see what we see: a world that does not embrace the gift of faith or that refuses the challenges of faith. As imperfect as we are, we are called to be a light to others. For some of us, that can be a more challenging belief than the Trinity or Incarnation. Fortunately, two other theological virtues are meant to help us in our spiritual journey along with faith!

***The Confidence of Christian Hope.*** Hope is:

*“The theological virtue by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it.”<sup>340</sup>*

Just as with faith, a distinction needs to be made between the secular use of the word “hope” and the meaning of the theological virtue of hope. It is common to say, “I hope it won’t rain” or “I hope she wins the prize.” Those are commonly expressed concerns or wishes, but they do not reflect the “hope” of the theological virtue. Christian

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<sup>337</sup> Eph 1:3-14.

<sup>338</sup> Psalms 119:73, 139:13; Isaiah 43:1; Jer 1:5.

<sup>339</sup> 1 Cor 12:14-26.

<sup>340</sup> Glossary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882.

hope is trust in God. It is not merely trust that God *can* do something, but confident assurance that God *will* do what God has promised. Christian hope follows the conviction of faith: as children of God we are also heirs of an eternal life with God.<sup>341</sup> Human beings are called to a transcendence that culminates in eternal union with God. Christian trust is confident (literally from the Latin, “with faith”) that God is in charge, and that God will be true to what God has revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

What makes such a hope possible? Just as with faith, human beings would not be able to transcend their human nature without this gift of God. Also similar to faith, human nature would not allow the acceptance even of this Divine gift if it was “utterly incomprehensible” to us.<sup>342</sup> God provided evidence of its reality in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the Resurrection God’s power, God’s mercy, and God’s steadfastness to humanity can be recognized. As Peter declares: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”<sup>343</sup> Even further, as Paul attests, “Christ in [us]” is our “hope for glory.”<sup>344</sup>

Although the direct object of Christian hope is transcendence to eternal life with God, the effect of the theological virtue of hope is not restricted to life after death. Rahner and Balthasar both emphasized that salvation - one’s life-giving relationship with God - has its beginning on earth. The virtue of hope plays an essential part in the development of that relationship:

The object of theological hope is thus the attainment of all true good and deliverance from all that is truly evil. This objective universality is characteristic of the theological

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<sup>341</sup> Rom 8:14-17.

<sup>342</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 25.

<sup>343</sup> 1Peter 1:3.

<sup>344</sup> Col 1:27.

virtues, which are primarily concerned with God but which, like God Himself, extend their radius of action and their dominion over everything. Thus faith is not concerned with God and divine things alone, but also with the whole of creation ... Charity does not consist in loving God only but extends its love also to ourselves, to our neighbors, and to all created things ... In a similar way hope not only aspires to the possession of God, but also reaches out to all the means of nature and of grace that lead to the possession of God and that free the soul from every temporal and eternal evil.<sup>345</sup>

Thus Christian hope is not limited to a personal experience of hope, but also involves our being “ambassadors” of the “new creation” of Christ in our everyday life on earth.<sup>346</sup> Hope is not merely a personal expectation, but looks to a “social, or communitarian” good.<sup>347</sup> Its relevance to one’s personal salvation, however, is fundamental. Traditional catechesis fostered a development of faith which too often stressed beliefs *about* God. The reforms of Vatican II brought a renewed emphasis on Christians not merely believing *in* God, but developing a personal relationship *with* God. The virtue of hope is a sign of that living, trusting relationship.

What are practical signs of hope in our daily life? Similar to the other theological virtues, the virtue of hope has God as its object. Hope involves a turning toward God with trust and a turning away from reliance on oneself. Unlike the virtue of faith that is so closely related to the intellect, the virtue of hope is more closely allied to the *desires* of the will. As such, hope involves more of an *affective* or emotional conversion,<sup>348</sup> and echoes Jesus’ call to love God with our whole heart. The more confident we are in God the less room there is for discouragement; trust replaces fear; peace and joy become the hallmark of an Easter people whose hearts are filled with the new life of hope.

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<sup>345</sup> S. M. Ramirez, “Hope” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1967), 134.

<sup>346</sup> 2Cor 5:11-21.

<sup>347</sup> S. M. Ramirez, “Hope” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 137.

<sup>348</sup> Walter Farrell, *A Companion to the Summa*, Vol. II, 87. Farrell notes in his section on “Happiness and Passion” that “Very often ‘emotion’ is used to describe what we are calling passion, ... it seems much better to reserve the name emotions for any movement of any appetite of man, passion exclusively for the movements of the sense appetite.”

Christians give evidence of their hope by being living witnesses of the Paschal Mystery. Christian hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; it exhibits a confidence that new life is possible even when all seems lost. Christ has conquered our worst fears: suffering, death, and evil no longer have power over us. This confident hope is put into practice whenever we are a source of light in the darkness to others.

Each Christian is challenged to enkindle that hope in others. Confidence in doing so comes from the fact that Christians know it is not entirely up to us: we understand that what we do is actually accomplished by Christ working in us.<sup>349</sup> God is proactive; rather than waiting for us to be perfect God takes the initiative and is at work in us already. As St. Paul assures us, Jesus suffered and died for us while we were still sinners.<sup>350</sup> We can be confident that nothing - not even our sins or imperfections - can separate us from God's love.<sup>351</sup> The Resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrated that God is in charge, that God's love is unconditional, and God's "hope does not disappoint."<sup>352</sup> Jesus also assures us that the light of God shines through us.<sup>353</sup> He tells us we *are* a light to others – not that we *could* be a light if we changed our ways or that we *will* be a light once we become perfect. Right now, in spite of our imperfections, we *are* a light to others. Such is the assurance we are given to help us spread confidence to others, even during times when our own confidence is still in need of further strengthening.

One of the most visible signs of hope is a life of prayer. Christians are confident enough to approach God with our needs and our desires because we recognize God's power in our lives and God's commitment to us. Thus the Our Father has been

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<sup>349</sup> Eph2:8-10, 4:11-16.

<sup>350</sup> Rom 5:8.

<sup>351</sup> Rom 5:35-39.

<sup>352</sup> Rom 5:5.

<sup>353</sup> Matt 5:14.



associated with the virtue of hope, asking God not only for the attainment of eternal life (“Thy kingdom come”), but also the means necessary for it (providing the nourishment we need, and protecting us from harm).<sup>354</sup> Jesus assures his disciples that they should not fear,<sup>355</sup> and offers them a peace that the world cannot give.<sup>356</sup> Other hallmarks of a Christian’s hope are joyful confidence that they will see God, as well as patient endurance of their everyday trials along “the Way” to eternal life with God.<sup>357</sup>

The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.<sup>358</sup>

Ongoing development of the second theological virtue is therefore a channel to furthering a deeper engagement with the third.

### ***Consent to Christian Love.***

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury ...”<sup>359</sup>

St. Paul provides the classic description of love, the “greatest of all” the theological virtues. But non-Christians can be “patient and kind;” they are also capable of resisting being “jealous or pompous.” Is there anything distinguishing about authentic Christian love? The first letter of John gives us a clue that the *Christian* understanding of love is distinct from any secular definition of it:

“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. . . We love because he first loved us.”<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> S. M. Ramirez, “Hope” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 133.

<sup>355</sup> Luke 12:32, Matt 8:26, Matt 10:31 Matt 28:10.

<sup>356</sup> John 14:27.

<sup>357</sup> S. M Ramirez, “Hope” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, 138-9.

<sup>358</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1818.

<sup>359</sup> 1 Cor 13:4-5.

Christians recognize that we are not the initiators in our relationship with God.

Our love is a response to God's love for us. As described by the Catholic Catechism:

Faith in God's love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. The first commandment enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him.<sup>361</sup>

As a *response*, the virtue of love is connected to a conscious choice rather than an emotion, and can best be identified as a *behavioral* conversion – a bending of the will to God. According to Aquinas: “Charity is an immortal love (2a2a, 24), and therefore its seat is the will (*appetitus* intellectivus), not the emotional powers (*appetites sensitivus*).”<sup>362</sup> This understanding is obviously quite different than the secular association of love with a feeling that fluctuates and all too often fades.<sup>363</sup>

As with the theological virtues of faith and hope, the object of the theological virtue of love is God. That does not mean, however, that the virtue of charity consists only in loving God. The very substance of God is a loving community of three Persons. Being made in God's image, we are called to share in God's kenotic, self-giving, life:

Man's basic vocation is now one of generous love, agape. His consuming task is to promote God's kingdom on earth, to spend himself in behalf of the Lord who seeks an ever fuller presence in the world He made.<sup>364</sup>

“Love” in the context of a Christian virtue is a freely given *consent* to the relationship that God has initiated with us. It is, in cooperation with the conviction of our faith and the confidence of our hope, saying “yes” to God's authority in our lives. It echoes Jesus' call to love God with our whole strength – with our whole being. Love as a

<sup>360</sup> 1John 4:10,19.

<sup>361</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2093.

<sup>362</sup> T. Gilby, “Charity” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 466; the references are to Aquinas' *Summa*.

<sup>363</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 154; “... *caritas* is not just something sentimental, nor does it primarily refer to a special intensity of feeling. Rather, it suggests the extremely “solid” and sober matter of evaluation and of readiness if need be to pay something for the union with God.”

<sup>364</sup> R. O. Johann, “Love” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, 1040.

fundamental response to God's initiative toward us distinguishes this theological virtue from the secular concept of love which is viewed as resulting from one's own initiative. This difference has ramifications on the Christian's relationship to God, self and all creation, as are identifiable in the signs of its presence in our daily life.

How do we identify the theological virtue of love in our life? In recognizing God as the Source of Love, the Christian realizes that everything we have is a gift from a loving God. Christians even acknowledge that our own bodies do not belong to us, but rather are temples of the Holy Spirit.<sup>365</sup> This understanding is very counter-cultural for our times. In a world that says, "This is my body and I can do with it what I want!" the Christian model from Jesus is: "This is my body, which will be given for you."<sup>366</sup> Ramifications of this understanding impact our response to many "life" issues today. We acknowledge God as the Author of life, and that we are only *co*-creators with God. Whether producing new life in our families, or fostering new life in our world through efforts of peace and justice, we strive to promote the dignity and sacredness of life as the gift of God that it is. The Christian's response to God's love thus impacts his or her relationship with others. In a world that stresses the survival of the fittest, the Christian reaches out to feed the hungry and clothe the "least of these."<sup>367</sup> Indeed, the Christian perspective is "whoever humbles himself will be exalted and whoever exalts himself will be humbled."<sup>368</sup> The object of Christian love is not found on the top of a ladder of "success" but in the midst of the poor and vulnerable.

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<sup>365</sup> 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16.

<sup>366</sup> Luke 22:19, an insight attributed to Fr. Frank Pavone of "Priests for Life."

<sup>367</sup> Matt 25:35-40.

<sup>368</sup> Luke 14:11.

Called to live the works of mercy and the Beatitudes, the Christian realizes that his or her possessions and riches are not ends in themselves, but they are to be used for the good of all. We are stewards of these gifts that are meant to bring about God's Kingdom on earth. *Everything* from God is gift/grace, and the Christian is captured in the love of the Giver. But our "consent" to God's love is not perfectly given. William May describes the challenge of giving a truly full consent to love, as we tend to "hold back" from completely participating in God's love:

the biggest problem, I believe, in living the Christian life and in carrying out faithfully our personal vocation is that we want to hold back. We refuse to give ourselves to the God of love, to let him take possession of us and come to abide in us. Like St. Augustine, who once said, 'Give me chastity, O Lord, but not yet,' we want God's love to abide in us and to abide in it, but not yet – because we know that if this happens we will have to give up some things to which we are attached and which we find attractive despite their irreconcilability with a truly Christian life.<sup>369</sup>

Augustine's plea was provided as an example of holding back one's full consent to love. To that can be added expressions reflecting a lack of total conviction of faith ("I do believe, help my unbelief!")<sup>370</sup> and the lack of fully confident and trusting hope ("Lord, our hearts are restless until they rest in thee!"<sup>371</sup>). God has given us the theological virtues to allow us to attain to the Divine, but we fall short time and time again. Fortunately, the theological virtues are not just theological "signs" of what we are striving to reach. When we consciously seek to develop them in our lives we can begin to recognize them as instrumental means to the eternal life promised in Scripture. Thus growing in faith, hope and love can simply be described as loving God and our neighbor more and more authentically "with our whole mind, heart and strength."

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<sup>369</sup>William E May, *An Introduction to Moral Theology*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 237.

