

**An Evaluation of Hans  
Urs von Balthasar's  
Critique of Karl Rahner's  
Theology of the Cross**

Submitted to Mary Immaculate College,  
University of Limerick for the award of  
Master of Arts by Research and  
Dissertation

August 2014

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***Declaration***

**Title:** An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Critique of Karl Rahner's Theology of the Cross

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**Declaration:** I, Thomas Carroll, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research and it does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

Submitted to Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, August 2014.

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## *Acknowledgments*

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of a number of people. This is my opportunity to thank them.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor and Head of Department, Prof. Eamonn Conway. His knowledge, insight, expertise and support were instrumental in the process of this thesis coming to fruition. His abundant patience in dealing with my many, many questions has been very much appreciated. His continued faith in my abilities has been a great motivation and without his encouragement, I could not possibly have completed such a work.

I would also like to thank my internal examiner, Dr. Eugene Duffy and my external examiner, Prof. Declan Marmion. Their constructive advice and recommendations have been very welcome and appreciated.

I would like to express my thanks to the academic and administrative staff of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies for their support, guidance and assistance over the past two years. I thank them for having awarded me my teaching assistantship and their generous conference funding throughout my postgraduate studies. It was a pleasure to work with them and a privilege to learn from them. I am a better teacher now, thanks to the opportunities and experiences made possible by them.

*"I cannot teach anybody anything; I can only make them think."*

Socrates

To my mother Sheila, I thank her for her abundant patience and support over the past two years. Her encouragement and understanding have been much appreciated.

And to my other family; Alisha, Lisa, Karen and Mairéad, I whole-heartedly thank them for making these last two years infinitely easier than I feared they would be. They were a constant source of kindness, care, laughter and support which got me through the difficult days. I would have been lost without them.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my late father Noel, who passed away during the early stages of this undertaking. To complete a rigorous piece of research such as this requires determination, mental strength and a sheer stubbornness to see the work through. As these are all qualities I inherited from him, I can think of no better tribute to him than this completed body of work.

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This work offers examines the theology of the cross found in Karl Rahner's writings, with particular regard to Hans Urs von Balthasar's critique of this area of Rahner's work . This work maintains that Karl Rahner does have a coherent theology of the cross, albeit that it differs from that of Balthasar's. This work draws in particular from scholars in the English language. Chapter 1 outlines what is meant by a "theology of the cross". This is achieved by briefly exploring the approaches to the cross offered by five major theologians. Following on from this, certain key criteria are outlined to determine in the context of the debate between Balthasar and Rahner, what can be deemed necessary to constitute a theology of the cross. Chapter 2 investigates the context of the criticism aimed at Rahner regarding his theology of the cross and serves to evaluate the critique offered by Balthasar. The next two chapters are an examination of where the cross is situated in Rahner's theology. A central contention of this work is that Rahner's theology of the cross is both explicitly expressed and implicitly implied in his work, and are both influenced by Ignatian spirituality. Chapter 3 presents the explicit, more thematic theology of the cross found in Rahner's work, with particular emphasis on Rahner's text; *Spiritual Exercises*. Chapter 4 offers the implicit but significant role the cross plays in Rahner's theology; particularly in his theology of death, theology of Eucharist and meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Finally, Chapter 5 applies the criteria outlined in the first chapter to evaluate our findings from Chapters 3 and 4. It is demonstrated that Rahner is not lacking a theology of the cross as Balthasar would claim.

All scriptural references in this work are from the *New Revised Standard Bible* (NY: HarperCollins, 1993) ed. Wayne A. Meeks.

**Introduction:**

At first glance, Pope Francis and the theologian Karl Rahner do not have much in common. One is the Argentine former Cardinal, outspoken and inspiring in his role to revitalise the Church during a traumatic and damaging recent history. The second is a quiet academic whom the Vatican viewed as troublesome yet influential, but who was never considered for the College of Cardinals. Yet, similarities do exist. Both are Jesuits, both are advocates of Christ redeeming all, even those who do not believe in him, and both can be characterised by their efforts to engage with the burning issues facing modern society. It is 30 years since Rahner's death, but in the present social climate and under the current papacy, it would seem that rarely has there been such a need for Rahner's theology to be re-visited.

In light of this, it is our contention that another theological giant of the twentieth century, Hans Urs von Balthasar, launched a critique of Karl Rahner that needs to be evaluated; that is, the claim that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross. Furthermore, no significant body of research has been undertaken in this area in the English language, using specifically English language resources. This work will set out to evaluate this critique and definitively outline the place of the cross in Rahner's theology.

Chapter 1 will first examine what specifically is meant by "theology of the cross". A history of the term will be briefly explored, along with its relationship to a theology of the Incarnation. The cross will then be examined in the context of how five major contemporary theologians approach the cross. These will include the great Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, the Swiss former Jesuit theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Belgian theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, the Reformed Christian German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann and the Spanish liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino. Having explored these respective approaches to the cross, consistent key themes will arise out of what criteria can be deemed essential to any theology of the cross. It is not my aim to attempt to define what a prescriptive theology of the cross must contain. Rather, the criteria chosen will be based in the context of these contemporary

theologians, who have each approached the cross in a distinctive manner. This, along with insights developed from the work of Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan, will lead me to six key criteria to assess the validity of Hans Urs von Balthasar's critique of Rahner's theology of the cross. These will be:

1. A theology of the cross must address the sinful nature of humanity;
2. Jesus' death on the cross cannot be separated from his obedience to the Father's will;
3. The cross cannot be adequately addressed without linking it to the resurrection;
4. Jesus' death on the cross must be understood within the context of his life and ministry;
5. The place of representative language used to discuss the event of the cross;
6. A theology of the cross must address the problem of suffering.

Chapter 2 will concentrate on Balthasar's critique itself, in an effort to understand the context in which it was said and why it was made in such a hostile and trenchant way in *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (English translation: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* [San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994]). A number of implicit factors in the critique will be explored. These include Balthasar's own background, his polemical style, his own relationship with Rahner, his concerns on the direction of the Church and his reservations over Rahner's philosophical influences. There will also be a clear parallel recognised between Balthasar's treatment of Rahner and the manner in which Karl Barth critiqued Friedrich Schleiermacher; that both critiques were not totally fair in their application. Rahner's response to the criticism will be explored, and also the positions of Balthasar and Moltmann on the suffering of God will be evaluated as this is a significant point of contention between the respective parties. Rahner's consistent protection of the full humanity and full divinity of Jesus will be explored, as it is central to approaching Rahner's Christology, along with Christology's relationship with anthropology.

Chapter 3 will contend that Karl Rahner has an explicit theology of the cross, and that this is an important component in his anthology of work. The word “explicit” A number of significant examples of Rahner’s explicit theology of the cross will be explored; none more central than that of the *Spiritual Exercises* (Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises* [London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967]). The text will reveal the distinctively Ignatian spirituality that is discovered in Karl Rahner’s theology and how in particular Rahner’s clearly expressed theology of the cross is influenced by this spirituality. The First Week of the *Exercises* will explore the reality of sin, judgement and hell. The Second Week will concentrate on imitating the life of Christ and taking up the cross in our own lives. The Third Week will focus on the passion, death and abandonment of Jesus which reaches its culmination on the cross. Finally, the Fourth Week will deal with Christ’s resurrection and how it is intimately connected to his death. These Four Weeks will demonstrate Rahner’s explicit theology of the cross which is permeated by his Ignatian influences.

A number of critiques aimed at Rahner’s explicitly formulated theology of the cross. These will include allegations that Rahner has diluted any salvific meaning of the cross into God’s salvific will. Also explored will be claims that Rahner has not made clear the role of Mary in our redemption, Rahner’s approach to Christ’s death is limited by philosophical speculation and Rahner has neglected the pneumatological element in his theology of the cross.

Chapter 4 will contend that Karl Rahner’s work contains an implicit theology of the cross. The contention here is that Rahner’s anthology contains a latent and deductible theology of the cross. This will be achieved by focusing on three particular areas of Rahner’s theology: his theology of death including martyrdom, his theology of Eucharist and his meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Rahner’s theology of death will be revealed to only find meaning in Christ’s death. This will include the death itself but also living as an anticipation and acceptance of death. This will lead to an exploration of Rahner’s critique of Anselm’s satisfaction theory, which will highlight what Rahner considers unacceptable for a theology of the cross. Rahner’s approach to martyrdom will also reveal the Ignatian element of calmly accepting the sin of the world and

trusting in God's mystery, which is consistently demonstrated in his theology of the cross. Rahner's theology of Eucharist will concentrate on receiving the sacrament which enables us to participate in the Passion of the Lord and become more attuned to the sufferings of Christ. The question will also be raised as to whether Rahner's Sacramentology is a further gateway in exploring Rahner's theology of the cross. Rahner's meditations on the Sacred Heart will examine how he reflects on Jesus' sufferings out of profound love for us, and how on the cross, Jesus' heart bleeds in love for us.

The central criticism of Rahner's implicit theology of the cross will also be evaluated: that Rahner's refusal to incorporate Christ's vicarious representation of our sins into his theology limits his contribution to a theology of the cross. This critique by Balthasar will include shortcomings in biblical exegesis and how Christ's death is truly and uniquely "for us" rather than a death in solidarity with us.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the criteria outlined in Chapter 1 will be applied to Rahner's explicit and implicit theology of the cross, which have been explored in Chapters 3 and 4. Each criterion will be an objective evaluation of an aspect of Rahner's theology of the cross. The purpose of this evaluation is to demonstrate that in the context of contemporary theology, Rahner does possess a theology of the cross, and this can be demonstrated through a careful and non-selective reading of Rahner. This evaluation will be a direct response to Balthasar's critique of Rahner and it is our contention that a fairer comment by Balthasar would have been; "Rahner lacks *Balthasar's* theology of the cross."

## **Chapter 1- The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross**

- 1.1 Chapter Introduction
- 1.2 History of the Term
- 1.3 Theology of the Cross v Theology of Incarnation
- 1.4 The Cross in Contemporary Times
- 1.5 Contemporary Theologies of the Cross
  - 1.5.1 Karl Barth
  - 1.5.2 Hans Urs von Balthasar
  - 1.5.3 Edward Schillebeeckx
  - 1.5.4 Jürgen Moltmann
  - 1.5.5 Jon Sobrino
  - 1.5.6 Conclusion
- 1.6 The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross
- 1.7 Chapter Conclusion

## **1.1 Chapter Introduction:**

The purpose of this work is to examine Hans Urs von Balthasar's critique that Karl Rahner lacks a theology of the cross, and see whether this claim remains valid in light of a critical evaluation of Rahner's theology of the cross. But before I can begin to examine the nature of the claim itself and subsequently evaluate the charge, it is important to first discuss what is meant by a "theology of the cross". What does it mean and what is its significance for humanity?

Specific criteria will be outlined, which will be searched for in Rahner's works to see does he offer a coherent theory and interpretation of the cross that can be seen as reasonable and consistent. Differing approaches to the cross offered by a number of contemporary theologians will then be examined. The aim of this is to demonstrate a fuller understanding of what is meant by a theology of the cross. It will highlight central themes of the cross, while also noting unique approaches some theologians take to a theology of the cross.

## **1.2 History of the Term:**

"Theology of the cross" has been defined as: "*the effort to explain the meaning of Jesus' death in relationship to God and to human beings.*"<sup>1</sup> To put it another way, it is asking the question who God is and how God saves, and what the significance is of Jesus' death in respect of this. The term *theologia crucis* was coined first by Martin Luther and was used to argue against the *theologia gloria* in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518.

A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is. This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers, works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls 'enemies of the cross of Christ' ([Phil. 3:18](#)), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Orlando Espín & James Nickoloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007) 196

<sup>2</sup> Thesis 21, Heidelberg Disputation, 1518 <http://bookofconcord.org/heidelberg.php#21> (Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2013)

## ***Chapter 1- The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross***

This was Luther's opposition to a theology of glory, a theology that would proclaim that God was pleased with good deeds and sincere human effort. This theology promoted the idea that God's ways can be generally understood by human reason. This was a theology that put faith in the glory of human reason and knowledge rather than in the mystery of God, in the midst of suffering and contradiction. The referencing of Luther as the person who coined the term is done so carefully. Luther's interpretation of the cross is not being equated with the more modern approach of contemporary theologians; Luther is being referenced simply to offer the historical context of the genesis of the term. It is acknowledged as one aspect that Luther has introduced. This is the sobering pragmatism that we are not all saved; that humanity is in need of redemption from the sinful condition it inhabits.

### **1.3 Theology of the Cross v Theology of Incarnation:**

Joseph Ratzinger proposes that a theology of the cross:

...leads to a dynamic, topical, anti-world conception of Christianity, a conception which understands Christianity only as discontinuously but constantly appearing breach in the self-confidence of man and his institutions, including the Church.<sup>3</sup>

Ratzinger's bold and striking words highlight that a theology of the cross seeks to rescue humanity from complacency. Humanity's confidence should not be based on self and simply to be a Christian should not be seen as a guarantee of salvation. The cross is not where complacent Christians go, expecting their sins to be a minor matter compared to the unique event of God and man interlocking in the Incarnation. What is evident here is an attempt to remind the Christian to remain humble and grounded.

The infinite magnitude of God becoming man does not equate to simple and easily accessible salvation. Humanity's sin must be addressed. At the cross, the pride of sinful humanity and the arrogance towards salvation in God is defeated. The cross keeps Christians grounded in the reality of their condition, humbling themselves to realise that just because Jesus died for us does not mean we are

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1969) 171

saved. Unless Christ's example is followed in taking up our cross in life and following the radical message of Jesus, we cannot understand the meaning of the cross.

Here, Ratzinger is comparing a theology of the cross to a theology of Incarnation and from this he denotes the points of polarity between the two. This lends itself to the attitude that the cross is not for the optimist who can simply enjoy the beauty and joy of God's creation. A theology of the cross reminds humankind not to look only to the Incarnation in its quest for salvation. While the interlocking of God and man is so critically important, the cross is the reminder to humanity to humbly work towards salvation, not assuming it is a given because of the Incarnation.