<sup>370</sup> Mark 9:24.

<sup>371</sup> Warner, Rex, translator, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, (NY: Library of World Literature, 1963), Book 1, 17.

### **Salvation through Intellectual, Affective, and Behavioral Conversions**

Augustine's plea: "Give me chastity but not yet!" was a result of a conversion experience in which he recognized a need for change in his life. Close examination of his prayer suggests that although he had achieved a change in his convictions and values (representing the likelihood of intellectual and affective conversions), he was not yet prepared to address the behavioral changes that were necessary for living consistently with his new perspective of life. Holistic moral consistency such as this is as difficult for us to achieve as it was for Augustine. Moreover, modern society's emphasis on individual rights and autonomy are presenting new challenges for consideration. Augustine recognized a need for change in *his* life in order to reach an ideal. Efforts such as the Assisted Suicide movement are today arguing that long-standing traditional *ideals* need to be changed in favor of affirming personal liberty.

In addressing the role of conversions in our life this project affirms that sometimes new perspectives will warrant our letting go of what we had once held dear. It will also seek to clarify, however, that change in itself does not automatically represent moral progress or the authentic fulfillment of our potential. The following section is focused on our call to conversion – not simply a call for "change" but a calling to strive for the fullness of life we were created to experience. Human beings are made to thrive on the goodness and love of God. The theological virtues are being presented here as signs and instruments of our growth toward this deeper level of existence. An understanding of our call to growth/conversion will be presented in terms of its dependence on an authentic use of human freedom. The section will close with a description of how suffering plays a role in facilitating our conversions in everyday life.

**Transcendental Conversions: An Authentic Use of Human Freedom.** In

identifying the theological virtues as instruments of human transcendence, our spiritual growth can be found once again to mirror our psychosocial growth. Just as Erickson identified different levels of growth in healthy human development, conversions to new and deeper experiences of life are also intrinsic to healthy spiritual growth. Traditional understandings, reflecting the simple body/soul classification of the human person, related a conversion primarily to a change in one's "religious" life, associating it with a decision to commit to a particular religious faith. Contemporary understandings, based on a more holistic approach to the human being, have identified multiple types of conversions that more adequately reflect different aspects of the secular life and the totality of the human person.<sup>372</sup> The original meaning of the term "conversion" was associated with a religious connotation that identified a turning *from* something (i.e., one type of belief or even unbelief) *to* something (i.e., a certain religion). In order to maintain a consistent use of the term in a secular sense, Donald Gelpi suggests:

in every conversion experience one turns *from* irresponsible *to* responsible behavior in some realm of human experience. By *responsible* I mean "accountable." Those who live responsibly recognize that they must give an account of their personal choices to themselves, to other people, and, in the case of a theistic religious conversion, ultimately to God.<sup>373</sup>

Gelpi's association of a conversion with an exercise of responsibility and accountability places conversions within the context of an authentic use of human freedom – one that is distinct from simply focusing on an ability to make a choice. The

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<sup>372</sup>Donald Gelpi notes that although Bernard Lonergan originally identified two kinds of secular conversion, "intellectual," and "moral" in addition to the traditionally understood "religious" conversion, he later added "affective" as a fourth type. Gelpi, for his part, has sub-divided "moral conversion" into two parts, thus proposing consideration of five types of conversions: affective, intellectual, personal moral, socio-political, and religious. See: Donald Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>373</sup> Donald Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 26.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that “Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God...”<sup>374</sup>

Gelpi’s definition of a conversion experience reflects this movement toward growth and maturity even on a secular level – in terms of a growth in responsibility and accountability. Conversions associated with the theological virtues’ focus on God facilitate even more directly a liberation *from* the limited scope of a “self-serving” focus *to* reaching out in service to God and others. As the *Catechism* explains:

The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to “the slavery of sin.”<sup>375</sup>

This project is emphasizing three types of conversions - intellectual, affective, and behavioral – as representative of the totality of the human being, and as paralleling ongoing growths in faith, hope and love.<sup>376</sup> Supernatural transcendence involves the whole human person, as we are called to love God more authentically with our whole mind and heart and strength and our neighbor as we love ourselves. Growth in faith, hope and love thus entail the development of our understandings, our values in life, as well as our behavior. “Conversions” as described in the context of this project entail a movement based on an authentic use of human freedom (i.e., choices made with accountability and responsibility). Although each journey of growth is ultimately a personally unique one, our steps along the way are not made in isolation – they are not only influenced by, but also have an influence on, our relationships with God and others.

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<sup>374</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1731.

<sup>375</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1733. “The slavery of sin” is quoted from Rom 6:17.

<sup>376</sup> Gelpi’s “personal moral,” “socio-political,” and “religious” conversions are being combined under “behavioral” conversions - reflecting a growth in the virtue of love. Note that the classification of conversions into three types does not imply categorical distinctions between them; the project agrees with Gelpi as to their intrinsic inter-relatedness. Three basic types of conversions are being emphasized to facilitate an understanding of their association with the development of faith, hope and love.

This more holistic approach to conversions is based on Gelpi's insights which he developed from Lonergan's methodology; it also mirrors Rahner and Balthasar's descriptions of the theological virtues at work in everyday activities. Gelpi notes how the Church has adopted this extended approach since the Second Vatican Council:

A traditional theology of conversion ... associated the notion of conversion with only two sacraments: baptism and reconciliation. Moreover, that same theology called the faith experiences that Christians have after conversion by a different name. It called growth in faith after baptism and reconciliation *sanctification*, and it identified sanctification with corporate and personal growth in hope, faith, and love. ...The new theology of conversion [developed since Vatican II] uses the term *initial conversion* in order to designate those experiences a more traditional theology called *conversion*. The new theology of conversion also renames *sanctification*, calling it *ongoing conversion*.<sup>377</sup>

Thus, Gelpi explains, the new description "makes it clearer that conversion does not happen once and for all. The business of conversion lasts a lifetime."<sup>378</sup> This new approach to "the business of conversion" affords a direct parallel to the "business" of human psychosocial development. Erickson cautioned against viewing stages of psychosocial growth as accomplishments from level to level. He emphasized the presence of ongoing challenges with developmental issues throughout life, even as he underscored the human capacity to successfully grow through these struggles. So it is with the spiritual life. Growth in faith, hope, and love are not accomplished through a single conversion experience. They represent ongoing intellectual, emotional, and behavioral development as the practice of them strengthens our potential for further growth in loving God with our whole mind, heart and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Common ground can be noted here between social scientists and theologians who agree that healthy human development is an ongoing challenging process. It is within that process of development that Christians can recognize a salvific significance for suffering.

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<sup>377</sup> Donald Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 101-102.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, 102.



**Conflict/Suffering: Invitations to “Let Go” of the Old.** Once the necessity for our ongoing conversions in life is understood, suffering can more readily be explained as *potentially* facilitating an ever deepening “new life” of faith, hope, and love. It is noteworthy that Gelpi observes that a conversion “typically begins with some kind of crisis.”<sup>379</sup> This directly parallels one’s spiritual growth with Erickson’s observations that psychosocial growth is the result of successfully addressing conflicts or struggles in life. Similar to Erickson’s identification of an interdependence among the different levels of psychosocial growth, Gelpi also describes a “dynamic of conversion” as well as a “counterdynamic” of conversion:

By a *dynamic of conversion* I mean the way in which one form of conversion conditions the development of another form of conversion ...<sup>380</sup>

By counterdynamic of conversion, I mean the way in which the absence of conversion in one realm of experience tends to undermine and even to subvert conversion in another realm of experience.<sup>381</sup>

Failure to address the issues of trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame/doubt, etc., on the initial levels of psychosocial growth has been described as affecting later stages of development. So, too, failure to grow even incrementally from intellectual, affective or behavioral conflicts can stymie other areas of spiritual or moral development. Failure to even recognize the need for such growth would be an impediment to it happening. This project proposes that an encounter with suffering effectively disrupts any stagnation in the “status quo” of our lives. Depending on the type of suffering that is encountered we are likely to experience challenges to our present convictions, values and/or behavior. Depending on our response to these intellectual, affective and/or behavioral conflicts, a conversion or “new life” is possible in the areas of relationships with God, our neighbor,

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, 43.

and even our own self. Healthy individuals naturally do not *want* to suffer: Jesus himself is an example of this.<sup>382</sup> Because Jesus took up his cross and encourages us to do the same, however, it is a mistake to envision suffering simply as an evil that needs to be avoided. A different perspective of suffering itself is needed.

Traditional approaches to suffering focused on suffering as objectively categorical in what was experienced, so that suffering could be perceived as a punishment from God, or, as in Jesus' case, it could be interpreted as an act of reparation to God for humanity's sin. Such a concept facilitates the perception of suffering as a goal in itself. This led to rationalizing the imposition of suffering on others as physical or emotional "discipline," or misguided attempts of mortification of one's own body in order to strengthen the soul. The focus of this study is not on suffering as an objective end in itself, but rather on suffering as it can be understood in the process of being experienced. This empirical approach facilitates the recognition of an importance on the varying degrees of suffering that are encountered in our everyday life. Thus, any experience of affliction - from minimal disruptions or conflicts, to tremendous personal or social tragedies - can be seen to have a potential impact on one's life. If even a mustard seed of faith can bring about what seems impossible,<sup>383</sup> this project is proposing that experiences of varying degrees of suffering can also make a difference in our lives. They may further our growth by affirming and deepening our conviction to the direction of the spiritual path we are on or by facilitating a conversion that corrects our course. They may also, however, cause us to burrow ourselves even deeper into the perceived "safety" of our status quo. Whether suffering furthers our transcendence to the fullness of our potential or furthers our

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<sup>382</sup> Matt 26:39; Mark 14: 36; Luke 22:42.

<sup>383</sup> Matt 17:20; Luke 17:6.

entrenchment in something more comfortable to us, suffering brings with it an opportunity for change. The ultimate difference suffering has on us depends on our response to it.

It is maintained in this project that a basis for recognizing a significance for all human suffering can be found in the salvific suffering of Jesus. Jesus' authentic solidarity with humanity in terms of his psychosocial development has already been explored in this project. It is now being proposed that a similar exploration of Jesus' suffering will reveal a solidarity with a universal human experience of suffering. To explore practical implications that Jesus' suffering may have in our own lives, attention will now be turned to a more focused consideration of Jesus' suffering on the cross and its relevance for us today.

#### **Parameter 4: A Consideration of Jesus' Own Experience of Suffering**

The goal of this project is to identify an association between Jesus' redemptive suffering and the suffering we experience in our own life. That connection will be described in this section by first examining how Jesus' *own* experience of suffering included the basic salvific elements this project has identified as intrinsic to *all* human suffering. An interpretation of how Jesus' suffering was *uniquely* salvific will then be made in terms of its impact on all humanity 2000 years ago, as well as how it continues to make a difference for each of us today. The section will close with a description of how Jesus' "Way" of the Cross is also our own as we take up our cross today.

#### **Jesus' Authentically Human Experience of Suffering**

Traditionally Jesus' suffering was described in terms of making a salvific difference "for the sake of others." The perspective on human suffering that has been presented by this project, however, also emphasizes suffering's potential to benefit one's

own life. In order to make an association between Jesus' suffering and our own that is consistent with the approach of this project, it will therefore be necessary to consider how Jesus' suffering also impacted his own life. Following is a presentation of aspects of Jesus' own experience of suffering as they reflect salvific elements highlighted by this project as basic to the human experience of suffering.

**The Holistic Challenges of Suffering.** Traditional soteriological interpretations of Jesus' suffering highlighted the salvific nature of Jesus' *physical* death and resurrection and, because of Jesus' sacrifice, the promise of new life for us after *our* physical death. This project's focus on a holistic view of the human person stresses the ongoing *spiritual* deaths that lead to incremental experiences of new life – intellectually, emotionally, and/or behaviorally – here on earth. While acknowledging the salvific centrality of Jesus' physical death and resurrection, in this section further insights will be sought from Jesus' experience of *spiritual* suffering in his final hours before his crucifixion. Especially being sought is evidence of Jesus' solidarity with the *holistic* human experience of suffering as developed in this project – an experience that includes challenges for our mind, our heart, and our will.

The inspired Scriptural description of Jesus' agony in the garden depicts Jesus as encountering an intense amount of *spiritual* suffering during his last hours on earth. Even without the infliction of any *physical* pain, Jesus was described to be in such torment that he began to sweat blood.<sup>384</sup> Hematohidrosis is a very rare condition in which blood vessels to the sweat glands burst, causing blood to seep through the skin; identified

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<sup>384</sup> Luke 22:44.

causes of the condition are “acute fear and intense mental contemplation.”<sup>385</sup> Association of such a condition with Jesus’ anguish in the garden suggests that Jesus experienced an extreme level of *intellectual* and *emotional* suffering the night before he was crucified. Specific identification of a conflict between Jesus’ will and his Father’s will also suggests that Jesus encountered a *behavioral* challenge in what he was being called to *do*. Jesus was described as not wanting to submit to a crucifixion, but he withstood any temptation to disobey *God’s* will by asserting his commitment to do what he was asked: “Not my will but yours be done.”<sup>386</sup>

Jesus’ agony in the garden can be described as his experience of challenges to the salvific mission - his calling from God - to which he was committed. It provides a clear example of the inter-relatedness between progressing through the levels of growth (addressed by Erickson) and growth through conversions (addressed by Gelpi): Jesus’ response in the garden directly impacted his ability for continuing his mission. If he had not successfully responded to the suffering he endured in his discernment of what was being asked of him, he would not have been able to “progress” to the next level of his mission: the actual experience of the crucifixion. In spite of the intensity of the experience, Jesus’ suffering in the garden was only a step in the progression of his spiritual journey. Additional intellectual, emotional, and spiritual assaults continued as he was taken from the garden, even before the onset of his physical scourging. Abandonment and even betrayal by one’s closest friends, being sentenced to death as a criminal after so recently being hailed as “king,”<sup>387</sup> and the prospect of the horrendous

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<sup>385</sup> H. R. Jerajani et al, “Hematohidrosis – a Rare Clinical Phenomenon” in *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, accessed on November 11, 2013, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2810702/>.

<sup>386</sup> Luke 22:42.

<sup>387</sup> John 12:12-13.

personal as well as culturally-related humiliation of being stripped and “hung from a tree”<sup>388</sup> are Scriptural examples of tremendous spiritual scourgings that accompanied the horrific physical ordeal of his suffering.

Identification can be made on different levels in our own lives with the suffering Jesus encountered in his passion and death. Most human beings eventually encounter injustice, betrayals, and apparent failures in life - any of which can represent the disruption of life as we knew it. The picture is not complete, however, in focusing only on the challenges Jesus experienced. Consistent with the findings of this project regarding psychosocial growth and development, suffering’s disruptive nature has been presented as actually bringing with it a potential for spiritual growth and experiencing a “new life” from the ashes of the old. A question immediately presents itself, however, when this concept is applied to Jesus’ experience of suffering. Jesus was already a model of human fulfillment and the epitome of loving God as well as others with his whole mind, heart, and strength. How can it be said that suffering was an opportunity for any kind of spiritual growth or experience of new life for him? If such a connection cannot be identified, however, any suggestion of a direct association between Jesus’ redemptive suffering and the suffering of every human being loses its grounding.

**Suffering as an Opportunity for New Life.** The key to recognizing a change to new life in Jesus as a result of his suffering is a return to the examination that was made in Chapter 6 of a “change” in the immutable Son of God “becoming” a human being. This project concurs with Balthasar’s insight that the kenotic process of the Son of God’s Incarnation did not end with his biological conception; the Son of God’s incarnational

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<sup>388</sup> Dt 21:23: “anyone who is hanged [on a tree] is a curse of God.”

self-emptying reached its culmination with Jesus' experience of abandonment by God on the cross. In "becoming human" the Son of God engaged in a self-emptying journey not only into the physical reality of a human being's life and death. It also included a spiritual descent into the darkest depths of what had been opened up through humanity's misuse of freedom: a dreadful absence of the loving relationship with God that all human beings were created to experience. To reunite humanity with God – to find all who were lost – Jesus had to go into what was a new experiential territory even for the Son of God.

Jesus' experience *is* like ours in all things but sin. Because of his sinlessness, however, his mission on earth was in opposite directions from ours. Jesus' mission was a kenotic descent to new life for him; ours is a kenotic transcendence to new life for us. Both involve a sacrificial emptying of the self to make room for a more loving and authentic engagement with others. Jesus' suffering facilitated a self-emptying of his divinity that culminated in an irrevocable solidarity with humanity even while they were sinners. Our suffering can be the means to emptying ourselves of self-centered and material attachments so that we can more freely grow in authentically loving our true self, our neighbor, and our God.

Rahner emphasized the redemptive significance of Jesus' personal experiences during his life: "All that [Jesus] received and accepted is redeemed ... because it has itself become the love of God and the fate of God."<sup>389</sup> He then interpreted even the abandonment, however, only through a universal lens: "[Jesus] has accepted abandonment by God. Therefore God is near even when we believe ourselves to have been abandoned by him."<sup>390</sup> Such an approach fails to acknowledge the critical difference

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<sup>389</sup> Karl Rahner, "See, What a Man!," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 7, 138.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*

made by the uniqueness of who it is who experienced forsakenness by God on the cross: a human being who is also the Son of God. Jesus' experience on the cross was not only a new experience for him; it was, in fact, something that had never before even been possible in all of human history. Jesus was able to authentically "receive" the *human* experience of alienation from God because he was an authentic human being. A totally transcendent spiritual Deity could not experience a *human* experience. At the same time Jesus was able to "accept" that experience authentically in "the love of God," and making it "the fate of God," because Jesus was also the Son of God. God's initiative was essential for reuniting humanity with God in humanity's alien territory, but a complete reunion also needed freely given human cooperation. Thus, Jesus of Nazareth's *uniqueness* in being both the Son of God *and* a human being freely cooperating with God made possible God's "reconciling the world to himself."<sup>391</sup> In personally experiencing the reality of sinners' estrangement from God, Jesus reached a new relationship of solidarity with humanity; it came with a humanly unfathomable price tag, however: the ultimate self-emptying of the Son of God made flesh.

This interpretation does not suggest in any manner that God's love was being held back until Jesus suffered and died for sinners on the cross. The depth of loving solidarity with sinners reached by Jesus during the abandonment was simply not possible without the uniqueness of the God-man experiencing the consequence of human sin. In order for Jesus to authentically experience this new relationship with humanity he had to somehow personally experience the transcendental conflict between the darkness of humanity's sinfulness and the goodness of God. A route was opened by God asking the beloved Son to submit to a crucifixion and then by God not intervening to stop the human choices that

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<sup>391</sup> 2Cor 5:19.



actually led to Jesus' execution. God had a reason for allowing Jesus to feel "abandoned" during his ordeal – as Balthasar's insight makes clear, it was part of a salvific *Trinitarian* plan that was conceived even before the Incarnation. If the salvific mission was to succeed, however, it was necessary to keep the reason for the abandonment hidden from Jesus' earthly understanding. The mystery of the Father's apparent absence was essential: it facilitated an authentic human feeling of estrangement from his Father that was necessary for Jesus to achieve a salvific identification with sinners. The result was a devastating darkness for Jesus, but a humanly inconceivable new life for all was given birth from his suffering. Jesus' anguished experience on the cross *was* offered "for our sake;" but it was also a means to a new level of experience *for him*. Not only did the Son of God made flesh reach an irrevocable empathetic solidarity with all of humanity, in doing so he also became the head of a new creation on earth.

**One's Response to Suffering as the Key.** As presented in this project, Jesus' suffering was necessary for humanity to be reconciled with God. Even in its necessity, however, Jesus' suffering was not a categorical end in itself. Authentic at-one-ment between humanity and God depended not only on Jesus experiencing abandonment, but also on his freely given *response* to it. The abandonment allowed Jesus to attain a solidarity with humanity even while they were sinners. If he had succumbed to sin's hopelessness in the midst of his suffering, however, he would have joined the ranks of sinners in their alienation from God. The salvific culmination of Jesus' suffering was realized when Jesus brought his cooperation with God to its absolute conclusion: in his final trusting submission to God even in the midst of the devastating mystery of what was happening to him. The completion of the life's mission of even the God-man was

dependent on an expression of human freedom: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”<sup>392</sup>

Rahner’s emphasis on the importance of our trusting submission to the mystery of God is echoed emphatically by this project; its centrality to our own suffering is also evidenced in Jesus’ experience of suffering. Even in the midst of his helping to bring it about, Jesus did not completely understand the reconciling outcome of his horrific agony on the cross. Jesus’ plea from the cross: “*Why* have you abandoned me?” confirms that Jesus *at that time* did not understand the connection between his feeling of forsakenness by God and the reconciliation of humanity with God. The unanswered mystery itself was necessary to make the *experience* of abandonment a reality. If Jesus had understood that his experience of suffering was a means to reconcile sinners with God, would he have felt forsaken by God? His suffering would still have been excruciating, but in understanding the salvific part it played in God’s plan he would not have had to question God’s absence from him. As it was, his unflinching trust in God allowed him to cooperate with God’s will even when he did not fully understand the meaning of the abandonment that he was experiencing. Similar to the calling of *every* human being, Jesus responded even to the *mystery* of his suffering with trust in God.

### **Jesus’ Unique Salvific Difference**

Having highlighted how Jesus’ suffering reflected salvific elements that are *universally* basic to all human suffering, the focus will now shift to considering how Jesus’ suffering was *uniquely* salvific “for our sake.” Jesus’ suffering will first be described in terms of the salvific difference it made for all humanity 2000 years ago. It

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<sup>392</sup> Luke 23:46.

will then be described how God's salvific initiative through the cross of Jesus is still at work personally and uniquely in each of our lives today.

**Universal Atonement for Sin through At-One-Ment with All Humanity.**

Rahner's three concerns regarding the concept of salvific sacrifices provide an outline for summarizing how Jesus' self-sacrificing love saved all humanity through the God-man's kenotic sacrifice on the cross.

God's mind cannot be changed. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. God *is* immutable and perfect love - unconditional and unqualified. The creation of human beings in God's own image is part of God's plan for human beings to live in a relationship with God that is different than the rest of creation because it entails a life of mutual love with God.

Even before sin entered the world God's initiative was necessary to provide human beings the freedom, the intelligence, and the grounding in love they required for their fullness of life in God. The extent of God's initiative for personal union with humanity received concrete expression in the Incarnation. If sin had not entered the world the Incarnation of the Son of God and Jesus' life on earth would have been the actualization of God personally "owning" the world. Sin did enter the world, however, and brought with it a hopeless situation for humanity. Even without being conscious of it, humanity was trapped in their life of contradiction with God – they had no means of transcending it on their own. If a reunion with God was to be actualized it meant God had to come over to *humanity's* side. It took the Son of God emptying himself of his divinity not only to attain union with the *physical* reality of humanity as they had been created, but also with the *spiritual* reality of what they had become. The God-man's

experience of alienation from God was necessary to accomplish what the Transcendent God alone could not: make the *human* reality of alienation from God part of God's own reality. Humanity's redemption from sin was realized in an at-one-ment with God through Jesus' hope-filled and trusting *response* to his suffering. On the cross human free will, cooperating with the salvific will of God, triumphed over sin's situation of hopelessness as Jesus submitted his life to the Mystery of God even as he felt forsaken by God. The creation that had been corrupted by sin was vanquished - a "new creation" was initiated. With Jesus as its head, it is a creation grounded in an irrevocable *supernatural* union between God and humanity that prevails even over the hopelessness of sin.

Jesus' encounter with the ultimate depths of human suffering and his hope-filled response to it opened "the Way" of salvation for humanity once and for all, thus bringing about that new creation. Jesus walked the way of salvation *for* us (i.e., for our sake) 2000 years ago, but he cannot walk it *instead* of us. Because authentic human relationships are grounded in freedom, each individual must freely accept the relationship of love that God is extending to us. Even here, God's loving providence reaches out to provide the hope we need. For Jesus not only "saved" humanity in a concrete time and place in human history, he also continues God's salvific initiative in the life of each of us today.

**Personal Redemption for Each of Us Today.** Jesus' suffering and death was a sacrificial offering "*for our sake*" not only as benefiting all humanity, but also in terms of personally benefiting *each* of us. The more clearly that insight is appreciated, the more clearly we can appreciate Rahner's insistence that modern theology needs to address the "highly personal loving relationship" between *individuals* and Jesus. In this section focus will first be directed to how Jesus' loving relationship with us is a

continuation of God's salvific initiative for *each* of our sakes today. Implications regarding our response to God's initiative of love through *our* personal relationship with Jesus will then be considered.