#### **1.4 The Cross in Contemporary Times:**

The cross is hugely important for those who suffer in society; those who are marginalised, endure pains and sorrows and ask; "What does it mean to believe in God?" This is a theology that is unsentimental, as it is centred in trying to find God in the heartbreak, suffering and pain of a life tainted by sin. Through it, we learn who God is and how God saves. It highlights the utter weakness of the human condition; how we suffer in our human experiences and how through Jesus' death on the cross, we can find solace in God's solidarity with us.

It has been noted that: "In recent years, theologians... have increasingly turned their attention to how the Cross reveals Jesus in solidarity with all victims."<sup>4</sup> In light of the horrors of the last century, namely the Second World War and the Holocaust, there has been a turn among contemporary theologians to re-evaluate suffering humanity's relationship with Christ through the cross. This has led to various interpretations of the cross and its meaning by established theologians. Of course, other aspects are essential in the development of a theologian's approach to the cross, as we shall see in this chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> Orlando Espín & James Nickoloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007) 196

### **1.5 Contemporary Theologies of the Cross:**

What will now be presented is a brief genealogy of theology of the cross in the past century by focusing on the works of five major theologians of the time. Each is unique in itself but shares similarities and differences to each other in their discourse.<sup>5</sup> Their overall theological method, their culture and their personal experiences have had a massive effect in the conditioning of their respective theologies of the cross.

The genealogy will include the father of a contemporary theology of the cross, Karl Barth. This will be followed by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who was influenced by Barth and developed a profound and unique *theologia gloria crucis*. Next will be Edward Schillebeeckx, who offers another Catholic perspective but one that is unique in its more negative approach to the cross. Finally, the contributions of two liberation theologians will be explored. The first is Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, who seeks to reconcile a suffering God with suffering humanity. The second is Jon Sobrino whose theology is rooted in the struggles for freedom in the face of political oppression in Latin America. This has led to the development of a unique theology of the cross. By briefly examining each perspective, a more comprehensive picture of what a theology of the cross encapsulates will be developed.

These brief overviews of contemporary theologies of the cross illustrate that there are sometimes striking differences in how leading theologians interpret the significance of the cross. However, these theologies also reveal significant similarities in how they address and explore the meaning of the cross. In this way, essential criteria for a theology of the cross will emerge. In understanding

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<sup>5</sup> Anne Murphy, Theological Trends: Contemporary theologies of the cross I, *The Way*, 28/2 (1988) 149-163 <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/28Murphy.pdf> (accessed on 20th September 2012)

Anne Murphy's article provided me with an excellent structure to develop an approach to exploring contemporary theologies of the cross. Four of the theologians I explore are also examined by her, but in no way is her work the basis of my research. Balthasar, Schillebeeckx, Moltmann and Sobrino offer four of the most distinctive approaches to the cross in the last century and this is why I chose them. My research on these theologians was based predominately on primary sources and the distinctive approaches offered in my research and in the article cited should be clear to the reader.

these criteria, I am better equipped to examine Balthasar's critique of Rahner. I begin with Karl Barth.

### **1.5.1 Karl Barth:**

Karl Barth is often regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> His massive theological output, characterized by his thirteen volume-work *Church Dogmatics* is one of the largest works of systematic theology ever produced. His theology has been called "dialectical" in that it heavily emphasized the transcendence of God and the sinfulness of humanity. Barth sought to balance the two sides of God and the human. This "balancing act" is seen most clearly by contrasting with his early emphasis on God, that is, God's utter otherness and distance from humanity as well as the created world with his later emphasis on the humanity of God.

Barth writes early in his *Church Dogmatics* that; "Dogmatics is possible only as a theologia crucis."<sup>7</sup> This would imply that the cross is crucial to Barth's project. What could be more accurate is that the self-revelation of God on the cross is critical to Barth's project. Barth is influenced by Luther in his theology of the cross. Rather than focus on the divine glory found in the risen Lord, Barth followed Luther's emphasis on the suffering Christ on the cross, which is the summit of God's revelation. The suffering of Christ is the suffering of God and so we come to know God at Golgotha. This influence is seen in Barth's writing:

...nothing demonstrates more fully than the cross how great is the omnipotence of God's love- so great that God can be weak and indeed powerless, as a human being can be weak and powerless.<sup>8</sup>

This epistemological element that Barth uses is a sign of Luther's influence on his theology of the cross, but Barth does not simply copy Luther's work. Barth disagrees with Luther on certain aspects of the cross. Luther articulates the notion of God on the cross, Who is both hidden and revealed. This proposal of

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<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 76

<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010) 14

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 129

## **Chapter 1- The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross**

God being both hidden and revealed verges on contradictory at times.<sup>9</sup> For Barth, any such contradiction that could exist in God would be blasphemous. Barth highlights that there is no paradox in God, for He is Lord of contradiction.

He makes His own the being of man in contradiction against Him, but He does not make common cause with it. He also makes His own the being of man under the curse of this contradiction, but in order to do away with it as He suffers it. He acts as Lord over this contradiction even as He Himself subjects Himself to it.<sup>10</sup>

Geoffrey Bromiley, who has written extensively on Barth, makes note of Barth's condemnation of contradiction in God as "corrupt and pagan"<sup>11</sup> which Bromiley calls trenchant and a little mischievous.<sup>12</sup>

Barth also stresses that unlike Luther, one need have no opposition between *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae*. *Theologia gloriae* focuses more on Jesus being raised for our justification and is not to be confused with *theologia gloria*, which puts faith in the glory of human reason and knowledge rather than in the mystery of God, and was opposed by Luther. Barth's theology of the cross insists that one cannot remove the resurrection from the cross. "Of course there is no Easter without Good Friday, but equally certainly there is no Good Friday without Easter!"<sup>13</sup> Barth attempts to find the balance between the events of Jesus' death on Good Friday and the resurrection on Easter Sunday. For Barth, the crucifixion and resurrection are ultimately one in unbreakable unity. "The crucifixion of Jesus has made an end for us, and his resurrection has made a new beginning with us."<sup>14</sup> The humiliation and exhalation of Christ find their significance in the fact that this is God's Son; the man who is abandoned and broken. It is God who humbles Himself into the situation of sinful humanity.

God's act of grace is putting Himself in the human's place and enabling humankind to be reconciled to God. "God's humility is high humility, from start

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, Trans by J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1957) 100

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1* trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 185

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 129

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 181

<sup>13</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (NY: Harper & Row Pub, 1959) 114

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 345

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to finish the miracle of free grace.”<sup>15</sup> This humility does not take away from the majesty and Lordship of God. This reconciliation represents such a humility, that God allows Christ to take the place of the sinner so that the ‘Judge may be judged in our place’<sup>16</sup>. This is achieved through the obedience of the Son to the will of the one he called Abba. This act is ‘for us’, as God puts Himself in the predicament of humanity.

He makes the misery of His creature His own. To what end? So that His creature may go out freely, so that the burden which it has laid upon itself may be borne, borne away.<sup>17</sup>

This substitution reveals God’s selfless love and mercy, to take on humanity’s sin and allow reconciliation to occur. Humanity suffers death as a consequence of sin, but in the resurrection humanity is gifted a new beginning. Barth recognises the cross as the integral attribute of Christ’s royal office. His death is the goal of his existence and the new opening of ours. He offers three answers for how this is so.

### **1. The cross fulfils the self-humbling of the Incarnation:<sup>18</sup>**

The Word is made flesh and faces suffering and persecution throughout his life. From being refused entry to an inn at birth, to being treated with hostility and disdain during his ministry, the life of Jesus is not an easy one. On the cross, the humiliation of the Son is ultimately realised in a criminal’s death. To be abandoned on the cross and in those moments for his ministry to appear a failure is the nadir of Jesus’ life. Yet this moment of absolute agony is endured in complete obedience to God and crystallises the depth and fulfilment of the Word’s self-humiliation.

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<sup>15</sup> John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000) 120

<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 273

<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (NY: Harper & Row Pub, 1959) 116

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 203

**2. At the cross Christ genuinely embraced our situation and radically transformed it:<sup>19</sup>**

The Son accepts the burden of humanity's sin and experiences what is totally alien to him; the vileness of sin. He pays the ultimate price for our sin, not only dying but also experiencing the death of one forsaken by God. We could not rebuild a reconciliatory relationship with God left to our own devices. Through a free act of grace by God, Christ radically changes our tragic condition, freeing us from the bondage of sin by offering himself. He becomes the victim despite being without sin. He transforms our sorrowful state into one in which we can be reconciled to God.

**3. His determination for the vicarious act of the cross has the character of an act of God, for if the death is the goal, it is not the end, for he is resurrected from death:<sup>20</sup>**

Through God's salvific grace and love, humanity is redeemed. Christ accepts death on the cross which is the summit and ultimate aim of his ministry, and does so in complete faith in God. He cannot know that God will resurrect him but in obedience faces death in the hope that this is not the ultimate, tragic end. The resurrection is the vindication of Good Friday, that Jesus's death was not in vain and that death was not destroyed for humanity. As Jesus rose from the dead, humanity now has hope of a new beginning. God's salvific will allows humankind to be raised from the dead through surrender on the cross.

Balthasar's book on Barth, *The Theology of Karl Barth*<sup>21</sup> highlights the impact he had on Balthasar's own theology. What is most evident about Barth's influence on Balthasar is that Barth's chief concern is re-orientating the focus of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992)

theologians to what it should be, namely, God's revelation in Christ. Balthasar's focus on Christ can be seen as directly meriting from the work of Barth.<sup>22</sup>

### **1.5.2 Hans Urs von Balthasar**

As the aim of this work is to evaluate Balthasar's criticism of Rahner's lack of a theology of the cross, it is important then to look briefly at the theology of the cross put forward by the former. While Balthasar is the chief critic of Rahner in this work, he needs to be included in this chronology due to his unique contribution to this branch of theology. Whatever about the argument as to whether Rahner has an implicit or explicit theology of the cross, there can be no doubts over the elaborate Christocentric theology put forward by Balthasar. Balthasar has the most distinctive and profound theory of the cross in Catholic theology, a *theologia gloria crucis*. Heavily influenced by the approach of Karl Barth, his rich, vivid theology carries within it a dialectical approach to the cross. The Son falling into suffering, death and the emptiness of this death reveals God in His most complete glory.

One of his most celebrated works, *Mysterium Paschale*, reveals most explicitly a theology of the cross, using the Easter event as the basis of the drama of salvation. What is central to the Easter mystery for Balthasar is the Son's complete obedience to the will of the Father. In this drama, the human form of the Son is shattered in death in obedience to the Father's will. In this moment on the cross, both the glory of the "hidden" God and the depraved depths of the human condition in its sinfulness are revealed.

Like Moltmann, Balthasar writes of the Paschal Mystery affecting the relationship of Father and Son within the Trinity. In the Passion, the Trinity is distorted as the Father becomes judge and the Son becomes the sinner. The Spirit permits the darkness of this separation and abandonment. This distancing between Father and Son begins in the Garden of Gethsemane, where

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Wigley, *Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Critical Engagement* (1<sup>st</sup> Edition) (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007) 249

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Jesus is confronted with the monstrous darkness of sin and struggles to say this “Yes” to God, in the face of the suffering that is to come.

Neither the sleeplessness which Jesus demands, nor the purely human fear and agitation before the suffering can explain this outbreak of his innermost substance; only a conflict between God in heaven and God the representative of sinners on earth can explain it.<sup>23</sup>

On Good Friday, the Son cries out in abandonment on the cross for a God that has forsaken him, but he is left alone. Every other human separation and abandonment can only happen within this greatest of all abandonments. The freely accepted death of the Son on Good Friday enables all the sins of humanity to be destroyed by God’s love.

The death of the Son on Good Friday leads into the silence of Holy Saturday. “It is for the sake of this day that the Son became man.”<sup>24</sup> Here lies Balthasar’s most profound contribution to the theology of the cross. Inspired by the meditations from mystic Adrienne Von Speyer, Jesus’ descent into hell is explored as the Word of God silent and alone. Jesus descends into the realm of the dead, not in glory but in all the chaos and God-forsakenness of the sinner. The Son is like a leaf, blown about in a tempest, falling to the ground at last in no control of itself. Jesus experiences the self-made hell of humanity’s final “No” to the life of God, thus experiencing hell itself. Humankind has chosen self over God and now is cut off from God. Here, the Word is silent. Yet there is still the hidden hope that even in the deepest realms of self-exile from God, God’s love is present. Rowan Williams writes that God is actually revealed on Holy Saturday.<sup>25</sup> God’s enduring of the depths of emptiness is not privileging human suffering over the impassability of God as Moltmann would argue. God is acting in the actual fullness of God, because God can only be in the hell of humanity because of whom and what God eternally is.

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<sup>23</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl & Werner Löser (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1982) 25

<sup>24</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 49

<sup>25</sup> Rowan Williams, Balthasar and the Trinity in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 37

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“Like Barth, the atoning event of the cross is the real why and wherefore of Jesus’ incarnation and human existence.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus’ death on the cross does not reconcile an angry God to the world. It reconciles a sinful world to a loving God, through the Son giving up His life. The infinite depths of God’s love and the sorrowful failing of humanity are such that only this radical language of atonement and substitution can possibly convey the incomprehensible action of love that God has willed for us to be saved. On the cross, the Trinity is revealed; the Three Persons united in selfless love.

The Son’s Cross is the revelation of the Father’s love, and the bloody outpouring of that love comes to its inner fulfilment in the shedding abroad of their common Spirit into the hearts of men.<sup>27</sup>

This salvation is only received when it enters into the hearts of men and women. This is the work of the Spirit, the configuration of the Christian who is redeemed with the Crucified and glorified Lord.<sup>28</sup>

### **1.5.3 Edward Schillebeeckx**

The theologians I have written of so far could be said to be characterised by their respective theologies of the cross. This is not the case with Edward Schillebeeckx. Like Rahner, his theological output is huge, but the cross would not be seen as the definitive component of his work. For Sobrino, Moltmann or Balthasar, this would be the case as the cross is so central to their theology. Schillebeeckx provides a valuable contrast to Moltmann, whom he strongly disagrees with on the meaning of the cross. So in the context of Schillebeeckx’s theology of the cross, it is a case of what the cross doesn’t mean for us rather than what it does mean.