*Jesus' as "the Way"*<sup>393</sup> *for Each of Us*. As Rahner insisted, Jesus' entire life on earth was a salvific event – it was a concrete communication of the relationship of love for God and others to which each of us is called. Thus, being a disciple of Jesus includes living the way that Jesus did. However, grounds for assigning a special significance to Jesus' last hours on earth – for his suffering and death - come from Jesus himself: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."<sup>394</sup> Jesus' makes it explicitly clear that taking up our cross is not an option. Since we are told to *come after him*, however, his statement also reassures us that we are not alone in our suffering. Jesus is still with us, every step of the way, even as we deal with the struggles in our own lives today.

In this project an association has been described between our salvific growth in faith, hope and love and the necessity for us to love with our whole mind, heart and strength. Jesus' encounters with the suffering of *his* cross reflected the holistic challenges we must embrace on this transcendental journey to the fullness of life. We can expect varied levels of suffering in our lives since we are called to on-going intellectual, affective and behavioral conversions as we open ourselves to loving God, our neighbor and our own self more completely. Jesus has shown us, however, that there is reason to hope even in the midst of our darkest experiences and that our *response* to suffering holds the key to new life for us. Jesus is indeed our Way (giving us a model for our behavior),

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<sup>393</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>394</sup> Luke 14:27.

our Truth (helping us to grow in our wisdom and understandings of life), and our Life (with a commitment to solidarity with us not only 2000 years ago, but also today.) He brings with him not only the empathy of a friend who shares one's experiences, but also the love and power of a God who stops at nothing to do what is best for us. His union on the cross with the depths of human suffering is irrevocable. His self-sacrifice produced a permanent and irreversible experience for the Son of God; it did not dissolve simply because he no longer physically walks on earth. Thus, he genuinely assures us that he is not going to leave us – even if we feel lost or abandoned, he will always be with us.<sup>395</sup>

***Our Free Choice: Anonymity or Conscious Intentionality.*** Although *Jesus* is in a committed relationship of love with *us*, we are free to choose the extent of our relationship with him. The human drive toward a relationship with God is so basic that Rahner has coined the phrase “Anonymous Christian” to describe those who are following “the Way” of Jesus without any conscious awareness of it. Rahner developed the concept specifically in reference to those who were not baptized into the Christian faith. However, it can be said that even baptized Christians are capable of living their faith anonymously if they seek to live a “good” and “loving” life without consciously and actively working to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Rahner conveyed the importance of “dying with Jesus (in absolute hope) in a surrender to the incomprehensibility of the eternal God.” The cross Jesus carried so long ago was a Roman instrument of physical death. However, Jesus’ teaching that disciples must take up their own cross *daily*,<sup>396</sup> makes it clear that embracing our cross today is not for the sake of a physical death which ends our earthly existence. *Our* cross today is for

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<sup>395</sup> Matt 28:20.

<sup>396</sup> Luke 9:23.

the sake of *daily* “letting go” of anything that is holding us back from an ever-deepening experience of the fullness of our life in God. “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”<sup>397</sup> Jesus assures us he is “the Way” to this fullness of life.<sup>398</sup> He has shown us what is necessary: trusting obedience to God through a personal relationship with God. “Surrendering” to a Higher Power who is humanly “incomprehensible” involves a transcendental leap of faith. But our God has become one of us, providing us encouragement grounded in absolute hope – in Jesus Christ’s concrete example of God’s power to bring new life even from death.

Whether or not we consciously commit to “dying with Jesus” today, Jesus is unconditionally committed to walking our journey with us. The disciples on their journey to Emmaus on that first Easter day were encouraged by Jesus as they learned from him about the meaning of his death and resurrection, even though they did not realize who he was.<sup>399</sup> Scripture records that it was not until the “breaking of the bread” that they recognized his presence in their lives. In a similar manner, it might not be until our own life story is “broken open” for us when we finally meet God face to face, that we, too, will recognize just how completely Jesus has been walking with us. In addition to being present to us today through direct spiritual encounters, Jesus is also reaching out to us through modern disciples who are consciously seeking to be Christ for others. He also assures us that he is among us in “the least”<sup>400</sup> imaginable ways. However, it is most basically through Jesus’ own way of the cross – through his self-emptying death 2000 years ago, that Jesus shows us how to truly live. Through his personal and unconditional

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<sup>397</sup> Matt 16:25.

<sup>398</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>399</sup> Luke 24:32.

<sup>400</sup> Matt 25:40.

commitment to each of us, whether we recognize his activity in our lives or not, he is still not only showing us “the Way,” he is walking it with us today.

### **Jesus’ Way of the Cross is also Our Own**

As demonstrated in this project, Jesus’ authenticity as a human being, including his experience of human suffering, affirms that his “way of the cross” is also our own. Consideration of Jesus’ experience of suffering clarifies that “taking up one’s cross” means more than simply agreeing to suffer. There are Scriptural accounts of Jesus himself escaping from those who wanted to push him over a cliff or to stone him to death.<sup>401</sup> The cross is not about submitting to *any* kind of suffering; it’s about doing whatever is necessary for doing what God is asking us to do.

We share the universal mission with Jesus to love God and our neighbor as ourselves with a self-sacrificing love. Jesus modeled the Way for us through his tireless compassion for the poor and the sick and by his challenges to the injustice and prejudices of those who kept people in his community marginalized. Toward the end of his life, however, Jesus discerned his unique calling from God that led him to submit to the injustice and violence of a crucifixion. Most of us are not called to martyrdom and literally following Jesus’ footsteps to be unjustly executed as a criminal. We are not called, therefore, to simply *imitate* Jesus. We are called to follow Jesus in cooperating with God’s unique will for us, just as Jesus, in taking up *his* cross, cooperated with God’s unique will for him. Encouragement will now be provided for that challenge by offering further understandings about suffering that are meant to assist us in applying the findings of this project to our own life experiences.

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<sup>401</sup> Luke 14:16-30; John 8:59, 10:31.



## CHAPTER 8

### TAKING UP OUR OWN CROSS WITH HOPE

A foundation has been laid through this project for associating the redemptive suffering of Jesus of Nazareth with a liberating potentiality in our own human suffering. A practical connection of its findings to our own life experiences will now be presented through a more focused exploration of what it means to take up our cross with hope. Adhering to the methodological distinction outlined by Lonergan in Chapter 1, suffering will be addressed empirically - in terms of its *process* as experienced in one's life, rather than its categorically defined nature. A most appropriate introduction to this objective is the teachings of St. Paul regarding *his* lived experience of suffering. The theological anthropological path undertaken by this study is therefore leading us back to the Scriptural reference which introduced it in Chapter 1:

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church,*<sup>402</sup>

Questions that were raised in Chapter 1 regarding Paul's attitude toward suffering and its relevance to modern life will provide the framework for this chapter. First, inspired by Paul's interpretation of suffering but utilizing the methodology of this project, a basis will be sought for a positive perception of suffering that is relevant for contemporary times. This will include consideration of the importance not only of our approach to suffering but also of our ability to risk being vulnerable in the midst of suffering. Next, a social dimension of suffering will be explored, which is intrinsic not only to Paul's theology of suffering as noted in Chapter 1, but also to the findings of this project regarding the existence of an innate human interdependence even within the

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<sup>402</sup> Col 1:24.

uniqueness of each person's individuality. Finally, just as human freedom is intrinsically linked to the development of the fullness of our human potential, human freedom will also be shown to be intrinsic to the fulfillment of the redemptive potential of suffering – including that which was offered by Jesus “for our sake.” Our freely given cooperation with the salvific work of Jesus will therefore be identified as what is “lacking” in the redemptive suffering of Jesus. The chapter's conclusion will mirror Paul's description of a new creation in Christ as we follow “the Way” of Jesus in salvifically “filling up” the world by loving God, self and others with our whole mind, heart and strength.

### **A New Perspective of Suffering and Vulnerability**

Paul's description of his experience of suffering succinctly reflects this project's conclusions: there is a redemptive/liberating potentiality associated with suffering that, once understood, allows our crosses to be taken up with hope. Paul's approach to suffering represents a daunting leap for most of us, however, who wonder how he can speak of “rejoicing” in his suffering. The goal of this section is to explore a more elementary but still positive response to suffering. It will seek to provide what was acknowledged in the first chapter to be a great need in modern times: concrete encouragement for hope rather than fear, even in our darkest experiences of suffering. In doing so an additional counter-cultural proposition will be presented that directly relates to this project's approach to suffering: vulnerability is not an intrinsic sign of weakness. When embraced in the midst of surrendering to God's will for us, vulnerability can actually be a sign of strength and a means to a fuller engagement with life. In order to maintain consistency with the rest of this project, this more positive approach to suffering

will be affirmed by anthropological resources rather than simply relying on theological or spiritual propositions.

Where can social scientific evidence be found that supports a positive response to suffering? This project proposes that practical empirical support is available in the field of medical science when an approach basic to this study is utilized: consideration of a contrasting perspective. In this case a documented medical condition can help us understand that there are dire consequences when an individual is *not* able to experience one of the most basic types of human suffering: physical pain. As described by the U.S. National Library of Medicine:

Congenital insensitivity to pain is a condition that inhibits the ability to perceive physical pain. From birth, affected individuals never feel pain in any part of their body when injured. ... This lack of pain awareness often leads to an accumulation of wounds, bruises, broken bones, and other health issues that may go undetected. Young children with congenital insensitivity to pain may have mouth or finger wounds due to repeated self-biting and may also experience multiple burn-related injuries. These repeated injuries often lead to a reduced life expectancy in people with congenital insensitivity to pain.<sup>403</sup>

A documentary film directed by Melody Gilbert, “A Life Without Pain,” reveals the challenges that are experienced by families trying to cope with the needs of a child who has congenital insensitivity to pain (CIP). Although an introduction to the film does not go so far as to suggest that we should rejoice in our sufferings, it does conclude that pain is actually a “gift:”

Do you think a pain-free life sounds great? Think again. A LIFE WITHOUT PAIN is an exploration into the day-to-day lives of three children who literally feel no pain. ... [They] have a genetic defect so rare that it is shared by just one hundred people in the world. Their parents must watch their every move, but even their vigilance hasn't shielded the girls from many serious, life-altering injuries. As we follow these families coping with this enormous challenge, we learn that pain is really a gift that no one wants, but none of us can do without.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> <http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/congenital-insensitivity-to-pain>; accessed October 6, 2013.

<sup>404</sup> <http://www.alifewithoutpain.com/about.php>; accessed October 7, 2013.

The conclusion that pain is a gift is based only on observations about *physical* suffering's connection to protecting one's *physical* health. Consistent with its appreciation of the totality of the human person, this project contends that the ability to experience *other* forms of suffering is conducive to protecting and nurturing our whole being, including our intellectual, emotional and spiritual health. First, a more positive perception of the human ability to suffer will be presented. It will then be emphasized, however, that just as with the experience of physical pain, positive results from experiencing suffering *in itself* are not a "given." Suffering is only a *potential* means for benefitting our lives because the actual outcome depends on how we respond to our experience of suffering. Support and clarification of these two positions will be founded on a concrete example: that of a child putting her hand on a hot burner of a stove.

### **Developing an Appreciation for the Human Ability to Suffer**

Gabby Gingras is one of three children whose condition was documented in "A Life Without Pain." Gabby's mother, Trish Gingras, formed her own conclusions about pain, acquired from personal experience with her daughter's life with CIP: "Pain teaches. Pain protects. Pain can save you from a lot of bad things in life."<sup>405</sup> Gabby's condition provided Trish a different perspective on pain: it allowed her to recognize a benefit in the human ability to suffer pain that was denied her daughter because of a genetic defect. CIP robs Trish's daughter of a natural ability to know that something conflicting with her body's comfort zone may be having a harmful effect on her body. Everyday experiences in Gabby's life drive this point home. If Gabby accidentally touches a hot stove with her

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<sup>405</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/OnCall/story?id=1386322>, broadcast on Dec. 9 2005, accessed October 6, 2013.

hand, she does not have the benefit of the vast majority of human beings: experiencing a warning signal that would make her instinctively remove her hand from the burner.

The argument is being made that our ability to suffer reflects our ability to be aware of something that is in the process of happening, or has already happened, which is outside of our usual desires or expectations – something that is disrupting one of the “comfort zones” of our life. This more holistic approach to suffering includes not only experiences of physical pain, but also intellectual, emotional and/or behavioral conflicts that are associated with our understandings of life, our values, and our actions.