Whereas Moltmann would speak of God abandoning Jesus on the cross, Schillebeeckx would speak of God being compassionately present with Jesus on

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<sup>26</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl & Werner Löser (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1982) 25

<sup>27</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 140

<sup>28</sup> Anne Murphy, Theological Trends: Contemporary theologies of the cross I, *The Way*, 28/2 (1988) 152 <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/28Murphy.pdf> (accessed on 20th September 2012)

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the cross. This is the first point of contention between the two. The Father does not hand over the Son to a violent and brutal death. For Schillebeeckx, God, being an eternal source of love, wills life for humanity and not death and suffering. Like Rahner, Schillebeeckx avoids language of atonement as he does not want to present God as sadistic and vengeful. To follow Moltmann's discourse would be to make God less good than any normal human being, as no good parent would willingly let their child be given up to be tortured and murdered. "To say that God handed him over is to blame God for what should be laid at the doorstep of human injustice."<sup>29</sup> Schillebeeckx identifies the cross as a negative and as revealing the tension between God and humanity in need of redemption.

For Schillebeeckx, the event on the cross is not simply the inter-Trinitarian event between Father and Son that Moltmann or Balthasar would postulate. The event is an act of human injustice, where the Father's relationship with the Son is never sundered. God remains in compassionate solidarity with the suffering Jesus, near silent but present. The event is the "index of the anti-divine in human history"<sup>30</sup>; of the opposite of God in the world. Here, the worst in humanity is revealed; the annihilating sin that widens the void between humanity and God. This vigil by God is kept until the destruction of humanity, in the death of Jesus. This wrongness of the innocent victim being slaughtered is defeated by the power of the resurrection, revealing that God has been present throughout the event. God's overcoming of the evil of death reveals God's presence in solidarity throughout Jesus's death and suffering in a finite and historical way.

So vital is this act that the cross alone cannot save. The redeeming efficacy of the cross is only realised in the resurrection. The cross in itself is sinful and an instrument of death. The cross then should never be the object of devotion and a cult of the cross which is based on finding value in the evil of suffering is completely against the way of the Christian. Jesus' willing sacrifice and the

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1992) 124

<sup>30</sup> Anne Murphy, *Theological Trends: Contemporary theologies of the cross I, The Way 28/2* (1988) 157 <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/28Murphy.pdf> (accessed on 20th September 2012)

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power of God to overcome the negativity of the cross enable our salvation. Evil cannot beget goodness, therefore the cross itself does not determine our salvation. This discourse is best expressed by Schillebeeckx when he writes:

We have to say we are not redeemed thanks to the death of Jesus, but despite it.<sup>31</sup> The final point of contention between the two is an area that Rahner and Moltmann will clash upon later in this work, which is the nature of suffering and God. Moltmann explores God suffering in love, not as a negative but a real empathy of love. Schillebeeckx, like Rahner, is influenced by Thomas Aquinas, so naturally, any idea of suffering entering God is fundamentally impossible. Rahner's arguments are very similar to those of Schillebeeckx. How is it good news for us if it turns out that God suffers too? How can God save us if He in fact also needs saving? If he is not free from the "muck" of our sinful situation, how can he be free to save us from it? The suffering we endure is a consequence of sin, and is experienced by all of humanity who has been stained by sin. It is a disease that God does not suffer from as God is other than sin.

Rather than Moltmann's assertion that God suffers out of love for humanity, God enters into faithful and compassionate support and solidarity with Jesus who suffers on the cross in order to save. The potency of evil is less than the power of the compassion of God, who enters into this relationship with the sufferer, but does not experience suffering. In this way, Schillebeeckx remains true to his Thomistic values. God's impassability is a sign of God's transcendence, but God's compassion is also transcendent. This means that God is in eternal solidarity with all those who suffer in the world.

On the actual death of Jesus, Schillebeeckx does not focus much attention. For Schillebeeckx, the death is a negative, as good cannot be a product of an evil action, namely the torture and murder of an innocent man. The scholar John P Galvin argues that Schillebeeckx actually seeks to locate the moment of salvific importance in:

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<sup>31</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1980) 730

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Either Jesus' free acceptance of death in a spirit of service, as distinct from death itself, or in the divine conferral of value on Jesus' death through the resurrection, understood as a corrective victory over suffering and death<sup>32</sup>

John Paul Galvin reinforces what can be said about Schillebeeckx's interpretation of the cross itself. The cross is not something of goodness. It is inherently evil, as Jesus is tortured and killed on it despite being completely innocent. The cross itself does not save. The faithfulness of Jesus to the will of the Father and the power of God to overcome the overwhelming darkness of sin enables redemption for all. Schillebeeckx has been criticised for failing to attribute any salvific significance to the crucifixion itself.<sup>33</sup> While this can certainly be argued, this work does not focus on the question. I am only seeking to highlight how a significant contemporary theologian takes a radically different perspective to the cross than his counterparts.

In his book *The Future of Christology*, The Jesuit theologian Roger Haight, who was a long-time student of Schillebeeckx, discusses what would form a coherent and viable theology of the cross. Haight's argument is strongly based on Schillebeeckx's approach to the cross. He proposes that one can develop a constructive theology of the cross from this approach. Some of his headings include:

In a revelational conception of how Jesus saves, the cross does not save, but God saves in spite of and in the face of the cross" and "Because the suffering inflicted on Jesus is evil in itself, it cannot be the basis or object of Christian devotion.<sup>34</sup>

These two headings reflect Schillebeeckx's mediation on the subject, aiming not to put value on the cross itself as it is an instrument of death which is evil. No goodness can be a result of evil, so the focus shifts to the fidelity of Jesus in his life and mission and the power of God to save, despite the cross. Indeed, Haight uses Schillebeeckx's formula of the negative experience of contrast as his basic structure to deal with the great paradox of the cross; how can divine revelation be found in the darkness of innocent suffering and death? This approach

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<sup>32</sup> John Paul Galvin, *The Death of Jesus in the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 50 (1983-1984) 170

<sup>33</sup> Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *St Anselm and St Thomas Aquinas on 'Satisfaction' or how Catholic and Protestant understandings of the Cross differ*, *Angelicum* 80 (2003) 159-161  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10395/1422> (accessed on 12th November 2012)

<sup>34</sup> Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (NY: Continuum, 2005) 86-102

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highlights that evil cannot be known except dialectically, as some awareness of goodness is needed to contrast with evil.

It can be argued that the cross is the primary rationale of the theologies of Balthasar and Moltmann. This could not be said of Schillebeeckx. Yet, Schillebeeckx's critique of theologies of the cross such as Moltmann's reveals Schillebeeckx's unique perspective of the cross, because of its clear differences to Moltmann. His arguments against God suffering on the cross is based on his background in Thomism, and reveals how God can enter in faithful solidarity with the suffering Son, saving humanity from death despite being untouched by suffering itself.

The cross itself should not be glorified as it does not save in itself. The power of the compassionate God to overcome the evil on the cross and the faithfulness of Jesus are what enable the cross to have its redeeming efficacy. As Schillebeeckx writes:

The basic experience of the first disciples after Good Friday was: no, evil, the cross, cannot have the last word. Jesus' [sic] way of life is right and is the last word that is sealed in his resurrection... Suffering and death remain absurd and may not be mystified, even in Jesus' case; but they do not have the last word, because the liberating God was absolutely near to Jesus on the cross, as during the whole of Jesus' career.<sup>35</sup>

For a theologian that is said to not have an explicit theology of the cross, Schillebeeckx's perspectives clearly shape and form Haight's chapter of what would constitute a constructive theology of the cross. It could at least be argued that Schillebeeckx has formulated a theory of the cross that is not as based on suffering or the salvific effect of the crucifixion, but on faith that overcomes such suffering.

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1990) 128

#### **1.5.4 Jürgen Moltmann**

Jürgen Moltmann is a Protestant theologian whose unique interpretation of the cross has sought to restore the startling and violent reality of the cross. His work is heavily influenced by his experiences during World War II, where he was prisoner of war in Belgium. The horrors of the Nazis' actions eventually led to Moltmann developing a Christian faith which he relied upon and identified with in the light of his experiences of the suffering of so many during the war. He found a God who was with the prisoners and present behind the barbed wire fences. He later said, "I didn't find Christ; he found me." The suffering and hope he saw as a prisoner left a lasting mark on him and his work.

As a result, Moltmann's theology of the cross is dialectical. This type of theology emphasises the infinite tensions, paradoxes, and basic ambiguities inherent in Christian existence. In relation to Moltmann and the cross, even in the darkest and gravest conditions of sinful humanity, God can be found. Moltmann's citing of Wiesel's *Night* illustrates this, where the young innocent boy is hanged on the gallows by the Nazis. "Where is God now? And I heard a voice in myself answer: Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows..."<sup>36</sup>

What is central to Moltmann's theology of the cross is the suffering endured on the cross, which is not just the cry of an innocent man being tortured. The death on the cross is not just an event in the historical sense; it is an event that occurs within the Trinity. It is a real and unique event where the Father and Son are sundered from each other. The Son experiences abandonment and separation from the Father. The cross is the event that not just effects humanity but profoundly affects the Godhead.

The critical moment is the abandonment of the Son on the cross; to experience utter Godforsakenness, yet to surrender his life in total faith to the Father. There is a sundering in the relationship of the Father and the Son, causing both persons to suffer in differing ways.

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<sup>36</sup> (Elie Wiesel, *Night*, 1969, 75f) cited in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. John Bowden and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1974) 274

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The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he would also suffer the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son.<sup>37</sup>

The Son dies in abandonment for sinful humanity, while the Father suffers grief in his love for the Son who has died. The Son has surrendered his life in total faith to the will of the Father, but the Father too has surrendered his Son to death and abandonment. It is from this simultaneous surrender, this sundering of the relationship that the Spirit proceeds from. It is the Spirit who creates love for humanity who is forsaken and stained by sin, for the downtrodden and poor in society.

Moltmann's interpretation of the Trinity on the cross takes on more than just the historical death of Jesus.

If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and death of Jesus... then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth which stems from the cross of Christ. By the secular cross on Golgotha, understood as open vulnerability and as the love of God for loveless and unloved, dehumanized men, God's being and God's life is open to true man.<sup>38</sup>

The cross reveals a God who opens Himself to sinful humanity in love. God is made vulnerable to the sufferings and agonies of humankind and loves the sinful and dehumanized. This process is enabled by Jesus' death, which allows humanity's relationship with God to be realised in open and irrevocable love.

While Moltmann references Karl Rahner's axiom of the Trinity, his writings on the Father suffering on the cross are very much at odds with Rahner's theology, as:

...the material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ (and) the formal principle of the knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup>

Moltmann's writing on the concept of suffering and the Father is perhaps the most unique of all his works. The classical theistic idea of God is a God that is immutable, impassible and timeless. God is omnipotent and therefore incapable

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<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. John Bowden and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1974) 243

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 249

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 241

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of suffering, even when that suffering is a component of genuine love. Moltmann echoes the famous words of another victim of the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that “only a suffering God can save us”. The suffering that Moltmann speaks about in relation to God is not the form caused by the weakness or frailty of the human condition. It is suffering of the most genuine love, selflessly letting oneself be weak and vulnerable out of love.

The one who is capable of love is also capable of suffering, for he also opens himself to the suffering which is involved in love, and remains superior to it by virtue of his love.<sup>40</sup>

But a God who experiences the pains of humanity is also insufficient. In the light of Auschwitz, Moltmann writes of God not only experiencing suffering on the cross; but experiencing every agony suffered in the whole of humanity.

In that case, not only would suffering affect God’s pathos externally, so that it might be said that God himself suffers at the human history of injustice and force, but suffering would be the history in the midst of God himself.<sup>41</sup>

God becomes another through the death of the Son, as God accepts the sufferings and agonies of humanity and integrates them into Himself. Such evil is destroyed by God’s love. The immutability of God is another point of contention between Moltmann and Karl Rahner. The cross reveals God’s final self-humiliation and arising from this destruction, Christians hope for the resurrection. For Moltmann, the resurrection and the cross are two sides of the one coin; both rely on each other. Without the cross, the resurrection becomes an illusion, and without the resurrection, the cross becomes a tragedy.<sup>42</sup> This is very similar to the perspective of fellow liberation theologian Jon Sobrino. The resurrection is the hope that all of the suffering and horror in the world can be defeated by God’s love through the death of the Son on the cross.

Also, like Sobrino, Moltmann’s theology is very much socio-political and sees the crucifixion as the true starting point of a liberating Christian theology.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 230

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Murphy, *Theological Trends: Contemporary theologies of the cross I, The Way 28/2* (1988) 156 <http://www.theway.org.uk/Back/28Murphy.pdf> (accessed on 20th September 2012)

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Moltmann's experiences of World War II forced him to face the very worst in humanity. Moltmann attempted to come to terms with reality of the genocide of the Nazis and the suffering caused to the innocent. This had a profound effect on Moltmann. What has resulted in his theology of the cross is also a concern for the marginalised in society, for those who suffer in poverty and in abandonment. The cross is demonstrated as that which has the transformative power to break the cycle of vicious slavery and powerlessness at work in the world.

Man seeks God in the will for political power and world domination. If he sees and believes God in Christ who was powerless and crucified, he is set free from this desire to have power over others.<sup>43</sup>

Jesus, who died a political death for speaking against the powerful class system of his time, reveals that the freedom in the Kingdom of God is not constrained by all human rule, authority and power. As Moltmann puts it:

The crucified God is in fact a stateless and classless God. But that does not mean he is an unpolitical God. He is the God of the poor, the oppressed and the humiliated.<sup>44</sup>

The poor and the marginalised can identify with this God, as He has experienced their suffering. Moltmann presents in his theology of the cross, a unique drama that exists within the Trinity, in which the relationship between Father and Son is distanced through the Son dying in abandonment. It is a theology deeply concerned with the suffering of the poorest in today's society and shares Sobrino's understanding that God can be known even in the most trying and painful conditions in human life. Moltmann's theology stands out for its perspective on God not being necessarily immutable or impassable. While this view may be criticised by theologians, one must appreciate the manner in which Moltmann presents a theology of the cross born out of hellish experiences of the suffering from World War II. For such a theology, the history of suffering would have to be integrated into God; otherwise hope for humanity being saved by a loving God would be impossible, as Bonhoeffer puts it.

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<sup>43</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. John Bowden and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1974) 69

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 329

**1.5.5 Jon Sobrino:**

Jon Sobrino offers a contemporary theology of the cross, which has developed from his experiences of the harsh realities of political suppression and tyranny and the striving for liberation by those he serves in South America. He is one of the most famous writers on liberation theology, a theology which is rooted in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. His work shares parallels with that of Moltmann, in that their writings on the cross are so influenced by their experiences of horror and suffering in the world. His experiences of violence, terror and corrupt governments oppressing the poor and marginalised enables him to write about the cross as God's real participation in the world.

Indeed, he recalls the body of murdered Jesuit Juan Ramón Moreno being dragged into Sobrino's room, and a book falling from his bookcase onto the floor and becoming soaked in the victim's blood. This book was Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. This striking anecdote informs the reader of the nature of Sobrino's writings. In the context of Latin America, where there is so much oppression and horror, God can be found best in His revelation on the cross. "I think there is no substitute for calling this God 'the crucified God'."<sup>45</sup>

His Christology is not built on the loftier assertions of the higher approach, where the Father is glorified and untouched by true suffering in the death of the Son. Sobrino notes: "People in Latin America, however seem to feel almost automatically what Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed in intuitive poetic terms; 'Only a God who suffers can save us'."<sup>46</sup>

For Sobrino, the traditional Greek metaphysical understanding of God's perfection and immutability is inadequate in relation to liberation theology and the cross. If God is perfect in the classic Greek sense, then suffering, which suggests a form of mutability and passibility is utterly foreign to God. This view is coloured by Sobrino's experiences of the troubles of Latin America. The

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<sup>45</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator; A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1994) 235

<sup>46</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American View*, trans. John Drury (London: SCM, 1978) 197

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downtrodden and oppressed can never be liberated or saved by a loving God who hasn't been affected by the misery and sin of the world they live in.

The cross is thus a symbol of solidarity between God and His people who suffer.

The cross should not be seen as an arbitrary plan of God [sic] or as a cruel punishment inflicted on Jesus, but as a consequence of God's original choice, incarnation, a radical drawing near for love and in love, wherever it leads, without escaping from history or manipulating it from outside. This, in human words, also means God's accepting suffering.<sup>47</sup>

God's suffering is the expression of God's absolute nearness to the marginalised and the oppressed, and shows God's sharing in their weakness, their pain and their mediocrity. Moltmann shares this view, that God can experience such weakness and lessening of Godself. The idea that God can truly experience such impotence and suffering is a view that would be at odds with many orthodox theologians. Sobrino writes:

Part of God's greatness is his making himself small. And paradoxically, in this plan of his taking on what is small God makes himself a greater mystery, a new and greater transcendence, than the stammered definitions of human beings.<sup>48</sup>

Jesus lived his life from below in Sobrino's view, in the full humanity of the world. In this way, Jesus has experienced the voiceless, impotent side of the oppressed in humanity, not the privileged, corrupt side of the wealthy and powerful. The cross is the consequence of Jesus' life in serving the Kingdom of God, and this work resulted in his death as a blasphemer. On the cross, Jesus suffered the hell of real abandonment from the Father. The cross becomes truly radical when one meditates on the presence of God on the cross. Sobrino shares Moltmann's assertion that the cross can be seen as the beginning of a truly Christian theology, one which has a powerfully liberating praxis.

For Sobrino, it is the only reasonable starting point for Christology as it is the single moment that brings the Christian back to the totality of Jesus' life. To use any other beginning would be to risk a theology in which there is a "risen one without a cross, an end without a process, transcendence without history, a

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<sup>47</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator; A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1994) 244

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 249

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lordship without service.”<sup>49</sup> It is only after the resurrection that faith in the Messiah can come about it, and in this light, God is revealed as who liberates and renews all life. Faith in this God can lead to new life for all, the same that Jesus has experienced. This faith leads to hope for the person, that despite all the horrors of the world, their sufferings do not have the final victory. Jesus has won salvation for all through his death on the cross, revealing God’s infinite love for humanity.

Sobrino takes exception to a Christology based on the resurrection, almost reducing it to eschatological myth. It cannot be grounded in human history as it was not physical, and to focus so much on the resurrection would be to downplay the horrific reality of Christ crucified. It is not the resuscitation of a lifeless body, and so it is only believed in faith; not a piece of historical data, like the death of Jesus of Nazareth. The hope it offers is for the future, and in the light of Jesus’ death on the cross. In Latin America, Good Friday is the Easter event which is most popular,<sup>50</sup> and a new focus has arisen in light of this. The Christian is beginning to realise in a more active way the authentic element of the cross.

While the resurrection remains the paradigm of liberation, the cross is no longer seen as a symbol of suffering or as the negative dialectical moment which immediately and directly gives rise to the positive moment of liberation.<sup>51</sup>

For Sobrino, the cross rules out any overly sentimental or naïve conceptions of the resurrection and rightly shifts focus back on the death of Jesus from a theological perspective, and ultimately on God crucified. As Sobrino puts it:

The present situation rules out any merely romantic conception of Jesus’ resurrection. It forces us to reflect theologically on the death of Jesus, and ultimately on the crucified God. Without the cross the resurrection is idealistic. The utopia of Christian resurrection becomes real only in terms of the cross.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1987) 154

<sup>50</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American View*, trans. John Drury (London: SCM, 1978) 180

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

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Sobrino's concern is that the cross has been downplayed or relativized in the face of the resurrection. While it remains the summit of liberation for the Christian, the cross must be central to understanding it. Without the cross, the resurrection would lose its meaning. The cross is the trigger which begins the sequence towards the resurrection. For Sobrino, it is vitally important that the cross is recognised as this catalyst.

Sobrino's perspective is that we take up our cross and follow Jesus "on the way." (Mark 10:52). The spirituality of the cross must be situated in following Jesus, not just identifying with Christ by intention alone. Identification must take place on the way of the cross. Sobrino equates political theology to a theology of the cross. By this, he means that the meaning of any genuine theology cannot be separated from the final end of the path Jesus took. The cross allows us to ask questions about God and also how we apply this questioning to our lives, which is such an inspiration for Sobrino's work.

The Christian is always called to help the poor and weak in society, thus helping to bring about God's Kingdom on earth.

Who can comprehend the aspect of divine revelation in the cross of Christ? The person who feels sorrow in the face of another's misery and who tries to overcome it by bridging the distance between self and the other's misery. Here we have the only authentic analogy for recognizing God on the Cross.<sup>53</sup>

This sense of love and empathy for the sufferings of the poor is central to Sobrino's theology of the cross. His theology of the cross reveals other distinctive characteristics. Sobrino recognises that to explore these themes, one must write first from the world and life of the historical Jesus, rather than a High Christology. His theology of the cross could be described as being strongly socio-political. His writings are deeply coloured and influenced by his experiences of the suffering and misery of the oppressed poor in El Salvador. Like Moltmann, Sobrino has a dialectical understanding; that one can know God even in the midst of suffering and societal upheaval.

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<sup>53</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American View*, trans. John Drury (London: SCM, 1978) 199

**1.5.6 Conclusion:**

These contemporary theologies of the cross share common focuses but each offers a unique dimension shaped by the perspective of the particular theologian. Barth's Christocentric *theologia crucis* helped inspire the rich, vivid approach of Balthasar to the death of Christ. Balthasar takes on a harrowing, mystic dimension in writing on the silence of Holy Saturday and Jesus' descent into hell. Balthasar also explores the real suffering endured on the cross by God and that this is an inter-Trinitarian drama which highlights a separation between Father and Son. Moltmann too deals with the suffering of God, but goes against traditional meditations on God and argues that God suffers the loss of His only Son out of love as a necessity of His Being. Moltmann's theology has a strongly liberating praxis with its focus on the oppressed and the poor. This too is a potent element of Sobrino's theology of the cross which seeks to highlight the solidarity between the crucified Jesus and those who suffer on the margins of society. Schillebeeckx offers a different approach to the cross, one that looks at the cross as an evil and not salvific. The meaning of the cross cannot be positive unless understood through the lens of the resurrection.

By exploring these theologians' works on the cross, it is clear that certain criteria are invaluable to an evaluation of Rahner's approach to the cross. While these writers many have placed more or less emphasis on certain elements, their various approaches highlight the complexity of the cross. The most important symbol of the Christian faith makes for subjective interpretations but these interpretations must share or at the very least relate to common pillars. These will now be identified.

**1.6 The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross:**

Having provided a brief overview of various interpretations of the cross by some contemporary theologians, certain key themes continue to be illuminated in relation to the cross. Despite varying theories and meanings derived from the cross, the same central elements are consistently explored, but done so to varying degrees in respective theologies of the cross. Different models of a theology of the cross are also identified, where the exponent interprets differently or focuses on one or more of these criteria. It is also argued that the advocate of one of these models can accept another model as a supplement to theirs.<sup>54</sup> This is an important aspect to note as this will be applied to the exploration of Balthasar's critique of Rahner. Rather than condemn it as being deficient, it will be examined whether in fact Rahner's work can offer any complements to Balthasar's position, potentially leading Balthasar to a more fruitful theology of the cross.

As has been stated, different theologies of the cross can focus more on certain elements than others. These central themes as to what constitutes a theology of the cross will be categorised. These are presented in an objective manner and, rather than focusing on a few and neglecting some, each criterion will be given the evaluation it merits. What must be first acknowledged are the two pillars of any theology of the cross, salvation and redemption. For any authentic soteriology, both pillars must be acknowledged. Humanity's reconciliation with God through His salvific initiative must be reconciled with God's giving up of His only Son for humanity. The great challenge for a theology of the cross is to contain both and it is here that points of contention are found as various interpretations lead to various arguments. The soteriological and redemptive aspects of the cross as criteria for a coherent and consistent theology of the cross will now be developed

In this work, specific aspects have been selected to outline criteria for a theology of the cross. This not an attempt to arrogantly state that these are the only criteria for a theology of the cross, and that any further explorations are

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<sup>54</sup> S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006) 6

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deficient. Rather, these criteria have been selected on the study of the theologians that have been explored in this chapter. There is a rich diversity in their respective theologies of the cross. Moltmann and Balthasar include types of suffering within the Trinity, which Schillebeeckx or Barth do not. Sobrino approaches the cross from the context of liberation theology, which Balthasar does not. Schillebeeckx argues that the cross is an evil instrument of death and that we are not saved because of it. This perspective is not shared by any other theologian in this study.

Criteria have been selected which are consistent with the approaches to the cross offered by the theologians discussed in this chapter. Rather than develop criteria based on their differences, criteria have been chosen based on their similarities. There is no such thing as the theology of the cross. All theologies ultimately fall short of exploring the mystery that is beyond our understanding, so in that sense we can never comprehensively define what must exactly constitute the theology of the cross. The following are criteria for a theology of the cross, based within the context of contemporary theologies of the cross offered by major contemporary theologians.

The Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan provides a useful resource in developing the first three of the criteria. Lonergan has not been listed with the other contemporary theologians and their approaches to the cross. The five explored have offered unique and substantial interpretations of the cross, whereas Lonergan would not offer such explicit uniqueness in his approach that would apply to this work. Instead, Lonergan is referenced here for the methodology that he has used to interpret the cross, which provides an effective starting point in developing criteria for a theology of the cross. There are similarities between the two. Both Jesuit theologians, Lonergan and Rahner, are the most famous proponents of neo-Thomism. It is also the case that Lonergan, like Rahner, is concerned with approaching theology in modern times without the shackles of scholasticism. Both theologians continue to be influential to the

study of theology today.<sup>55</sup> In this way, Lonergan is a suitable starting point to approach criteria to evaluate whether Rahner has a theology of the cross or not.

Lonergan attempted to make sense of a universe in which God saves through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus by proposing what he called the Law of the Cross. The basic structure of this formula is as follows. Firstly, humanity is penalised for its sins by death. Secondly, if this death which is a consequence of sin is accepted out of love, it is transformed. Thirdly, this accepted death is glorified into a new and blessed life.

Lonergan utilises this Law to explain the meaning of the cross in the context of the Christian's life and the New Testament affirmations of salvation through Jesus. "In form the law of the cross is a three-step principle of transformation: Something somehow turns into something else."<sup>56</sup> Each step of Lonergan's Law of the Cross illuminates a critical criterion for a theology of the cross. The first three criteria listed will show this:

**1. A theology of the cross must address the sinful nature of humanity and how we need to be saved from our sinfulness, which Jesus takes upon himself on the cross.**

First, sin incurs the penalty of death

Death does not simply mean the physical expiration of our biological lives. Death too can mean a situation in our lived experience. A life filled with hate can be seen as death; because such an existence can be seen as a killing of humanity or to put it another way, a dehumanization. The phrase "to be dead inside" is apt. If you saw a news bulletin reporting on a terrorist attack killing innocent people, one could say the killers must be dead inside. A person who can callously act in such terrible ways and not feel the crushing weight of guilt

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<sup>55</sup> Marmion notes that in this edited collection; "...all the contributors see Rahner and Lonergan as important voices- and not only from the past. Rahner, for example, was very much a practical and contextual theologian, while Lonergan's methodological investigations continue to be influential." Declan Marmion, *Christian Identity in a Postmodern Age: Celebrating the Legacies of Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Declan Marmion (Dublin: Veritas, 2005) 22-23

<sup>56</sup> William P. Lowe, *The College Student's Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MD: Liturgical Press, 1996) 167

upon them could be said to be dead inside. The human may be alive in the biological sense, but their humanity is dead. These situations arise from human selfishness, arrogance and ignorance. They arise out of sin, and through such sin this death occurs. This is what is meant by this first step.