Expanding on the National Library of Medicine’s description of the human experience of physical pain, this project is proposing that the human experience of other types of suffering allows us the ability to become aware of other types of “health issues” that may otherwise “go undetected” in our lives.

Despite a human tendency to categorically associate suffering with whatever causes the suffering, suffering is not a cause of the conflict; the experience of suffering is a *consequence* of whatever is disrupting our life. A more accurate empirical description is that suffering is our awareness of that disruption. Trish Gingras’ conclusions about pain make that clear. Experiencing physical pain is not the *cause* of a problem to the body – our experience of physical pain is a *consequence* of something else – something that breached the body’s physical comfort zone. This understanding can readily be extended to other forms of suffering by considering the human anguish endured with the tragic death of a loved one. If the death of the loved one was the result of a traffic accident, those who were not present at the scene of the accident do not begin to suffer until they receive notification of what occurred. In some cases there is a long lapse of

time between the time when the tragedy actually occurred and the advent of the suffering. Thus, although tragedies occur daily in our communities and in our world, without an awareness of the tragedies we do not experience suffering in connection with them. Suffering, in fact, *is* our awareness that something happened.

How important is this distinction? It is crucial in that it allows for a disassociation between a disruption in one's life – even a most tragic one - and the suffering that comes as a consequence of it. Trish Gingras has a very positive perception of the human ability to experience physical pain (e.g., it lets you know when the physical integrity of your body is being threatened). That does not mean that she has the same positive evaluation of what *causes* an experience of pain (e.g., putting one's hand on a hot burner). In a similar manner, this project suggests that one's experiences of intellectual, emotional and spiritual suffering can be differentiated from the cause of the suffering. An appreciation for the awareness/warning that suffering gives us does not suggest that the *causes* of suffering are necessarily something positive as well. Lack of an appreciation for that distinction led to “abuses of the cross” which were referenced in Chapter 3 of this project. When merits associated with “redemptive” suffering were not dissociated from the *cause* of the suffering, self-abusive mortification as well as unjust actions which caused others to suffer could more easily but erroneously be rationalized as constructive.

An emphasis on this empirical distinction between suffering and the cause of our suffering is critical. Our efforts to eliminate the *causes* of suffering need to continue. Although we also long for the elimination of suffering, until the world is living in authentic harmony and love, a life without suffering would prove to be the holistic

counterpart of CIP: living without an awareness of the reality that conflicts and challenges in the world and in our selves are challenging our “health” as human beings. Even though no one *wants* to experience pain or suffering, just as pain alerts us to physical health issues, suffering alerts us to more holistic health issues. The more accurately we can identify the source(s) of the discomfort we are suffering – whether physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or any combination thereof - the more successfully we can address the actual cause of the suffering and work to eliminate it from the world and our own lives.

This distinction between suffering and the cause of the suffering is basic to the bishops’ argument in Chapter 1 that suffering *itself* is not a “problem” that needs to be eliminated from one’s life by ending one’s life - the *cause* of the suffering is the problem that needs to be considered. They point out that advocating for assisted suicide may actually “magnify” the suffering of the terminally ill, especially if their worse suffering is not physical pain but “feelings of isolation and hopelessness.” Taking time to discern the root causes of the person’s actual physical, emotional *and* spiritual suffering is necessary to discern an appropriate and more beneficial response. Refusing to react to suffering out of fear – of pain, vulnerability, or the unknown - is the first step to benefiting from what suffering can teach us about what we are encountering. Ultimately it can provide us with an opportunity to develop a deeper awareness of our understandings and our values in life, along with an opportunity to reevaluate the choices we are making in our journey.

In relating experiences of suffering with a *process* of human development, it is important to recognize the significance of minor upsets and annoyances throughout one’s life, in addition to more easily acknowledged sufferings of traumatic upheavals. This

perspective reflects the insights of Erickson and Gelpi on the interdependence of developmental processes: an ability to successfully meet the challenges of more elementary developmental stages directly impacts the ability to master future challenges. Thus, just as an athlete's training enhances his or her ability to succeed in taking on more demanding challenges, our response to the suffering which we experience even in minor annoyances can strengthen our capability of responding successfully to more and more demanding situations. Our failure to develop a capacity regarding minor challenges will be an impediment to successfully responding to more demanding challenges in life.

With a focus on *progressive* development, it becomes important to clarify what is meant by even "minor" degrees of suffering. Not all conflicts or challenges cause suffering, and even very like-minded individuals often provide different descriptions of what they consider to be experiences of suffering. With such a variety of combinations possible, how can a "lived experience" of the concept of suffering even be defined? This project endorses philosopher Jerome Miller's definition of suffering as "an experience that affects us in the core of ourselves."<sup>406</sup> Encounters with suffering are experiences that reach to the very center of who we are and what we value; they are also, therefore, uniquely defined by each individual. Thus various types and levels of suffering can be recognized in situations where the comfort zones surrounding our own personal core are being affected. In this way suffering can be *personally* associated with instances from simple annoyances to devastating tragedies. This project is emphasizing that our responses to the "mustard seeds" of suffering that we experience as well as to the earthquakes that totally shock one's core, are all important in the course of our

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<sup>406</sup> Jerome A. Miller, *The Way of Suffering: A Geography of Crisis*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1988), 31.



development. A positive approach to suffering even in the small struggles can enhance our ability to address larger conflicts in our journey through life.

The importance of developing a healthy response to suffering can be clarified further by returning once again to Trish Gingras' observation that pain *can* help us. The experience of physical pain does not *by itself* protect the body from physical harm. Simply feeling the pain – “learning” that the stove is hot - does not stop the stove's burner from continuing to char a child's hand. The hand must be removed from the stove to stop the damage. Suffering holistically considered is a teacher in a similar manner – it alerts us when something has crossed our physical and/or spiritual thresholds of pain. Unlike the body's instinctive reaction to physical pain, however, experiencing challenges to our intellectual, emotional, or behavioral comfort zones call for a more conscious response. Positive responses to suffering benefit our healthy growth and authentic fulfillment, but they do not come naturally – they must be developed. As has been emphasized throughout this project, suffering is only a *potential* means for a liberating experience of new life; the end result of our suffering depends on our response to it. In order to gain new life from our suffering we have to be open to experiencing something that is, indeed, new to us. Entrance to an experience of “new life” entails our “letting go” of the old and being vulnerable to the unknown.

### **Responding with Open Vulnerability to the Unknown**

So much of suffering will always remain a mystery, even with a positive approach to suffering. Paul was able to rejoice even in the midst of great suffering - not because he unraveled the mystery of suffering, but because he acquired the ability to hope in the

“power of God” even as he proclaimed the “mystery of God.”<sup>407</sup> His hope was not in the secular sense of wishful thinking, but in terms of the theological virtue that represents trust in God. The resurrection of Jesus was the basis for his confidence that God not only had the power to bring goodness and life even from death, but that God also had an unwavering commitment to humanity through Jesus. Paul was also able to realize that successfully meeting life’s challenges did not depend on his having absolute control of his life. Quite to the contrary, he recognized his inability to control even his own actions: “What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.”<sup>408</sup>

Paul was able to let go of what he could not “understand” and worked instead on consciously turning control of his life over to God. This dynamic is basic to unleashing the redemptive potential of suffering: trusting submission of one’s will to God rather than reliance on one’s own limited understanding. This concept clearly parallels Rahner’s claim that human beings have a fundamental salvific need to submit to the Mystery of God. It mirrors Jesus’ suffering as he needed to make a trusting submission to God even though his anguished question from the cross remained unanswered. So it is with *all* human suffering. Experiences of suffering put us at crossroads in life by presenting us with challenges that we do not will for ourselves and that we might not even understand. Our possibility for growth from the suffering depends on our response to it.

Jerome Miller identifies the human “will to control” as a formidable challenge to gaining the most out of our suffering. He observes that humans have a tendency to equate control with power and mastery. Seeking control of our own life, however, actually makes us victims of a self-imposed containment. As he explains:

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<sup>407</sup> 1Cor 2:1-5.

<sup>408</sup> Rom 7:15.

The will to control, which tries to prevent anything tragic from happening to us, is itself tragic because in exercising it we end up confining ourselves inside a world from which everything Other than ourselves has been drained. We do not realize that we are ourselves the victims of our own desire to be safe. In control of everything, we live in the smallest and most narrow of all possible worlds.<sup>409</sup>

Miller observes that we treat our life as if it were our home. He adds that we typically seek to protect our home from an invasion by the “Other,” i.e., anything that would upset the security of our “ordinary lives.”<sup>410</sup> While this project proposes that our experiences of suffering put us at crossroads in our lives, Miller doesn’t even see us venturing that far out into the world. He paints a picture of people guarding even the doors of their houses to prevent the “Other” from entering. In fact, he suggests we interpret disruptions as a problem for which we need to find a practical solution so the stability of our home can be maintained:

That I experience an accident as interference, and my own anxiety as a disruption of the even keel of repose, indicates that I already have a blueprint I intend to impose on the course of events. If a day “proves uneventful,” it is not because I accept whatever happens, nor is it because nothing happens. It is because everything has happened as planned. ... “Everything goes smoothly” means that the world remains within the boundaries I have decided to assign it.<sup>411</sup>

Miller explains that by assigning the status of a “problem” to any disruption to our day, we are seeking to wrest away the interruption’s challenge to our dominion: “Thus, if I can treat everything as a problem, I can prevent anything that happens to me from being upsetting. And all I need to do in order to turn something into a problem is believe in its manageability.”<sup>412</sup> Miller does not see perfect control of our life as a benefit, however, for it only reinforces a vision of life that is limited to our private and practical

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<sup>409</sup> Jerome Miller, *The Way of Suffering*, 14.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.. As identified by this project, the “Other” knocking at our door would include not only encounters with God or other people, but also conflicts that present intellectual, emotional, or behavioral challenges on any level. The project associates these with opportunities that reflect our calling to grow in our love of God, our neighbor, and our own self with our whole mind, and heart, and strength.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 15.

management of it. His approach suggests not only a more positive perspective of our experiences of disruptions in life (i.e., encounters with suffering), but also a more positive perception of vulnerability – the ability to “let go” of control and open our doors to experiencing something beyond the very narrow perceptions of life that we create and maintain for ourselves.

Giving up control of one’s life as emphasized by this project should not be confused with becoming apathetic or passive about life. To the contrary, this type of “letting go” involves taking our vision of how things should be and turning it over to conformity with the will of God. Such a conversion takes commitment and strength. Rather than encouraging passivity it emphasizes that we *are* called to make a difference in the world, but as *co*-creators with God rather than as God’s replacement. Such was Paul’s approach to life. He describes us as “God’s co-workers”<sup>413</sup> in bringing about a new creation. The fulfillment of our potential to be *co*-creators of a better world, however, is not possible without letting go of our desire for absolute control.

Miller’s concept of suffering is basic to the thesis of this project – an experience of suffering is a disruption in one’s life, which is also an *opportunity* for new life. In itself suffering does not make us grow – it is merely the Unknown/Other knocking at our door in the form of something we had not willed for our life. Our response to the suffering makes the difference on whether we grow or become further entrenched in trying to maintain control by keeping things within the familiarity and security of our status quo. Being able to risk vulnerability is an essential element for experiencing a new direction in life’s journey. A single experience might present us with the opportunity to take what seems to be an intangible step – possibly at first bringing with it only a

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<sup>413</sup> 1Cor 3:9.

difference in our outlook on life. But the accumulation of changes in our interior steps gives direction to the path we take in the course of our life – and on our ultimate vision of life itself. Because of our inherent mutuality with others, the journey we take also impacts that of others – advancing or stalling the mission of building up the fullness of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Adoption of Miller’s insight regarding the “Other” facilitates a better understanding of the social aspect of suffering that we ultimately embrace in taking up one’s cross to do God’s will. The concept that suffering has a social dimension is compatible not only with Paul’s theology but also with the findings of this project regarding a mutuality that is intrinsic to healthy human development even within the individuality of every human being. It is proposed that a clearer understanding of the positive impact our choices can have on our own lives as well as that of others can help strengthen our resolve to take up our cross with hope. No one wants to suffer; suffering during one’s life, however, is inevitable. If our response to suffering can be shown to make a positive difference in life we can be encouraged to do what is necessary to make that difference – for our own sake as well as that of others.