The key element in the first step is the **sinfulness of the human condition**. This state of human weakness is something from which we all suffer. Through our freedom, we are able to turn away from God, to miss the mark in what it is to be more fully human. This arrogance and selfishness is an orientation away from God's love and mercy. This is why we need to be saved and the cross is the revelation of the salvific will of God. We need to be saved from ourselves and it is through God's willing us to be saved from our own folly that we look to the cross. Sin incurs the penalty of death in the sense of us living our lives in a dehumanizing way. Without salvation through the cross, we face the ultimate and terminal death; the rejection of the "Yes" to God which is the refusal of the gift of being brought into right relationship with God.

**2. *Jesus' death on the cross cannot be separated from his obedience to the Father's will***

Second, this dying, if accepted out of love, is transformed

Jesus' acceptance of his death breaks the cycle of sin and dehumanization, this "eye for an eye" mentality, which enables the process to continue. If Jesus resists his death with hostility to answer the violence of his enemies, sin is allowed to continue dehumanizing. But Jesus did not do this, instead continuing his ministry out of faithfulness and love for the One he called Father, and out of love and solidarity for all people, even those who hated him. The act becomes a statement that faith in God and love for fellow man is worth more than putting one's own life first. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13).

The second step highlights the vital fact that **Jesus accepted his death with total faith in the Father**, even during hellish abandonment on the cross. The manner in which Jesus obediently faced an awful death despite being innocent

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highlights how the cross was the summit of Jesus' ministry. In refusing to fight violence with violence, Jesus breaks the cycle of endless retribution and the dehumanizing pattern that blighted the very people executing him. One is reminded of Jesus' words at the time of his arrest to his follower who struck the ear of Malchus. Then Jesus said to him; "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52). Jesus' obedience to the will of his Father even to death on the cross is a standard of faith for which Christians strive. Jesus' ministry in proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is come is seen in Jesus' remaining faithful to God and to his mission, forgiving those who kill him and accepting his death. The cross reveals the depths of God's love that His only Son would die, revealing the salvific will of God.

### **3. *The cross cannot be adequately addressed without linking it to the resurrection.***

Third, this transformed dying receives the blessing of new life

Jesus' death in faith and love to God leads to Jesus being raised. Jesus is rescued from the emptiness of death and brought to new life in God, a new closeness that cannot be achieved on this side of death. The cross represents the pinnacle of Jesus' ministry. If there was no resurrection, then all of Jesus' work would remain futile, as it would have appeared to all the witnesses of the death of Jesus. The cross would then be tragedy. It is in the light of the resurrection that we can see what we have been given through the death of Jesus, through the salvific will of God.

The third step underlines the importance in remembering **that the death of Jesus cannot be remembered as revealing God's saving love unless seen through the lens of the resurrection.** The cross not seen without the Resurrection is a travesty. It is an innocent man being murdered on a piece of wood, condemned as a criminal and blasphemer. All of Jesus' actions and his ministry would fall subject to the annihilating nature of death. The resurrection validates the Christian's belief in a God who wills them to be saved and that a

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radical closeness with God has now been achieved. The cross is a revelation of God's willingness for all to be saved and is revealed through the death of Jesus. It is validated by the resurrection of Jesus and gives hope to the believer that death is not the end of existence, but the final letting go into the mystery of God.

Not only should the cross be interpreted through the lens of the resurrection, it should also not be isolated from the life and mission of Jesus. Jesus did not suffer crucifixion because he preached about love and forgiveness. Jesus died the death of a criminal for being a significant threat to the socio-political powers of the time. While Jesus did not set about to establish a political kingdom, his teachings on the Kingdom of God were very much at odds with traditional Jewish institutions. Jesus, as shown in the second step in the Law of the Cross does not continue the cycle of dehumanizing by responding to violence with violence. Social attitudes of segregating the "unclean", the sinners and the weak were against the teaching of Jesus. The words of Jesus to the crowd who call for the adulteress to be stoned are striking. 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7). The call to self-sacrifice and love of neighbour were dangerous for political authorities who feared an uprising from this carpenter from Nazareth.

Lonergan's Law of the Cross has provided the framework to the first three criteria. The remaining three will now be explored.

### **4. *Jesus's death on the cross must be understood within the context of Jesus' life and ministry.***

On the cross, Jesus becomes the Christ. The call of the Good News is paving the way for the healing of humanity, making them full participants in God's reign as children of a loving Father. Jesus' message of love and friendship are not forgotten at the cross, but reach the summit of their meaning. Schillebeeckx writes:

We have to see the life and death of Jesus as one whole; we cannot consider the significance of his death by itself. To give one's life for others is in fact the

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greatest sign of love and friendship, but only if any other solution is in practise excluded and is thus impossible.<sup>57</sup>

Despite humanity's violence towards each other, despite the crucifixion of a man who preached love and forgiveness, the Kingdom of God still comes, despite the sin of humanity. On the cross, this offer of salvation is realised.

To underplay the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus is to take meaning from the cross. Without an understanding and reflection upon the way Jesus lived his life and conducted his ministry, the cross becomes a senseless tragedy. Jesus' teachings on how to treat others and what society we should live take on added significance viewed through the cross. On the cross, Jesus proves that not only does he live his message of the Kingdom of God, but is willing to die in disgrace for it. Jesus' life and ministry seen in conjunction with the cross crystallise Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom by God. To sacrifice his life as a sign of love those who hate him is an almost incomprehensible act of goodness, but to reflect on this without reference to what came before that in Jesus's life is folly.

### **5. *The place of representative language used to discuss the event of the cross***

The redeeming of our sins by Jesus on the cross is a pillar that any theology of the cross must be based on. It can be one that is uncomfortable for the Christian as its focus is not on the optimistic perspective of God's saving us through the obedience of the Son so much as the tragedy of the sinfulness of the human condition. This is the state of sorrow and ignorance we live in, the moment where we realise that our sinful humanity is at odds with the love of God. Jesus is the Redeemer who takes our sins upon himself, a willing and innocent sacrifice so that we can be reconciled with God. It has already been noted that the sinfulness of the human condition in the first step of Lonergan's Law of the Cross. Other critical aspects of redemption and the cross will now be highlighted.

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<sup>57</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1990) 120

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Why is the death of Christ significant? Much of the church is sure it knows the answer- it is an atoning sacrifice- and much of the rest of the church is deeply uncomfortable with the question.<sup>58</sup>

Words associated with redemption include atonement, satisfaction and representation. This coupled with readings of Anselm's theory of satisfaction, which deal with the question of redemption has led to tensions in the discourse on the cross. Before looking at these tensions, it is worth revisiting Anselm's theory as outlined in *Cur Deus Homo?* This theory begins with the establishment of the cosmos by God in a hierarchical order of relations, similar to the feudal system of Anselm's time.

Sin is offensive, and it damages the honour due to God. As we are all subject to God's creation, in sin we form a "debt" which we owe to God. As God is just and merciful, this debt does not remain outstanding. Because of the Fall, we are not in a position to be able to repay the debt as it would be insufficient, as a finite repayment is not the same as an infinite payment. It is only God that can repay such a debt and it is through the Incarnation that restitution was paid. God who was able to make restitution and humanity who ought to make restitution did so. The debt was satisfied, and humankind was brought back into right relationship with God.

Anselm's theory has been criticised for its language seeming to suggest the cross reveals a bloodthirsty God who demands a human sacrifice to appease the debt owed. Any such interpretation like this is utterly at odds with a loving and merciful God. To attempt to make sense of a God who will not be satisfied unless His only Son is brutally murdered as satisfaction for a debt owed is both offensive and disturbing to any Christian. To follow this discourse would be to label God as a cosmic monster who is satisfied by the torture and suffering of His Son.

The misunderstanding of Anselm's theory can lead to a person thinking that redemption through Jesus' death as sacrifice amounts to a transaction where: "One gives first secretly with the left hand what one takes back again

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<sup>58</sup> S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006) 20

ceremonially with the right.”<sup>59</sup> Such an understanding not only contributes to this idea of a vengeful, bloodthirsty God but critically, can lead to the cross being stripped of salvific significance.

In the case of the criticism that Anselm presents a God whose justice outweighs His mercy, Van Nieuwenhove would argue that such a viewpoint is the result of a less than careful reading of Anselm. His text *Cur Deus Homo?* explicitly states that one of the main purposes of his work is to show how divine justice and mercy are harmonized in the cross of Christ.”<sup>60</sup> The expiation is not the debt humanity must pay to a wrathful God. We are not the instigators of this conciliation. It is God who approaches us and vice versa. It is God who comes to us in the Incarnation and it is the foolish love of God that lets itself be given away to the point of humiliation so that we may be saved.

For the cross to give hope to the Christian and instil faith and love in God’s saving will, satisfaction must not be seen as a transaction where the innocent Son is brutally tortured and crucified to appease a tyrannical and sinister God who demands blood to pay the debt. It is God who intervenes directly by entering into our folly and setting the unjust humanity just again. In the incarnation, God works to restore our relationship with Him, not through our impetus by His grace and righteousness.

### **6. The place of suffering in a theology of the cross**

Over the past century, there has been a return to the role of suffering in the cross in the light of the horrors of wars and the advancement of nuclear and chemical weapons. Also the movement of liberation theology not limited to but particularly South America has re-awakened the need for suffering and the cross to be discussed by the modern Christian. “In recent years, theologians... have increasingly turned their attention to how the Cross reveals Jesus in

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1969) 214

<sup>60</sup> Rik Van Nieuwenhove, St Anselm and St Thomas Aquinas on 'Satisfaction' or how Catholic and Protestant understandings of the Cross differ, *Angelicum 80* (2003) 159-176  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10395/1422> (accessed on 12th November 2012)

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solidarity with all victims.”<sup>61</sup> This discourse has been highlighted previously in the chapter in the cases of Moltmann and Sobrino. The horrors of war and the savage oppression that they have lived through naturally permeate their world view and very clearly can be seen when reading their respective writings on the cross. What kind of a God can allow His Son to suffer so much when he is innocent? How can a just God allow such evil, oppression and marginalisation exist in the world? How can all this suffering of the victims “below” relate to God “above”?

This confrontation with suffering is at the heart of a theology of the cross. The harsh reality of a world afflicted by suffering is revealed through the cross. The sobering reality of the suffering and death in the Christian life is most profoundly felt on Good Friday, the commemoration of the death and Passion of the Lord. Interpretations of suffering at the cross at Calvary can lead to highly significant differences of opinion between theologians. Rahner, who focuses on protecting the Chalcedonian formula, will conflict with approaches from not only Balthasar but also Moltmann. The question of the relation of suffering to God will be explored in detail later on in this dissertation.

This debate widens from the question of how does the suffering Jesus relate to humanity scourged by oppression, violence and exclusion. The very nature of God’s relationship to suffering is brought into question. On one side, the words of Bonhoeffer ring out, of how “only a suffering God can save us”. Yet while one Christian may find hope in this, another may remember Rahner’s words: “To put it crudely, it does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament.”<sup>62</sup> Can a God who suffers really save man from his suffering then? At this point however, it is only important to note that for the cross to have a more complete meaning in modern times, Jesus’ solidarity with those who suffer in the world must be explored. This will in turn lead to exploring the Rahner’s positions on Jesus’ suffering on the cross and those of his critics, namely Balthasar and Moltmann.

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<sup>61</sup> Orlando Espín & James Nickoloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2007) 196

<sup>62</sup> Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, Translation ed. Harvey D. Egan. (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1986) 126

**1.7 Conclusion:**

The criticism that Balthasar lays on Rahner is that he lacks a theology of the cross. In this opening chapter, I have attempted to explore what exactly is a theology of the cross. By observing contemporary theologians' works on the cross, one can see that while the cross shares several critical themes, different interpretations of these themes can lead to radically different theologies. Moltmann's view on a God who can suffer out of love for a broken humanity is at odds with the classical understanding of God as incapable of experiencing suffering. Balthasar's harrowing work on the descent into hell on Holy Saturday reveals a rupture within the Trinity that is not seen in any other theologian's work. So in order to critique Balthasar's claim, it is important to highlight what themes are central to any theology of the cross.

Within any approach to the cross is the effort to harmonize the redemption won by Christ for us with the salvation offered to us by the Father. To adequately discuss the cross in this context then, certain criteria have been highlighted. Lonergan's Law of the Cross lends itself to the first three of these. A theology of the cross must address the sinful condition of humanity. We cannot save ourselves and it is Jesus on the cross who reveals God's salvific will. The Son's obedience to the will of the Father cannot be understated. Without this obedience, our view of the Son relationship with the Father would be distorted. An unwilling son who is tortured and murdered to satisfy a father is totally alien to any form of true Christianity. We are reminded of Jesus' words in the garden of Gethsemane: " Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42).

The cross must not be seen in isolation from the resurrection. Without each other, they fail to give significance to the life and death of Jesus. Christian faith and hope is grounded in the dying of Jesus on the cross and his being risen to new life in God. The cross also cannot be separated from the life and mission of Jesus. Without understanding the context of what Jesus said and how he lived, the message of the Kingdom of God is overshadowed. Regarding the cross, this

## ***Chapter 1- The Criteria for a Theology of the Cross***

understanding is vital to what meaning can be attributed to the actions and words of Jesus, before Calvary and at Calvary.

A significant understanding of transactional and sacrificial words in relation to the Redemption of humanity is important. It is essential to understand the importance of words such as “ransom”, “sacrifice” and “expiation” in relation to a theology of the cross. Otherwise, there is a danger of painting the picture of a sadistic and cold God who is distant from the event on Calvary. In understanding these words properly, the redemptive aspects of the cross are not blurred to a misinterpretation of God accepting the sacrifice of a willing victim.

Finally, in light of the suffering of recent decades, there has been a call to re-examine the question of suffering and the cross. Exploring the issue of relationship between the Father and the Son in relation to suffering needs to be included in a theology of the cross. To do so is to attempt to comprehend how on the cross, those who suffer in the world can identify with the sacrifice of Jesus and the infinite love, mercy and salvific will of God. This must be considered as absolutely vital for any theology of the cross.

Having established criteria which can be deemed critical to approaching the cross, we now turn to criticisms of Rahner’s approach to the cross.