### **A Social Dimension of Suffering**

Paul speaks of rejoicing in his suffering *for our sakes*; he explains that *his* suffering is making a difference for *us* by “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” Although such claims could seem as baffling to the contemporary mind as his joyful response to suffering, Paul’s recognition of a social dimension for suffering actually reflects basic principles of human social development as referenced in Chapter 6 of this project. A healthy personality, as

depicted by both Maslow and Erikson, is developed from an interrelationship among people that is grounded in a mutuality of giving and receiving love. Such love is not simply a “feeling” toward another, but an authentic sharing of the self for the good of the other. Erikson’s depiction of this mutuality, beginning with the infant’s biological need of physical nourishment and extending through the psychosocial development of the mature human being, establishes how fundamentally human beings depend upon and impact each other consciously and unconsciously. Paul’s analogy of many parts of a single body reflects this aspect of mutuality as he concludes that every human being makes a difference for others. Paul argues that even if the members of the body are not conscious of it - even if they go so far as to *deny* any relationship – it doesn’t change the fact that they actually do have a relationship and they do impact each other.<sup>414</sup>

While most of us are aware of the impact we can have – for good or ill – on those who are directly involved with us in our daily relationships, Paul’s insights reflect a much broader vision. Erikson was quoted in Chapter 6 as recognizing that each human being develops according to his or her “readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius.” He noted that the process of an individual’s development begins with a mother figure but ends with “that segment of mankind which ‘counts’ in the particular individual’s life.” Paul’s vision was not limited to a particular segment of humanity but rather embraced all of humanity. Such an extended vision of life is one that can be grasped by each of us as we come to a clearer appreciation of the relationships that “count” in the spiritual life. Our approach to suffering can change for the positive when we realize suffering’s instrumental role in the development of those relationships which are not defined by material or physical boundaries.

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<sup>414</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-27.

It has been emphasized in this project how one's psychosocial development on earth (Chapter 6) as well as one's supernatural life for all eternity (Chapters 5 and 7) are both grounded in a human need for love. The Scriptural description of *who* we are to love (God, neighbor and self) as well as *how* we are to love (with our whole mind, heart, and strength) is therefore central to a consideration of a social dimension of suffering. The focus of this section will first be on aspects of suffering that can impact our development of relationships with God and others. Attention will then be focused on how a positive response to suffering can encourage the development of a more authentic relationship with our own self – one that consciously welcomes self-emptying conversions which allow our whole mind and heart and being to be flooded with the fullness of love that we were created to experience in solidarity with God and with others.

### **Recognizing Opportunities to Grow in Love of God and Neighbor**

Jerome Miller's insights about suffering provide a basis for examining a link between one's approach to suffering and one's relationship with others. Based on Miller's description, experiences of suffering can be visualized as unanticipated opportunities knocking at our door, attempting to break through the walls of familiarity within which we have safely secluded ourselves. As developed in this project, these can be invitations to empty the self of established convictions, values, and behaviors so that we can open the door to developing them in ways we had not yet imagined. Miller recognizes the prevalence in modern times, however, of a desire to control one's life so completely that we buttress the door with practical ways to control the disruptions, rather than opening the door to the unknown. He observes that this "will to control" is an attempt:

to enclose everything inside the fixed boundaries of practicality, [so as to] deprive everything we encounter of that Otherness that makes it potentially disruptive. In making a thing “manageable,” we confine it and thus make it limited. ... And if by the “sacred” one means that Other whose Otherness has the power to overwhelm us, the purpose of practicality is to empty one’s world of the sacred.<sup>415</sup>

The Christian today has a very counter-cultural challenge: we are called not to empty but to *fill up* the world with the sacred. The more we make room for the Sacred in our own lives (“He must increase; I must decrease”) the more we will also be filling up the world with the Sacredness that is filling our own lives (“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world”). This process involves a self-emptying of one’s own self-serving “will” so that a more conscious engagement with life beyond one’s personally limited perception of it can be experienced.

Miller’s analogy allows us to visualize suffering as opportunities to open our door to a deeper engagement with the ultimate “Otherness” of God. Paralleling the Scriptural call to love God with our whole mind and heart and strength, opportunities for growing in love of God can be found in encounters with intellectual, emotional, and behavioral conflicts or challenges that touch us at the core of who we are. As described by this project, even “mustard seed” experiences of these conflicts with our status quo are opportunities for us to extend the boundaries of our comfort zones. A most basic example of this has already been raised in Chapter 1: the concept of suffering itself can pose a tremendous intellectual challenge regarding the existence of God to someone whose concept of God is incompatible with the reality of suffering in the world. As we mature in life – as we grow in a deeper experience of the reality of life - our concepts about God need to change along with our broadening experiences. Children can easily relate to God as a parent figure who protects the young from harm and provides what is

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<sup>415</sup> Jerome Miller, *The Way of Suffering*, 13-14.



needed in life. That anthropomorphic concept is helpful for children to learn about God but it will be a stumbling block for the child who grows up still relating to God only in terms of someone who rewards the good and punishes the bad.<sup>416</sup> As conflicts with such a conviction are encountered – when we learn that even innocent children are not protected from very tragic experiences - those assumptions about God are accordingly challenged. Without an awareness of any conflicts we would not suffer; but we also would not be challenged to grow beyond our own limited understandings. The created being cannot fully comprehend the Creator.<sup>417</sup> As we grow in our experiences of life our understanding of God needs to correspondingly grow to allow *not only* descriptions of God in human terms, but also to acknowledge the transcendence of God and the reality of God as Absolute Mystery. Wrestling with the mystery of God – confronting our intellectual conflicts and doubt - can be opportunities to strengthen our relationship with God as we take our faith seriously enough to hunger for a better understanding of who God truly is.

In addition to helping us grow in our understanding of God, our encounters with suffering also afford us an opportunity to evaluate the consistency between our beliefs *about* God and our actual lived relationship *with* God. Reflection on our responses to suffering can provide us practical indications of strengths and weaknesses in our spiritual journey – specifically in areas where we do not have control. How confidently do we

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<sup>416</sup>Harold Kushner's work as a rabbi made him no stranger to tragedies that befall human beings. His *personal* encounter with suffering in the tragic death of his young son, however, caused him to reevaluate his ministerial approach to suffering as well as his understanding of God as an all-powerful parent figure. Some of Kushner's conclusions differ from Christian understandings of God, but his insightful and compassionate book is an example of how our experiences of suffering can motivate us to reexamine our assumptions about God and life. See: Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Random House, 1980).

<sup>417</sup> Isaiah 55:9: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

involve God in the unexpected challenges we encounter? Can we easily seek God's will even in the darkest times or are we more comfortable immediately going into "management control"? In the past it was often claimed: "There are no atheists in foxholes," implying that in times of tremendous threats human beings naturally turn to – or at least hope for – a Higher Power who can help. Today's "trenches," however, are being filled with a different philosophy – one that emphasizes a need for taking immediate control rather than immediately seeking help from God. The more we train ourselves to rely on our own resources, the more successful we will become in denying God as a source of power for us. God has given us the freedom to choose the course we prefer. Our responses to suffering provide a glimpse of the path we are actually travelling. Taking time to reflect on the consequences of our choices can provide encouragement for the path we are following or identify areas where we have room for growth in our relationship with God. This is especially critical for our modern times. The more we become immersed in an environment which holds self-sufficiency and personal control in the highest esteem, the less we will be able to recognize our need to develop a fuller relationship with God and the benefit of relying on God's wisdom and power rather than our own.

In addition to insights into our relationship with God, our experiences with suffering also provide us insights into our relationship with *others*. As noted in Chapter 1, Paul describes our relationship with each other in terms of the relationship the individual body parts share within one body. This relationship is so intimate that Paul notes: "If [one part of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." That type of solidarity between one's own life and even that of

strangers is not always emphasized today. Hints of our deeply embedded connection with others are evidenced, however, in our spontaneous reactions to suffering. When we become aware of someone who is suffering as a consequence of an injustice, our empathy is often very naturally and simply expressed: “Someone should do something about that!” On the other hand, a spontaneous surge of optimism escapes us when we hear of a bystander who risked his own life in saving a stranger from certain peril. Such responses are contemporary confirmations of Paul’s observation that we share the sufferings, as well as the joys, of others in our human family. To the degree we are not aware of tragedies and conflicts experienced by others, our ignorance hinders the possibility of engagement with their suffering. Awareness of the suffering of others, however – whether through personal encounters with the suffering of loved ones or news reports about tragedies occurring on the other end of the world – brings with it an opportunity to not only feel empathy for them, but also to try to reach out to make a concrete difference for them.

In Miller’s terms, reaching out to someone in need involves extending ourselves beyond the threshold and security of our own home. Even the smallest attempt to make a difference for someone else represents a stretching of our comfort zone. How often and to what extent do we try to reach out to those who are suffering as a result of a serious illness, homelessness, or unemployment? How easily do we decide we do not have the time or resources to help? What does it take to encourage us to even consider whether we might have the means to help? Once we become aware of the suffering of others, the choice is ours on how to respond, which includes choosing whether to even respond at all. The choice we make, however, will not only make a difference for others but will

make a difference for ourselves as well. As noted by this project, our relationship with others is one of inherent mutual relationship; whether we accept or refuse an opportunity to reach out to others, our decisions in themselves are also impacting our own lives by shaping our capacity for self-emptying love.

Reflecting on our responses to the suffering of others can give us insights not only into our relationship with others, but also a better understanding of our self. If we choose to do nothing, is it because we don't believe we have anything to offer that would make even a small difference? Or is our response based on not wanting to become involved? Our choices reflect not only our perception of who we are and our purpose in life, but also our sense of an ability to make a difference. Reflection on our experiences of suffering can also therefore provide us insights into the third type of relationship within the social dimension of suffering: the relationship we have with our own self.

### **Recognizing Opportunities to Grow in our Love of Self**

Since we are called to love others *as* we love ourselves, our call to love others does not represent a need to indiscriminately give of ourselves without bounds. Jesus was known to socialize as well as to go off by himself for self-care.<sup>418</sup> The call to love others *as* ourselves therefore reflects a need for a self-love that will enhance our ability to grow in our love for others. If our responses to the suffering of others reveal patterns of giving without healthy boundaries, we may be engaging in self-*serv*ing rather than self-*empty*ing love. Self-emptying love involves a conversion as described in Chapter 7 - turning from irresponsible to more responsible behavior. It involves a turning from the old self to the fullness of who we are meant to be by increasing our ability to love God

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<sup>418</sup> Matt 11:18-19; Matt 9:10-11; Luke 5:16; Matt 14:12-13.

with our whole mind, heart and strength, and to love our neighbor as our own self. Such conversion is not possible with self-*serv*ing behavior which promotes not the emptying of the old self but only the continuation of it.<sup>419</sup>

Authentic self-love seeks the fullness of life that is possible for us. In Chapter 5 an association was described between the theological description of the fullness of life (growth in faith, hope, and love) and Erickson's concept of the development of one's ego identity. As described by Richard Gross, Erickson directly associated one's personal development with the development of *specific* perceptions of life, among them: 1) life does have a purpose; 2) all of our experiences – even the bad times - offer something of value; and 3) human beings share a solidarity throughout all history. These universal elements take on a personal direction as we interpret them in terms of 1) our understanding of our own self and our purpose in the world; 2) our appreciation for the value of our life, in spite of the imperfections in our world and in our self; and 3) our response-ability toward others with whom we share existence. The schema for Erickson's concept of ego identity can thus be described as paralleling our intellectual, emotional and behavioral development as we grow in self-knowledge, self-esteem, and responsibility toward our own selves and our situation in life. Following this framework on a personal level it can be affirmed that experiences of suffering often are occasions for us to reexamine our beliefs regarding the meaning of life and our purpose in it. They also may influence a reevaluation of our values (giving a higher priority to some things while learning to “let go” of things we once held in control). Often our encounters with suffering can also be described as challenges to our behavior so that we take more seriously our response-ability and accountability to others.

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<sup>419</sup> Matt 16:25; Lk 17:33; Jn 12:25.

Thus it can be realized that our responses to various types of disruptions in life can teach us a lot about *ourselves* and our on-going intellectual, emotional and behavioral development. How open are we to considering challenges to our understanding and knowledge of the world? What about challenges to our image of our own self? How do we handle conflicts that seem to directly attack our self-esteem, or our values, or our behavior? Do we ignore them or react defensively to them? Certainly our responses vary with the intensity of the conflict, the source of the conflict and the situation in which it surfaced. Our responses to these various encounters with suffering reveal how open we are to seeking truth about ourselves as well as our readiness to change our behavior to reflect the values we profess. Taking time to reflect on our responses to disruptions of our “comfort zone” – even in those cases where the challenge is seemingly a “mustard seed” – provides us a tool for growing in self knowledge, emotional maturity, or responsibility and accountability. Insights gained from our reflections can help us evaluate how well we are actually showing signs of loving God, others and our own self with our whole mind and heart and strength.