## **Chapter 2- Criticisms of Rahner's Approach to the Cross**

- 2.1 Outline of Chapter
- 2.2 The Historical Relationship between Rahner and Balthasar pre-Cordula
- 2.3 Implicit Factors in Balthasar's Criticism of Rahner
  - 2.3.1 *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*
  - 2.3.2 Balthasar's Background
  - 2.3.3 Balthasar's Polemical Style
  - 2.3.4 Balthasar's Relationship with Rahner
  - 2.3.5 Balthasar's Concerns on the Direction of the Church
  - 2.3.6 Balthasar's Concerns on Rahner's Philosophical Allegiances
  - 2.3.7 Balthasar and Rahner: A Parallel with Barth and Schleiermacher
  - 2.3.8 Conclusion of the Implicit Factors of Balthasar's Criticism
- 2.4 Rahner's Response
- 2.5 The Response at Freiburg
- 2.6 The Suffering of God in Balthasar and Moltmann's Theologies of the Cross
  - 2.6.1 Hans Urs von Balthasar
  - 2.6.2 Rahner's Response to Balthasar
  - 2.6.3 Jürgen Moltmann
  - 2.6.4 Rahner's Response to Moltmann
  - 2.6.5 Conclusion
- 2.7 Balthasar's Misrepresentation of Rahner's Incarnational Theology

2.7.1 Immutability

2.7.2 Impassibility

2.8 The Death of God

2.9 Christology and Anthropology

2.10 Chapter Conclusion

## **2.1 Outline of Chapter:**

The biographies of these two theological giants of the twentieth century are unnecessary for this work. While their dispute has been covered in much detail by other authors<sup>63</sup>, relevant to this work are the underlying reasons for the dispute, both historical and theological. The dispute will be approached in the context of Hans Urs von Balthasar criticising Karl Rahner for lacking a theology of the cross, with the various factors for the estrangement will be explored. To criticise an author is perfectly acceptable, provided the critic has sufficient reason to do so. However, to be so hostile in criticism goes beyond a mere difference of opinion.

A brief sketch of how the relationship between both theologians fragmented will be outlined. Balthasar's criticisms will be noted, with particular focus on the perceived lack of a coherent theology of the cross on Rahner's part. The key text explored here will be *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*.<sup>64</sup> The possible reasons for Balthasar's fierceness in his rebukes towards Rahner being explored.

The dialogue between the two during this estrangement will be examined, in a bid to explore the fairness of Balthasar's critique of Rahner's approach to the cross and what response Rahner offers to the criticism.

Rahner's response to Balthasar and also to Jürgen Moltmann's critique will be explored. The key point of disagreement here is related to the respective theologians' differing positions on the nature of God and how this is connected to suffering on the cross. Moltmann is a critic of Rahner's theology of the cross for not taking into account the real and historical suffering in the world.

Following this, Rahner's response will be outlined, which is informed by his strong emphasis on the Incarnation, particularly regarding divine immutability

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<sup>63</sup> Authors including Gerard F. O Hanlon, *The Jesuits and Modern Theology: Rahner, Balthasar and Liberation Theology*, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 (1992) 25-45 and Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991) 123 (ref 52)

<sup>64</sup> (E.T) Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994)

and impassibility. It will also be demonstrated how the Incarnation is the key to approaching Rahner's Christology and by extension his theology of the cross.

Finally, the tensions between the approach taken by Rahner and Balthasar will be framed within the context of the alleged tensions between theology of the cross and theology of the Incarnation.

## **2.2 The Historical Relationship between Rahner and Balthasar pre-Cordula**

Leo O' Donovan has called Rahner and Balthasar "sons of Ignatius"<sup>65</sup> and argues that they can be considered contemporaries. Rahner was born in 1904, a year before Balthasar and died in 1984, four years before Balthasar. They both joined the Society of Jesus, but lived very different lives. Rahner followed a more traditional life as both Jesuit and academic, while Balthasar left the Jesuits and worked in a secular setting as a freelance writer. Both have been tremendously influential theologians, and whether they are irreconcilably opposed to each other remains to be seen.

At one time, Balthasar and Rahner were in fact close acquaintances, collaborating during their time in Munich. Eamonn Conway, a theologian who has written extensively on Rahner, points out that as early as 1939 they had worked in collaboration on a proposed outline for dogmatic theology, which was published in the first of volume of his *Investigations*<sup>66</sup>. In this collaboration, they agreed on a number of points needed for what would constitute theology of the cross. These included the reality of Jesus's death as experienced by him, the cross as atonement for humanity and the descent into hell.<sup>67</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler was a personal friend to Rahner succeeded him as Professor of

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<sup>65</sup> Leo J. O' Donovan, Two Sons of Ignatius: Drama and Dialectic, *Philosophy and Theology* 11 (1998) 105-124

<sup>66</sup> Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991) 123 (ref 52)

<sup>67</sup> Karl Rahner, Prospects for Dogmatic Theology & A Scheme for a Treatise of Dogmatic Theology, *Theological Investigations 1*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 1-37

Dogmatics in the University of Münster. He notes that when he and Rahner visited Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr in 1961, the exchange of ideas was amicable and open.<sup>68</sup> Yet soon after, this schism in relations developed which left the two somewhat estranged. The publication of *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* in 1966 was the strongest indicator that the two theologians had reached a significant parting of ways.

What follows is Balthasar's criticism of Rahner explored. The critique will be explored but also what factors that contributed to shaping Balthasar's critique of Rahner will be examined. Without exploring these factors as well, one could very easily come to a simple and undeveloped notion that Balthasar has misinterpreted Rahner, has treated him unfairly and in fact his position is not so different to Rahner's. While this could well be the conclusion of this work, an exploration and evaluation of the factors within Balthasar's critique is extremely important. In examining and critically evaluating these factors, the work will not rely on ignorance but on reasoned conclusions as to the nature of Balthasar's criticism that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross. The first point of departure however, is the implicit factors that shape Balthasar's criticism.

### **2.3 Implicit Factors in Balthasar's criticism of Rahner:**

In exploring the dialogue between Rahner and Balthasar, certain factors must be recognised and appreciated. These factors enable the reader to understand the contexts from which Balthasar is writing. Balthasar's criticism of Rahner's supposed lack of a theology of the cross is the subject of enquiry, but these factors can also apply to Balthasar's critique of Rahner in a wider context as well. These include: (i) *Cordula oder der Ernstfall* (ii) Balthasar's Background (iii) Balthasar's Polemical Style (iv) Balthasar's Relationship with Rahner (v) Rahner's Concerns on the Direction of the Church (vi) Balthasar's Concerns for Rahner's Philosophical Allegiances.

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<sup>68</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 124

**2.3.1 Cordula oder der Ernstfall<sup>69</sup>**

*Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, first published in 1966, is a fiercely worded tract and is Balthasar's sternest and perhaps best known criticism of Rahner. It was written during a difficult period in Balthasar's life, when he had to leave the Jesuits in favour of his secular publishing house.<sup>70</sup> The title refers to St. Cordula, the young virgin girl who was one of the 11,000 virgins that accompanied St Ursula. When the group was attacked by the Huns, she hid in a boat. But seeing how bravely her companions accepted their martyrdom, she turned herself over to the Huns and was brutally executed. Her submission to this death is the *Ernstfall* or the "decisive moment". In this way, Cordula becomes a witness to her faith. Rahnerian scholar, Philip Endean, recognizes the rationale of the book:

Von Balthasar is inviting a Roman Catholicism infatuated with Vatican II to see itself as Cordula in hiding and challenging it once again to embrace the call to martyrdom.<sup>71</sup>

This call to martyrdom requires a profoundly confident faith in God, and that Balthasar sees Rahner lacking such a faith is the most significant reason for his criticism. Balthasar venomously attacks Rahner and in *Cordula* concisely expresses his concerns in a savagely satirical dialogue, which ridicules Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian. Karen Kilby succinctly summarises Balthasar's position: "If one can be a Christian anonymously, why then bother with the costly business of actually professing Christianity?"<sup>72</sup> Vorgrimler notes that:

...since *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*, for von Balthasar Rahner has been the great theological opponent who makes faith inadmissibly easy, who adapts to the

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<sup>70</sup> Brian W. Hughes, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Interview with Werner Löser" (*America*, October 16, 1999) 17. Löser recounts a conversation he had with Balthasar where he confided his personal feelings about leaving the Jesuits. "He had left them in 1950. It was a very painful episode that he still felt more than 20 years later. I recall him saying, 'I am still a Jesuit, but I live in exile. This situation is an ever-bloody wound in my heart.'"

<sup>71</sup> Philip Endean, "Von Balthasar, Rahner and the Commissar", *New Blackfriars* 79 (1998) 27

<sup>72</sup> Karen Kilby, Balthasar and Rahner, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 260

needs of contemporaries, and trivialises the seriousness of God's history with humanity.<sup>73</sup>

An off-shoot of this critique is Balthasar's claim that Rahner has depreciated the meaning of the cross. In fact, the copy of *Cordula*, Balthasar personally sent to Rahner came with a dedication: "Write a theology of the cross!"<sup>74</sup> If there really is salvation for the non-Christian or the atheist without explicit reference to Jesus Christ or the cross itself, then Balthasar would insist that Rahner has allowed what is distinctive about Christianity to have been lost.

Balthasar writes of the dramatic dimension of the Christ event, where the Spirit permits the 'hiatus' between the Father and Son who are separated on the cross. Balthasar sees Rahner's complete lack of this decisive, tragic element as seriously deficient. Rahner has not signified how utterly unique the cross is in the salvation history of the world.

Balthasar believes that the dramatic dimension is completely lacking in Rahner's anthropology. The Incarnation and the cross seem to add nothing to the grace already given to humanity with creation.<sup>75</sup>

Hans Rotter notes that Rahner believed there to be a genuine request in Balthasar's criticism of Rahner's supposed lack of a theology of the cross. But Rahner also believed his theology was not as aesthetic as Balthasar's, with his beautifully rich, spiritual writings.<sup>76</sup> Rahner was once asked about his thoughts on Balthasar. He conceded that he envied Balthasar's artistic nature and believed that Balthasar was far more talented than he.<sup>77</sup> This eloquent style reflected the Swiss theologian's extroverted personality and as well as artistic talent that was so clear in his writings.

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<sup>73</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 124

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 124

<sup>75</sup> John O Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Continuum, 2000) 105

<sup>76</sup> *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner By Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas Batlogg, and Melvin Michalski. Translation ed. Barbara Turner (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009) 233

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 336

### **2.3.2 Balthasar's Background**

Balthasar's cultured background contributes to his erudite and vibrant writing style. Born in 1905 to an aristocratic family (thus the honorific title; "von"), Balthasar was raised in a family where high culture and devout faith were intertwined.<sup>78</sup> During his life, Balthasar developed an unfaltering affection for music, especially Mozart, and for Romantic literature, particularly Goethe.<sup>79</sup> This passion for the humanities never diminished his love of God; rather it allowed Balthasar to express his faith in a deeply artistic way. His doctoral dissertation on the history of the eschatological problem in modern German literature, entitled; *Apocalypse of the German Soul*<sup>80</sup>, is a theological exploration of German literature and its interpretation of the soul's final destiny.

Eamonn Conway raises an important point on the context of Balthasar's theological aesthetics. Balthasar did not immediately enter into Jesuit formation and had already been awarded a doctorate in literature. His work was less constrained than that of Rahner.

As he was not a theology professor he did not have to don the scholastic mantle in the same way Rahner had to. The result was that Balthasar enjoyed both the inner and outer freedom required to evolve a system that was neither a reaction to nor an attempted renovation of scholasticism.<sup>81</sup>

This freedom of Balthasar cannot be forgotten when visiting any dialogue between him and Rahner. Unlike Rahner, Balthasar did not have a cohort of students to explain or defend his theological system in a formal university setting.<sup>82</sup> This unique context that Balthasar comes from must be recognised

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<sup>78</sup> Brian W. Hughes, "Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Interview with Werner Löser" (*America*, October 16, 1999) 17. Löser notes that Balthasar's aristocratic upbringing had potential drawbacks. "Due to his aristocratic upbringing and refined milieu, he did not have many contacts with the poor. Rahner, on the other hand, was an ordinary but strong and energetic man."

<sup>79</sup> For further reading, see Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (NY: Continuum 1997) 72-102 on Balthasar's influence by Goethe. Oakes notes on 73 that Balthasar's influence by Goethe and Rahner's influence by Immanuel Kant go far to explain the tensions between the two theologians.

<sup>80</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*, 3 vols. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Einsiedel: Johannes Verlag, 1998)

<sup>81</sup> Eamonn Conway, 'So as not to Despise God's Grace: Re-assessing Rahner's Idea of the "Anonymous Christian"', *Louvain Studies*, Vol 29 (1-2) (Spring-Summer 2004) 12

<sup>82</sup> Kerr makes note of the severe censorship Rahner had endured from the Vatican due to his publications on the possibility of concelebration in 1954 and the perpetual virginity of Mary in 1960. Balthasar was not constrained by any past experience of Vatican harassment over his

when reading interactions between the pair to highlight the greater freedom Balthasar in writing. His cultured background and deep knowledge of Patristics enabled him to write passionate and vibrant spiritual writings. This freedom allowed his artistic nature to flourish, helped by his intellect and ability to express his faith in a striking, almost poetic style.

This love of literature and the humanities informed Balthasar's tremendous ability to produce beautifully rich, spiritual writings. This skill to write so eruditely also has a negative side. Coupled with Balthasar's strong personality, this style was central to Balthasar's ability to criticise with sharpness and ferocity, at times unfairly.<sup>83</sup>

### **2.3.3 Balthasar's Polemical Style**

Kilby observes that:

Balthasar can be a subtle and sympathetic reader of the texts of others, but at times (especially in polemical moments) he paints with very broad brush strokes, and whatever the benefits of this, fairness to individuals may be one of the costs.<sup>84</sup>

Balthasar's polemical style has two elements to it. The first is that Balthasar, in arguing his position on an issue, could show self-righteous contempt for a theological position other than his. Whether an opposing position was in fact that different to his is a valid question, but for Balthasar, arguing his stance was more important. For Balthasar, the best method for defence of his position could be an attack on the position he disagreed with. In following such a method, Balthasar can misrepresent the author who does not agree with his position. An author may not be as theologically different to Balthasar on an

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writings as Rahner was. Kerr also notes that Rahner took up Guardini's chair in philosophy, which he hoped would protect him from further intensive Vatican scrutiny. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neo-Scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 89

<sup>83</sup> Brian W. Hughes, Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar: An Interview with Werner Löser (*America*, October 16, 1999) 20. Löser discusses the impact of *Cordula* on Rahner and Balthasar's relationship. "As a literary work, the language is eloquent; but the content is aggressive and hurtful. From 1967 to 1968 their relationship suffered because of Balthasar's remarks in the book."