Erickson emphasized that our success or failure to integrate basic developmental elements from our experiences in life directly affects our future personal development; his conclusion would naturally include what we integrate into our lives from our experiences with suffering. It has been highlighted in this section how our encounters with suffering can be opportunities for the development of our relationships with God and others, as well as a means for furthering our own growth and fulfillment. Paul’s interpretation of suffering goes even further. He suggests that the potential impact of our choices extend beyond our own personal responses to suffering, but also somehow make

a difference even in the redemptive/salvific suffering of Jesus Christ. We are not the Savior of the world – Jesus is. Paul has emphatically acknowledged that.<sup>420</sup> This section’s description of suffering’s *potential* to impact not only one’s own life but also that of others, however, provides the groundwork for exploring Paul’s conviction of an intimate union between Jesus’ redemptive suffering and that of our own.

### **Filling Up what is Lacking in the Suffering of Christ**

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>421</sup>

The Nicene Creed explicitly identifies Jesus’ suffering as being “for our sake.”

As Scripture attests, it was through Jesus’ death and resurrection to new life that the world was reconciled to God.<sup>422</sup> Jesus indeed suffered *for* us. He could not, however, suffer *instead of* us. Because human beings are created with free will, it is not possible even for God’s salvific initiative through Jesus to *impose* a reconciliation with God on humanity. Human beings must freely cooperate to make the redemptive suffering of Jesus bear fruit. As described in this chapter, even our everyday struggles are opportunities for us to be co-creators with Jesus of a new life in greater solidarity with God and others. Jesus explains, however, that new life is not possible without letting go of the old: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”<sup>423</sup> And, again: “whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it.”<sup>424</sup> We are not taking up our cross so long as we continue to seek ways to preserve our old life. We are not following Jesus so

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<sup>420</sup> Rom 1:1-4; 1Cor 5:11-21; Phil 2:5-11.

<sup>421</sup> <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/>, accessed on 9/21/14.

<sup>422</sup> 2Cor 5:17-20.

<sup>423</sup> John 12:24.

<sup>424</sup> Luke 17:33.

long as we keep trying to manage a way around the impalement and loss of control that comes with being nailed to a cross. The way of the cross is not simply about being willing to endure pain. It is about a death to the old self – including our will to control it.

Suffering is an encounter with something that is *not* of our own will – it is often something that we would not even have envisioned for ourselves. Thus Miller describes the opportunities presented by our experiences of suffering as part of an outward journey that involves vulnerability to the unknown. It is not enough to simply open our door to the Other while we remain steadfastly and securely in our own management of life. Miller claims that what is needed is something “radically different from welcoming the stranger into one’s home: One would have to leave one’s home and go disarmed into the territory of the stranger.” This, of course, is the kind of vulnerability embraced by Jesus as *he*, in the midst of great agony, agreed to submit to a crucifixion: “This is not what I would choose for myself; not *my* will, however, but yours be done.” No Jewish man would have wished to turn himself over to be crucified. Even beyond the excruciating torture and humiliation involved with a crucifixion, a Scriptural pronouncement was understood: “anyone who is hanged [on a tree] is a curse of God.”<sup>425</sup> Jesus did not treat even this monumental conflict as a problem he had to manage; he did not try to work out a compromise with God. Once he clearly understood what God wanted him to do he freely submitted to God’s will rather than his own. Later, when God remained silent so that Jesus’ cry from the cross went unanswered, Jesus made a further submission to the Mystery of God. There was no sign of Jesus trying to bargain with God for an answer so he could endure his suffering more easily. Because his trust in God did not depend on his

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<sup>425</sup> Deut 21:23.



understanding what God was doing in his life at that time, Jesus was able to freely and definitively place his life in God's hands even with the added weight of the mystery of it.

The mystery of suffering is inevitable in life. Our trusting submission to God in the midst of the mystery is *not* inevitable. It cannot be forced from us; it must be freely given. The social dimension of suffering was presented in this section based on an association with healthy *mutual* relationships, not a hierarchical domination of one individual or group by another – not even a domination of God over our free will. Grounded in the freedom of each individual to make his or her own choices, the social dimension of suffering reflects the reality of human mutuality. It represents a giving and receiving of love. It also represents a reciprocal impact: our response to suffering will affect, for good or ill, not only our own self but also the lives of others. We are indeed, the salt of the earth; we are adding our own “flavor” to the world – a flavor that is uniquely our own based on the choices that we make. The more our choices reflect a solidarity of love for and with others, the more potent our flavor will be.

In accepting the Mystery of God into our lives we are making ourselves vulnerable to experiencing things we never would have chosen on our own. To say “no,” to this kind of vulnerability is to risk never growing, never experiencing the reality of life beyond our own assumptive world – never experiencing a fuller life than the one we now have. It is proposed that *this* is what Paul referenced as being “lacking” in the redemptive suffering of Christ. Through Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection a New Covenant was established by God with humanity. We have the ability to be instruments of God's will in the world – to be co-creators of a new life with Jesus as the head. What is “lacking” in the redemptive suffering of Jesus is each of us freely following in the

footsteps of Jesus, uniting with him and others in order to change the world, beginning with ourselves. Paul's conviction underscores the Christian understanding that because of Jesus, suffering itself has been redeemed<sup>426</sup> and our experiences of suffering are no longer personal and private. Even what seems to be a most personal experience of suffering is now intrinsically connected to the suffering of Jesus. In addition, our response to suffering is not meant to be a private matter – Jesus' personal victory over suffering and death is now empowering us to be co-creators with him and with others in a solidarity that is meant to change the world.

Paul explains: "He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."<sup>427</sup> Paul notes, however, that just as Jesus suffered for *our* sake, we are now "constantly being given up to death *for the sake of Jesus* [italics added], so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies."<sup>428</sup> Jesus' death and resurrection 2000 years ago is a sign of hope for us today; in walking with Jesus our everyday deaths and rising to new life can be a sign of hope for others, as together we strive to bring about God's will on earth.

Prayer is essential for discerning God's will, and Jesus left us a prayer that emphasizes the goal we are called to embrace. It is so familiar to Christians that we often only mechanically say: "Your Kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Our response to suffering is an indication of how consistent our actions are with the words of the Lord's Prayer. If we want a world fashioned on the goodness and love of God – if we truly want God's will to reign - it will be necessary to seek a personal relationship with God so that we can *hear* what God is calling us to do. And then it

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<sup>426</sup> John Paul II. *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Dolori*, #19.

<sup>427</sup> 2Cor 5:15.

<sup>428</sup> 2Cor 4:11.

means saying “yes” to what God wants of us – even in the smallest of everyday matters. It means letting go of absolute control of our life so that God can take over and lead us in directions we would never choose or even anticipate on our own. It means following in the footsteps of Jesus and taking the risk to go into unexplored territory – dying to the old self in order to rise to new life.

Suffering is inevitable in life, but Jesus’ experience assures us that if God allows the suffering God has the power to bring goodness out of it – even bringing life from death – if we place our trust in God. This “Way” of Jesus will lead us to the unfamiliar and the unexpected - experiences that will be unique to our own individual spiritual journey. It will not, however, be a solitary journey into an unknown abyss. Jesus became a human being to not only show us the steps, but also to accompany us, even now, every step of the way: “I am with you always, even until the end of the age.”<sup>429</sup>

Like Jesus, we are called to love God with our whole being – with our whole mind and heart and strength. Like Jesus, we are called to discern God’s will for us as we strive to love others even as we love ourselves. Like Jesus, we will encounter suffering that we do not understand and, if left to promoting our *own* will, would prefer to avoid. *Because* of Jesus, however, we know that God has a purpose for our life, even when all seems lost. *Because* of Jesus, we can trust that God will never abandon us, even when we feel most alone and defeated. *Because* of Jesus, during even the darkest of times we can take up our cross with hope.

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<sup>429</sup> Matt 28:20.

## **CONCLUSION**

The goal of this thesis was not to solve the mystery of suffering; nor was it to minimize in any way the challenges associated with suffering. The objective was to offer concrete encouragement for the times we will inevitably encounter suffering in our lives. Although this academic quest for a reason to have hope emerged from the author's own experiences with suffering, it was also argued that there is a compelling need for a study of this type in contemporary times. In the beginning of this paper an observation was made concerning an erosion of hope in our society's approach to suffering, as evidenced by more pronounced cultural influences to avoid it. A need was proposed to consider Christianity's hope-filled approach to suffering, but to seek an understanding that would be viable in contemporary times. In this final section of the thesis a review will be made of the methodology of the project and its findings will be summarized. Attention will then be drawn to a pressing need for further research of this type, which will be followed by recommendations for further study, including an encouragement for personal enrichment.

### **Review of the Methodology**

Since the goal of the thesis involved connecting the traditional Christian concept of Jesus' redemptive suffering on the cross with suffering as it is experienced by each of us today, the author's approach to the project reflected a two-fold task. First, a contemporary understanding of how Jesus' own suffering was salvific needed to be established; second, a viable connection needed to be drawn from that Christian interpretation of Jesus' suffering to an application of it in our own lives. As presented in the first two chapters, differences between traditional and contemporary approaches

needed to be addressed not only regarding the theological concept of redemption, but also the philosophical concept of human understanding itself. A theological anthropological foundation was therefore established for the project, with an empirical rather than classical approach to the subject. Acknowledging a basic contemporary need for empirical evidence, the contributions of three significant Catholic theologians of the twentieth century were supplemented with corroborating findings from the social sciences. As detailed in Chapter 3, this approach resulted in the identification of four basic “concerns” which required exploration for the thesis. Additional insights were sought in Chapter 4 and a focused examination of the concerns was made in Chapter 5, resulting in their being developed into a framework for the research.

### **Summary of the Findings**

A contemporary theology of the cross was developed in Chapter 6 as the first two concerns of the project were addressed: 1) what is God’s relationship with humanity, and 2) how did humanity need God to save them? Rather than the hierarchical approach of classical soteriology, focus was turned toward an understanding of God in a mutual relationship with human beings.

In addressing the first concern, parallels were made between the development of healthy human relationships and the relationship between God and human beings. Scriptural and theological references were shown to concur with social scientific understandings that human beings need to give and receive love. The Christian understanding is that human beings are made in the image of God who is love. They find their own fulfillment in giving and receiving the love of others; their ultimate fulfillment is in experiencing this mutual relationship of love with God. Utilizing social scientific

resources as well as Scriptural references as a foundation, it was emphasized that the development of *trust* is fundamental to the development of healthy and mature relationships, including our relationship with God.

Focus on the second concern shifted attention to the consequences that resulted when God's gift of human freedom allowed sin, the contradiction of a relationship with God, to enter the world. A contemporary Theology of the Cross was presented that described God's salvific initiative for humanity through Jesus' at-one-ment with us on the cross. Human beings could not transcend the hopeless environment of sin that they had created for themselves; the situation of alienation from God even clouded their awareness of what they were called to be. Their salvation therefore depended on God taking the initiative while they were still sinners: God had to somehow encounter and conquer the alienation from God in which they were trapped. This redemption/reconciliation was accomplished on a cross when the God-man Jesus of Nazareth was "self-emptied" to the point of being united with humanity in their experience of separation from God *while also* remaining faithful to God throughout his horrendous ordeal. While affirming the traditional teaching of the salvific centrality of Jesus' obedience to God even on the cross, the empirical perspective of the project highlighted the importance of Jesus' *trust* in God as foundational to Jesus' obedience. Through his undeterred hope in God – even as he encountered an inexplicable and excruciating human feeling of being forsaken by God – Jesus successfully bridged the chasm that had been created between God and an alienated creation. Jesus' life, death and resurrection is a concrete witness of God's unconditional love for humanity and the extent God will go to save us.

In Chapter 7 focus was turned to the [human] subject and a consideration of the third and fourth concerns of the project: 3) how are human beings *personally* “saved?” and 4) how does the suffering of Jesus relate to the suffering of all human beings? Essential to the project was a need to establish solidarity between Jesus’ salvific suffering and the human experience of suffering as developed in this project.