<sup>84</sup> Karen Kilby, Balthasar and Rahner, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 260

issue, but if you were to read just Balthasar's opinion, you could receive a much skewed perspective on Balthasar's opposing author.

The second element relates back to Balthasar's erudite and cultured style of writing. When utilised, these skills can be transformed into overtly hostile and bitter attacks on authors he did not agree with.<sup>85</sup> Kevin Mongrain notes that: "When his intellectual advice was not heeded, he could be a nasty and bitter polemicist."<sup>86</sup> This ferocious style is best seen in *Cordula*, where Balthasar accuses Rahner of leading Christians down the path to atheism, since anyone can be saved, be they Christian or "anonymously" Christian. An off-shoot of this is that Rahner has stripped the redemptive efficacy of the cross away. This is clear in the sharp tone of Balthasar's polemic:

There is lacking here a theology of the Cross that Rahner has not yet given us. It is true, of course, that the emphasis on the doctrine of an anonymous Christianity, so urgently required in the present situation, involves a proportionate devaluation of the theology of the Cross.<sup>87</sup>

Balthasar asserts that Rahner's position is that the Christian has placed God's saving will as the cause of their redemption, not Christ's sacrifice on the cross. To criticise a theologian on a differing point of view is absolutely credible, but to attack a theologian so ferociously is pushing the limits of fairness. As Mongrain argues:

The lack of hermeneutic generosity is a factor to keep in mind when reading von Balthasar criticisms of Rahner; one wonders if all aspects of von Balthasar's own theology could withstand a similarly unyielding and hostile critique.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> In the Afterword, Balthasar notes that his book has been reproached for its satirical tone. He attempts to justify this by his opinion that 'the prophets and Paul have taught us to use this stylistic device as the right method of treatment in certain cases.' Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 152

<sup>86</sup> Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2002) 13

<sup>87</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 108-109

<sup>88</sup> Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2002) 156

### **2.3.4 Balthasar's Relationship with Rahner**

Gerard Ruis served as Academic Editor for the Publishing House in Graz and was a producer for many years on Austrian Radio. He remembers asking Rahner could he give him anything on what he thought of Balthasar as his birthday approached. After some coaxing, Rahner finally said: "Ah I don't know what I should say about him. He is always against me."<sup>89</sup>

It must be noted that Balthasar had a sincere respect for Rahner as a Catholic theologian, despite some of his concerns with aspects of his work. Conway observes that Balthasar's critique of Rahner reveals how familiar Balthasar is with aspects of Rahner's work.<sup>90</sup> Balthasar makes clear his position on Rahner's theological pedigree: "I consider Karl Rahner, taken from an overall perspective, to be the strongest theological potential of our time."<sup>91</sup>

As noted already, they had worked together on various projects together with the schematic on a theology of the cross in 1939 being most relevant to this work. Despite the parting of the ways for Rahner and Balthasar post-*Cordula*, this respect was not lost, even when in disagreement over certain issues. In 1978, Balthasar said of Rahner:

It is true that Karl Rahner is inclined to filter all questions through the prism of his own method but, on the other hand, his pastoral concern enables him to see all problems- theological and secular- in their realistic complexity, and to accept other than his own attempts of solution.<sup>92</sup>

It is clear that there was mutual respect between the two, despite obvious differences in opinion. Vorgrimler notes that the alienation was in his opinion, certainly initiated by Balthasar.<sup>93</sup> *Cordula* is the most significant document that highlights the separation, but there are certain personal factors that added to

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<sup>89</sup> *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner By Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas Batlogg, and Melvin Michalski. Translation ed. Barbara Turner (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009) 336

<sup>90</sup> Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991) 38

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 38 (ref 57)

<sup>92</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Current Trends in Catholic Theology and the Responsibility of the Christian*, *Communio: International Catholic Review* (Spring, 1978) 85

<sup>93</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 124

the bitter feeling between the two. These include Balthasar feeling resentful over being completely excluded from Vatican II, unlike Rahner who had a pivotal role at the Council. Another instance was in 1963, when Balthasar was overlooked in favour of Rahner for Romano Guardini's Chair of Christianity and the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Munich.<sup>94</sup> These circumstances would obviously have frustrated Balthasar, to see a contemporary being elevated to such success while his contributions go seemingly unnoticed. This frustration would naturally have lent itself to the alienation between the pair on Balthasar's part.<sup>95</sup>

Another personal factor in the strained relationship between them was Balthasar's unique relationship with Adrienne von Speyr. The wife of the historian Werner Kaegi, she converted to Catholicism with Balthasar as her spiritual director. Her intense visions and experiences of the suffering of God and the torments of sin and hell heavily influenced Balthasar, particularly his writings on Holy Saturday. Her own suffering therefore permeated Balthasar's approach to the cross. Balthasar felt his collaboration with von Speyr was absolutely fundamental to his entire theology. He highlights this in *Our Task*:

This book has one chief aim: to prevent any attempt being made after my death to separate my work from that of Adrienne von Speyr. It will show that in no respect is this possible, as regards both theology and the developing community.<sup>96</sup>

There are a number of points that can be made on this central importance that Balthasar places on von Speyr's influence. The first is that von Speyr's collaboration is from private revelation, which as Noel O' Donoghue points out:

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 124

<sup>95</sup> O' Donnell notes that after Balthasar left the Jesuit Order, he suffered a period of extreme isolation. John O' Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Continuum, 2000) 2. Marmion also notes that it was at this dark period of his life that Balthasar wrote *Cordula*, which could also explain to an extent the level of ferocity and bitterness of some of Balthasar's criticism of Rahner. Declan Marmion, Rahner and His Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 4 (February 2005) [http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/395536/AEJT\\_4.10\\_Marmion.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/395536/AEJT_4.10_Marmion.pdf) (accessed on 20/8/13)

<sup>96</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Our Task: a Report and a Plan*, trans. John Seward (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 13

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...is based on a dangerous precedent; for easy or cheap knowledge is harmful to men and women.<sup>97</sup>

These visions and the influence that they had on Balthasar was met by disapproval by some, including Rahner. Adolf Derlap worked with Rahner in Innsbruck and noted Rahner's sceptical attitude towards these visions and subsequent books. He believed this definitely contributed to the alienation in the relationship between Rahner and Balthasar.

Rahner cast a rather jaundiced eye on these books and visions and commented on them. That created a certain amount of tension between them! That certainly damaged their previously close relationship.<sup>98</sup>

Von Speyr's visions were a constant source of inspiration for Balthasar.<sup>99</sup> For Rahner, to treat them as inappropriate or unreliable would obviously have offended Balthasar. This was a situation where von Speyr's private revelation was absolutely fundamental to Balthasar's theology and for Rahner to not share a similar appreciation of it would have appeared to Balthasar as disrespectful.

On the rare occasion that Rahner defended himself against Balthasar's claim he lacked a theology of the cross, Rahner included von Speyr in his now famous response:

There exists a modern tendency... in both Hans Urs von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr (and of course far more the latter) that conceptualizes a theology of the death of God that appears to me to be a rather gnostic position.... To put it quite crudely; 'If I want to escape from my filth, mess and despair, it doesn't help me one bit if, to put it bluntly, God is in the same mess'<sup>100</sup>

This was said in the context of a lecture Rahner gave in Freiburg, where he was answering a question by a student on Balthasar's claims he lacked a theology of

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<sup>97</sup> Noel O'Donoghue, *Mystics for Our Time: Carmelite Meditation for a New Age* (Wilmington, NC: Michael Glazier Books, 1989) 25 (ref 12)

<sup>98</sup> *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner By Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas Batlogg, and Melvin Michalski. Translation ed. Barbara Turner (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009) 103

<sup>99</sup> O' Donnell points out that Balthasar and von Speyr's founded the secular institute, the Community of St John. "Balthasar's role as director of the institute led to the most painful decision of his life, the decision to leave the Jesuit Order to whose spirituality he remained indebted to." Such was his spiritual bond with von Speyr that he chose to leave his Order and work with her, as he believed her mystic visions to be of great importance to the Church. John O' Donnell, *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (London: Continuum, 2000) 1- 2.

<sup>100</sup> Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*. Edited by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons. Translation edited by Harvey D. Egan. (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1986) 245

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the cross. His answer was not meant with any ill will, but as Prof Albert Raffelt concluded: "had the effect of upsetting Hans Urs von Balthasar terribly."<sup>101</sup>

In relation to Balthasar's personal feelings towards Rahner, it is clear that he had strong respect for Rahner as a theologian, but a significant alienation developed between the pair and this is most notable in 1966 with the publication of *Cordula*. The personal factors that Vorgrimler highlights are significant as Balthasar felt excluded as Rahner was elevated to higher levels of authority and influence. This was not only in terms of involvement in Vatican II, but also related to vying against Rahner for a professorship, and losing out to him for the post. Adrienne von Speyr's influence in Balthasar's theology is also an important factor in the alienation between Rahner and Balthasar. Vorgrimler says of the two theologians: "Radically different experiences of God led to irreconcilable differences."<sup>102</sup> This is true, but the nature of Balthasar's experiences of God was heavily influenced by the visions of von Speyr. This made it of critical importance to Balthasar. It can be argued that Rahner's scepticism of the merit of von Speyr's visions strained his relationship with Balthasar

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<sup>101</sup> *Encounters with Karl Rahner: Remembrances of Rahner By Those Who Knew Him*, ed. Andreas Batlogg, and Melvin Michalski. Translation ed. Barbara Turner (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009) 103

<sup>102</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 125

### **2.3.5 Balthasar's Concerns on the Direction of the Church**

Balthasar's criticism is influenced by his concerns on how the Church was progressing in the twentieth century, fearing that it would become more and more relativized. Balthasar was conservative, taking positions other than liberal or progressive ideas developing in the Church. Balthasar argued that he was not attempting to push theology back into over adherence on the details of church practice.<sup>103</sup> It would be crude to simply label Balthasar "conservative" but it is fair to say that regarding the Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his conservative leanings were critical in his criticism of Rahner.

Balthasar was vehemently opposed to "progressive" trends within the Church and this can be seen in his attitude towards women's ordination<sup>104</sup> and obligatory priestly celibacy.<sup>105</sup> His arguments, which revealed his conservative leanings, highlighted the bitter polemical nature of his writing when his own intellectual advice was not accepted. Balthasar took these positions to protect what he saw as a Church being attacked by this new secular world, which sought to separate the concrete papacy from the mystery of the Church. Also, his fierce attack on the idea of the "anonymous" Christian, where the mystery of the Church is dissolved into a world where faith becomes secondary, highlights his fears and concerns for the Church. This is clearly seen in *Cordula*.

Franz Josef Van Beeck is highly critical of *Cordula*, and argues that Balthasar's fiercely expressed views are not based on just theological concerns. They are also "the product of anger born out of anxiety."<sup>106</sup> This is a valid argument as whatever the theological concerns Balthasar had, his expression of it is extremely fierce. His utter rejection of Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian, and by extension his claim Rahner has neglected a theology of the cross is bitter and polemical.

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<sup>103</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*, trans. Robert John Halliburton (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008) 17-18

<sup>104</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, The Uninterrupted Tradition of the Church, *L'Osservatore Romano* (February 24, 1977) 6-7 <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic3/balthasar.asp> (accessed on 18/2/14)

<sup>105</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, The Meaning of Celibacy, *Communio: International Catholic Review* (1976) 3, no. 4, 318-329

<sup>106</sup> Franz Josef Van Beeck, *God Encountered: A Contemporary Catholic Systematic Theology: Volume Two/1: The Revelation of the Glory* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993) 6-7

To disagree on a theological position is perfectly acceptable, but to show such contempt and venomous disdain goes beyond that. Balthasar's critique perhaps tells the reader that he was revealing his fears for the Church, under attack from a new secular culture and that was perhaps willing to adapt itself to this society. Particularly during and after Vatican II, Rahner's standing grew within the Church and Balthasar remained largely distant from such distinction. Coupled with Balthasar's concerns about the direction of the Church, Rahner was the personification of the worries Balthasar had about a relativism of the Church.

Rowan Williams notes the distinction between the two Catholic periodicals, *Concilium*, which is associated with Rahner's approach and *Communio*, which reflects significantly differing concerns and is more in the tone of Balthasar.<sup>107</sup> To characterise these two journals as representing the differences between the two theologians would not accurately portray the situation. It is not a clear-cut debate between the conservative Balthasar and the more progressive Rahner. But, it does highlight the concerns that both theologians had regarding the direction of the Church.

Rahner's desire to deal with the current and divisive issues of society facing the Church meant that his approach was based on an openness not seen as prevalently in Balthasar's outlook. Balthasar's fears of seeing Christianity tempered and constricted by the trends in secular society were reflected in his passionate arguments on issues, which inevitably put him at odds with Rahner.

### **2.3.6 Balthasar's Concerns on Rahner's Philosophical Allegiances**

So severe was Balthasar's critique of Rahner in *Cordula*, that in a postscript in a later edition he penned a response to rebukes for being so critical.<sup>108</sup> He referenced original concerns he had had with Rahner's publication, *Spirit in the World*, which he had reviewed previously, and reiterated why he had been so critical. In Kilby's words: "He presents Rahner's involvement in German

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<sup>107</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Balthasar and Rahner', in *The Analogy of Beauty in The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1986) 11

<sup>108</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 146-149

Idealism, as evidenced by *Spirit in the World*, as a decisive element in his own reaction against Rahner."<sup>109</sup>

*Cordula* outlines in Balthasar's mind, the two pathways in life the Christian is faced with; the first option is the call to martyrdom, which is being a genuine witness to Christian faith. The second is "the System" which is inspired by German Idealism. The System enables Christians to adapt to modern society but in doing so, lose the call to be true witnesses to their faith. Balthasar's criticism that Rahner makes faith too easy and too admissible is clearly seen here. That which is distinctive about Christianity is lost, and by extension, the cross loses its meaning as is the call to take up one's cross and follow Christ. The uniqueness of Christ and the historical reality of the cross are made less significant and everything is dissolved into a philosophy coloured by the abstractions of German Idealism. In Balthasar's view, this is the cost of Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian.