Consideration of the third concern emphasized that although God took the initiative to bridge the barrier that separated God and sinners, human beings have to freely walk through the portal that God opened for them. Parallels were drawn in this section between the theologically identified means to personal salvation (i.e., a growth in faith, hope and love) and its scriptural counterpart (i.e., loving God with our whole mind, heart and strength and our neighbor as our own self). Our holistic spiritual growth was related to intellectual, emotional and behavioral growth and/or conversions that are necessary for the full development of the whole human person. Common ground was noted between social scientific observations on human development (Chapter 6) and theological descriptions of the process of conversions (Chapter 7), since both associated human growth with successful resolution of conflicts and challenges in life. Encounters with various types of suffering were thus described as potential facilitators (dependent on our free response) of different aspects (intellectual, emotional, behavioral) of human growth and development. Our responses to even “mustard seed” encounters with suffering were noted to affect our capacity to give and receive love with the totality of our whole being, thereby impacting the progress of our transcendental journey.

Addressing the 4<sup>th</sup> concern of the project – relating the suffering of Jesus to our own – affirmed that even though Jesus was the Son of God, his encounter with suffering

was authentically similar to our experience of suffering today. His cross included intellectual, affective, and behavioral challenges as part of his mission to do God's will. Feeling abandoned by God was an agonizing mystery for the God-man from Nazareth, but his response to this excruciating suffering – his undeterred trust in God's love and providence - was a human victory over the depth of hopelessness and alienation. It was a victory that *every* human being is called to experience. Jesus' hope-filled response to *his* suffering was instrumental in ushering in his role as head of a new and reconciled creation. Because of Jesus' *personal* experience of suffering and death, human beings are no longer on their own in the world – even in their greatest suffering. *Each* of us is now united with a God who is not simply *sympathetic* for us from a distance, but who is personally joined with us in an *empathetic* solidarity even in the challenges and mysteries of life. As we die with Jesus in daily taking up our own cross, we can confidently trust to be resurrected with him into an ever deepening fuller experience of life. This is not accomplished through reliance on the power of our own strength and understanding, but as Jesus accomplished it – with unwavering trust in the wisdom and love of God even in the darkest times of our life.

Building upon the project's findings regarding suffering, a practical application was made in Chapter 8 on what it means to “take up one's cross with hope” in modern times. Contemporary challenges to a more positive perspective of suffering that were raised in Chapter 1 were reexamined. The empirical approach used in the project facilitated a clarification that suffering is a consequence, not a cause, of conflicts and challenges – that suffering, in fact, can more accurately be described as our *awareness* of the existence of conflicts and challenges in life. Suffering was thus described as a teacher



providing valuable insights concerning our beliefs, our values, and our behavior when we take the time to reflect on our encounters with, and our responses to, suffering. The intrinsic *social* dimension of life that was referenced throughout the project was then applied to our experiences with suffering. Even our own most personal encounters with suffering bring with them opportunities to grow intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally not only in our own love of self, but also in our love of God and others.

Chapter 8 was concluded by drawing a more focused association of our suffering and that of Jesus Christ. Jesus has shown us that the key to suffering's potentiality is not simply about personally experiencing physical or spiritual pain. It requires giving up our own desire for control so that we become open to, rather than afraid of, the unknown – especially our vulnerability to the mystery of God. When our response to suffering is one of trusting cooperation with God as we seek God's will for us, we are actually co-creators with Jesus in a new creation. However, God has given us the freedom to ignore God's will, so we also have the ability to create a world reflective of our own human will. Our experiences of suffering remind us that this world conflicts with what we would like it to be. Our response to suffering, especially in terms of whether our trust is placed in God or solely on human initiatives, is an indication of the kind of world we are choosing to create.

### **A Pressing Need for Studies of this Type**

Reflection on the findings of this study reveals the impact our *perceptions* of reality have not only on our understanding of suffering but also on the values and beliefs we develop as a result of them. It was emphasized in the project that differing perceptions exist not only throughout the centuries but even among contemporaries living

in modern times. This clearly demonstrates that perceptions and human understandings in themselves are not complete and guaranteed representatives of reality. Yet our perceptions and personal understandings of life – including our experiences of suffering - will influence decisions we make that affect both our own lives as well as the lives of future generations.

The theological insights of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar were fundamental to the conclusions of the project, but the methodology of Bernard Lonergan was instrumental to the development of it. Lonergan’s own conclusions underscored the importance of conscious and intentional attentiveness to the perceptions upon which we base our beliefs. One of his conclusions is especially pertinent to this project as he claimed:

For among the evils that afflict man, none is graver than the erroneous beliefs which at once distort his mind and make systematic the aberrations of his conduct.<sup>430</sup>

As Lonergan suggested, the greatest evils are those which promote *systematic* misconduct, such as were addressed in Chapter 3 of this project. The institutionalization of evils such as patriarchy and slavery, still evident in our world today, represent “erroneous” beliefs that were embraced and became difficult to reverse. The institution of these evils did not occur because human beings were seeking to do evil; they are examples of how the fullness of life for human beings can be thwarted by erroneous convictions which are believed to be promoting something good. Lonergan recognized the gravity of this situation: anyone who is immersed in an environment of erroneous beliefs will have great difficulty in being objective enough to recognize them as such. If these beliefs

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<sup>430</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, editors, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2005), 687.

become systematic they represent dire consequences not only for individuals, but humanity as a whole.

The author is arguing that erroneous beliefs are being promoted today regarding our approach to suffering. The assisted suicide movement was highlighted as challenging a time-honored prohibition against taking one's own life. However, the assisted suicide movement can be associated today with movements as diverse as euthanasia, abortion, and embryonic stem cell research, all of which can be described as attempting to "solve" a problem of suffering by taking life into our own hands. We are at a crossroad in our society today in terms of our approach to suffering. More than ever before, we need to seek a better understanding of the mystery of suffering itself, and a better understanding of possible consequences associated with the way we respond to it.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The findings in the project affirm our ability to make a difference in the world, even if our contributions seem miniscule in themselves. Lonergan provided a framework for making conscious and intentional choices; his methodology is grounded in attentiveness to our life experiences and encourages a process of interpreting, judging and then responding to them. Along that line, four recommendations for further academic study will now be offered. A closing summary will then be made to encourage further *personal* study and enrichment. It is hoped these recommendations will foster an awareness of issues associated with suffering today and attentiveness to the difference we make through our responses to them.

1. In-depth studies are recommended into contemporary movements which promote "solutions" to some form of suffering by taking human life into our own hands.

Further research is encouraged for a better understanding of beliefs being endorsed by these types of challenges. Traditional mores are based on the concept of the intrinsic value of every human being, calling for societal protection of each life from conception until natural death. How is the value of life being redefined and what are possible consequences of placing responsibility on an individual to decide when a human life – their own or another’s - is worth living?

2. The social dimension of life which was highlighted by this project raises the possibility for consequences on others even from our “personal” choices. This perspective is shared by groups such as *Not Dead Yet*, *Californians Against Assisted Suicide*, and the British organization *Care Not Killing*. They are united in warning of social consequences for the most vulnerable members of society if laws are enacted to allow assisted suicide as a “personal” response to suffering:

Any change in the law to allow assisted suicide or euthanasia would place pressure on vulnerable people to end their lives for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden upon others. This would especially affect people who are disabled, elderly, sick or depressed.<sup>431</sup>

The response to suffering offered by these groups can be examined in terms of addressing not only physical pain, but also the emotional and spiritual needs of the one who is suffering. Further study could focus on the difference we can make on behalf of others through continuing education on the subject, through prayerful and legislative advocacy, as well as through our outreach to family members and others who need hope in the midst of their suffering.

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<sup>431</sup> See: <http://www.carenotkilling.org.uk/about/>, accessed on September 20, 2015.

3. Although not as highly publicized as “Posttraumatic Stress” a condition described as “Posttraumatic Growth” has been identified by modern psychologists:

Posttraumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises. It is manifested in a variety of ways, including an increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life. Although the term is new, the idea that great good can come from great suffering is ancient. ... It is also suggested that posttraumatic growth mutually interacts with life wisdom and the development of the life narrative, and that it is an ongoing process, not a static outcome.<sup>432</sup>

This definition is a social scientific affirmation of the findings of this project regarding a “redemptive” value for suffering. Further study is encouraged to counter the cultural emphasis on negative associations with suffering by seeking a deeper understanding of social scientific evidence, such as posttraumatic growth, which supports the possibility of positive consequences of suffering.

4. This project associated a positive approach to suffering with conscious openness to God’s will, which is another counter-cultural concept today. Twelve Step Programs are a commonly recognized secular movement which claims personal transformation can come through reliance on a Higher Power rather than seeking one’s own control of life. Highly recommended for further research on a *Christian* practice for discerning God’s will is the Ignatian “Consciousness Examen.” Not to be confused with the “examination of conscience,” which focuses on the morality of one’s actions, the Consciousness Examen promotes a

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<sup>432</sup> Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun. *Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence* in “Psychological Inquiry” 2004, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1-18, p. 1. Accessed August 16, 2015, [http://data.psych.udel.edu/abelcher/Shared%20Documents/3%20Psychopathology%20\(27\)/Tedeschi,%20Calhoun,%202004.pdf](http://data.psych.udel.edu/abelcher/Shared%20Documents/3%20Psychopathology%20(27)/Tedeschi,%20Calhoun,%202004.pdf).

conscious and intentional daily recognition of God's activities in one's life, which then facilitates a clearer discernment of God's will.<sup>433</sup>

As noted in the Preface, three of the author's personal questions about "redemptive" suffering served as a catalyst to the project. Answers to those questions were realized in the process of developing the thesis and will now be presented as its conclusion. It is hoped that the author's experience can encourage others to pursue their own questions about suffering, leading them to a better understanding of how the mystery of suffering can be reconciled with belief and trust in an unconditionally loving God.

***If God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-loving, couldn't God have forgiven sin without the violence of the crucifixion?***

If redemption from sin was only about a need to be pardoned, sin conceivably *could* have been forgiven by God through an exercise of hierarchical power over disobedient subjects. God, however, chose a salvific route that would result in a personal and reconciling *at-one-ment* between humanity and God. It was a route that was much more costly for God: God didn't even spare the Son of God from those who would crucify him. But it concretely demonstrated the value God gives to human beings and God's desire for a personal relationship with them.

***How does the agonizing execution of an innocent person "atone" for sin?***

Two wrongs do not make a right – allowing Jesus to be crucified does not imply that God caused or even condoned an evil such as a crucifixion as a means to atone for sin. Consistent with God's respect for the use of our free will even today, God refused to hinder human beings from using their freedom even when that freedom led to crucifying

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<sup>433</sup> Recommended as an introduction to this practice for those desiring further *personal* research and spiritual development is "Consciousness Examen" by George Aschenbrenner, S.J., (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007).

the Son of God made flesh. But, as Jesus' Resurrection vividly demonstrated, God's respect for human freedom does not inhibit *God's* freedom *and* power from having the last word in bringing good out of even the most horrendous evil. This project also makes a distinction that it was not the pain and suffering of the crucifixion *in itself* that saved us: it was Jesus' hope-filled *response* to his crucifixion - his trusting faithfulness to God in spite of his agonizing ordeal. It took Jesus' free will cooperating with God's grace to bring about not only an atonement *of* humanity but a reconciling at-one-ment *with* them.

***How could one man, even a God-man, being hung on a cross 2000 years ago make a difference with the way God accepts us today?***

Jesus' experience on the cross 2000 years ago did not change the way God accepts us today. Quite the contrary, it vividly demonstrates the extent God will go to make a personal relationship with us possible, and the immense power God has to do so. Jesus' victory on the cross allowed God's all-encompassing love and mercy to conquer the hopelessness of our human situation. Since Jesus' suffering and death mirrors our own life experiences, his trusting faithfulness to God on the cross is also an example and an encouragement for us in the conflicts and challenges we face today. Moreover, because of the agonizing depths of Jesus' own human suffering, Jesus himself is now personally and irrevocably united with us even in our darkest experiences, offering us the help and power of God as we take up our own cross and follow him. Jesus himself explained that the purpose of his human life is to benefit our own: "*I came so that [you] might have life and have it more abundantly.*"<sup>434</sup>

What is the Christian response to such love? It is to be Jesus' disciple, taking up our own cross and following in his footsteps - his life, death, and resurrection - on a daily

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<sup>434</sup> John 10:10.

basis.<sup>435</sup> The Christian response is to approach suffering with trust in God's love for us, and confidence in God's power to bring good out of even the most hopeless experiences. Suffering may be inevitable in our lives. It may always remain a great mystery of life. But Jesus is the reason for our hope as we take up our cross and simply follow him.

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<sup>435</sup> Luke 9:23.



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