Balthasar believes it is Rahner's transcendental method that robs Christianity of its meaning. Rahner's approach is inspired by the work of transcendental Thomist Joseph Maréchal, who attempted to bring together the thought of Aquinas with German Idealism. *Spirit in the World* was Rahner's failed doctoral dissertation in philosophy, influenced by Martin Heidegger which argued that the human search for meaning was based in the infinite horizon of God's own Being experienced within the world.

In Balthasar's view, Rahner reduces the Incarnation to a theological *a priori*; a formal *Vorgriff* (pre-understanding) and that humans have a natural orientation towards transcendental revelation. He is also critical of Rahner's theology, which he sees as reducing the particularity of the Christian faith to only the expression of the human subject's self-transcendence. Balthasar believes Rahner's reliance on philosophy leads to a tightly ordered system which renders his theology open to post-Christian interpretation.<sup>110</sup> He consistently

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<sup>109</sup> Karen Kilby, Balthasar and Rahner, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 259

<sup>110</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 273

points to *Spirit in the World* when highlighting his suspicions that Rahner is heavily influenced by German Idealism.

It is debatable here whether Balthasar is being fair to Rahner by describing him as basing his theological method on philosophy, namely on *Spirit of the World*. At this point, it is worth remembering Balthasar's background. The aristocratic and cultured lover of Mozart was influenced by Goethe but regarding philosophy, Barth was a more significant influence on Balthasar. His study of Barth:

...had impressed upon him the damage that flirtation with any philosophical system was likely to do to the integrity of the presentation of Christian revelation; as he saw it, necessarily reducing revelation to the fulfilment of an already existing framework.<sup>111</sup>

*Spirit in the World* was a doctoral dissertation, and the only major text that one could argue was written as a philosophical text, not a theological one. Rahner never claimed to be a philosopher and did not have a particular philosophy, even dedicating a few pages in *Investigations* to clarify this: "I myself am a theologian and really nothing else; simply because I am just not a philosopher, and am under no illusions that I ever could be one."<sup>112</sup>

Philip Endean argues that Rahner's work is ultimately rooted in his spirituality. This leads to a necessary reduction of the significance of *Spirit in the World* and any earlier philosophical works. It also highlights the inaccuracy of observing Rahner's theological output as an evolution of *Spirit in the World*.<sup>113</sup>

Rahner also finds support that his theological system not being overtly philosophical from peers who would have been critical of him in the past. Joseph Ratzinger notes that Rahner's:

...transcendental method does not pretend to deduce Christianity purely from itself. It is, he recognized, 'a presupposition of understanding'

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<sup>111</sup> Eamonn Conway, 'So as not to Despise God's Grace: Re-assessing Rahner's Idea of the "Anonymous Christian"'. (*Louvain Studies*, Vol 29 (1-2) ( Spring-Summer 2004) 12

<sup>112</sup> Karl Rahner, Some Clarifying Marks About My Own Work, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 243

<sup>113</sup> Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 7

(Verstehensvorgang) that becomes possible because the faith has already opened up the field of thought.<sup>114</sup>

Leo J. O' Donovan also defends Rahner's transcendental method which Balthasar argued ultimately prevented him from developing a theology of the cross:

It is not only a short-circuiting but also simplistically false to understand him only as a transcendental thinker... He was above all a theologian who lived out of the experience of the Holy Spirit, and out of this experience concerned himself with the understanding of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>115</sup>

### **2.3.7 Balthasar and Rahner: A Parallel with Barth and Schleiermacher**

Both Kilby and Conway point out that the comparison between the dialogue between Rahner and Balthasar and that of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. In the same way that:

Barth saw Schleiermacher as the epitome of modern Protestant theology gone wrong, then Balthasar presented Rahner as a leading light in the going wrong of contemporary Roman Catholic theology. And more concretely, just as Barth saw Schleiermacher as adapting to modernity where he should have resisted it, and as distorting theology by moving its centre from God and God's revelation to man, so Balthasar saw Rahner.<sup>116</sup>

Kilby also raises two other relevant points which would apply to the relationship between Rahner and Balthasar. The first is that Balthasar, like Barth, combined his criticism with real respect and appreciation for his so-called opponent. The second is that Barth was not always fair to Schleiermacher as Balthasar has not always been to Rahner.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Verstehen des Glaubens. Anmerkungen zu Rahners Grundkurs des Glaubens*, (*Theologische Revue* 74, 1978) 184 (as cited in Eamonn Conway, *Rahner's 'Tough Love' for the Church – Structural Change in the Church as Task and Opportunity* in *Karl Rahner: Theologian For The Twenty First Century*, ed. Pádraic Conway and Fáinche Ryan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010) 143-144

<sup>115</sup> Leo O'Donovan, *Zwei Söhne des Ignatius in Weg und Weite*, *Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, ed. by Albert Raffelt (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2001) 373 (as cited in Eamonn Conway, 'So as not to Despise God's Grace: Re-assessing Rahner's Idea of the "Anonymous Christian"' (*Louvain Studies*, Vol 29 (1-2) (Spring-Summer 2004) 14)

<sup>116</sup> Karen Kilby, *Balthasar and Rahner*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 257

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 257-258

Conway notes the respective contexts in which Rahner and Schleiermacher were working. Both were attempting to address a feeling of hostility towards Christianity, both utilising philosophy to make a connection between human thought and divine revelation.<sup>118</sup>

A clear insight is developed regarding the comparison between the respective theological pairings. In exploring the dialogue between Rahner and Balthasar, similar issues are raised between Barth and Schleiermacher. The respect and admiration Barth has for his supposed rival and the knowledge Barth had of Schleiermacher's work can draw a comparison to Balthasar's opinion of Rahner. Balthasar had a clear appreciation and respect for Rahner as a theologian. That being said, it is also important to remember that Barth was not always fair to Schleiermacher as Balthasar was not to Rahner. If one was to base their entire opinion of Schleiermacher on Barth's arguments, one would not have a proper understanding of his work. The same could be said of Balthasar regarding his critique on Rahner.

### **2.3.8 Conclusion on the Implicit Factors of Balthasar's Criticism**

What has been clearly distinguished is that Balthasar's criticism of Rahner has many dimensions to it. These dimensions are most certainly not confined to theological differences.

*Cordula oder der Ernstfall* reveals much more than Balthasar's disapproval of Rahner's approach to the cross, the moment of true Christian witness. It reveals the criticism of a theologian with a cultured writing style. Balthasar's eloquence and elegance enable him to compose rich spiritual writing. But what is also revealed is Balthasar's trenchant and at times hostile polemical side. Balthasar turns his pen into a weapon in his bitter criticism of Rahner. He is unyielding and aggressive in condemning Rahner's approach to the cross as non-existent.

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<sup>118</sup> Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991) 46 & (ref34)

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Factors included in Balthasar's critique are personal grievances. *Cordula* was written during a dark period of Balthasar's life, in a time of isolation after leaving the Jesuits. Balthasar's exclusion from Vatican II and him being beaten to Guardini's professorship chair by Rahner are also recognised. Rahner's scepticism over Adrienne Von Speyr's input in Balthasar's theology is significant in the souring of relations between the two. There is a definitive respect between Rahner and Balthasar in terms of their theological contributions in general but these personal factors cannot be omitted.

Factors included in Balthasar's bitter criticism have also included his concerns over Rahner's influence by German Idealism and the direction of the Church in the twentieth century. As has been demonstrated, it is clear from researchers including Kilby and Endean that Rahner cannot be said to have a theology so heavily influenced by philosophy. It has also been highlighted that Rahner himself has stated that he does not belong in the category of philosopher.

Balthasar's anxieties over the Church being relativized are not completely fair to Rahner. Rahner's openness in exploring burning issues facing society is not seen as easily in Balthasar's approach. Rahner's background as a professor of theology meant he did not have the freedom to write that Balthasar had. Despite this lesser freedom, it can be argued that Rahner attempted to engage with a modern and changing society far more clearly than Balthasar.

The parallel with Barth and Schleiermacher and Karl Barth is particularly apt in this discussion. Simply put, if you had never read Schleiermacher and relied on secondary information about him from Barth, you would have an unfair and not fully accurate understanding of Schleiermacher. This comparison is suitable in critiquing Balthasar's presentation of Rahner. Balthasar is not fair on Rahner and shows a clear lack of hermeneutic magnanimity in relation to Rahner's approach to the cross.

## 2.4 Rahner's Response

The content of *Cordula* revealed Balthasar's eloquent literary style but also his occasionally hostile and hurtful nature. There are two elements to the response of Rahner to Balthasar's criticism, the personal and the theological. Both elements will be briefly examined.

### 1. Personal:

Vorgrimler indicates that Rahner was peace-loving and did not generally defend himself from criticisms. His desire to have friends in theology meant that he would suffer disappointments when the people he believed to be friends repudiated his works. One of these was Balthasar.

In 1964, he wrote an essay for Rahner's sixtieth birthday and sang his praises. From 1966 on, Balthasar spoke of Rahner as the embodiment of all heresies, a theologian who could lead one to atheism.<sup>119</sup>

Rahner who was very sensitive took such a criticism personally and *Cordula* has been shown to be the clear moment of alienation between the two, where their personal relationship was put under heavy strain. Rahner thought of Balthasar as a friend in theology, so to face such hostile and aggressive criticism from Balthasar was of particular disappointment to him.

### 2. Theological:

There are few documented examples of Rahner directly defending himself against Balthasar's polemic in *Cordula*. Cardinal Karl Lehmann refers to one occasion in 1967 when Rahner had to address the criticism as it was presented at a seminar. Rahner felt no obligation to reply to it, but because of the seminar, he had to. "Rahner's reaction was essentially to reject von Balthasar's criticism as 'too dumb to be worthy of a response. He has understood nothing.'"<sup>120</sup>

The most famous recorded response of Rahner to Balthasar's claims that he lacked a theology of the cross will now be explored. It is significant as it reveals Rahner's opinion that he did not lack such a theology. Furthermore, in Rahner's

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<sup>119</sup> Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, Translation ed. Harvey D. Egan. (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 181-182

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 112

opinion, there were significant flaws in his main detractor's theology of the cross and also Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the cross.

### **2.5 The Response at Freiburg:**

A section of Rahner's most famous reply to the criticism of Balthasar has already been noted but its significance cannot be understated, as it is one of the only times Rahner launches a counter-criticism at Balthasar and also Jürgen Moltmann, citing what he describes as clearly gnostic tendencies in their respective approaches to the death of God. The full quote has already been quoted on p55.

The context in which Rahner said this was actually a completely innocent theological conversation with a seminary student at Freiburg during a lecture. Yet it has taken on notable significance as both Balthasar and Moltmann quote Rahner's use of the word in their works, which will be highlighted during this chapter. However neither mention a point made by Rahner earlier in the conversation at Freiburg when asked about Balthasar's accusation that he lacked a theology of the cross. Rahner's reply was that he most certainly did have a theology of the cross.<sup>121</sup> Rahner also referred to Anselm Grün's doctoral dissertation about this subject.<sup>122</sup>

While Rahner may not have rebuked Balthasar with the same hostility as Balthasar had criticised him, it is clear that Rahner argued he had a theology of the cross. Also, his response to Balthasar and Moltmann provide an insight into what Rahner saw as defective in their respective theologies of the cross. This "gnostic" position they took refers to both theologians writing on the suffering of God on the cross.

Balthasar and Moltmann have already been discussed in the previous chapter regarding their respective theologies of the cross. What will now be examined is why Rahner necessarily calls their positions "gnostic", in relation to how it is

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Anselm Grün, *Erlösung Durch das kreuz. Karl Rahners Beitrag zu einem heutigen Erlösungsverständnis* (Münsterschwarzach: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1975)

God that suffers on the cross and why his statement at Freiburg is completely justified.

## **2.6 The Suffering of God in Balthasar and Moltmann's Theologies of the Cross:**

Modern theology has challenged the traditional view of *apatheia*; the position strongly influenced by Greek philosophy that God is impassible. The Church Fathers and Reformation theologians maintained this idea of God as impassible, God who is fundamentally unable to suffer or enter precisely enter into a state of suffering. This was not an attempt to conceptualise God as being passionless or apathetic; rather it was to protect the divine and perfect nature of God.

The chief reason must lie in their view of the perfection of God as triune, having a life of perfect felicity in himself, which, when he came into our human sinful situation, did not alter him... Though God was a living, loving being in perfect communication with himself he could also, while maintaining his full deity, enter into relationship with our humanity and our world.<sup>123</sup>

The central concern when exploring suffering in God is to balance the protection of God's perfection with the Incarnation; that is the Word Incarnate suffering and dying. Both Balthasar and Moltmann offer distinctive theologies of the cross which include a relation between suffering and God that Rahner does not accept. Rahner seeks to protect the *communicatio idiomatum*; the classifying of the person of Christ as having two natures, human and divine.

Balthasar and Moltmann's perspective on the suffering of God on the cross will first be presented. This will expand the discourse on them in the previous chapter, but also highlight why they have not been reconciled to Rahner's approach to the cross. Balthasar is critical of Rahner's failure to do justice to the cross and to the deadly seriousness of sin, as already explored. Moltmann is highly critical of Rahner's rejection of the idea of a suffering God.

Following this, the reasoning behind Rahner's rebuke of Balthasar and Moltmann will be outlined. Rahner's efforts to protect both the human and divine natures of Christ will also be highlighted. The hypostatic union set down

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<sup>123</sup> John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994) 54

at Chalcedon stresses that both natures are fully communicated and the attributes of one nature can be applied to the other. But Rahner also makes clear that these attributes are not to be confused. In this way, Rahner makes clear that he rejects any confusion of attributes that would say the divine nature suffers outside of its total union with the human nature of Jesus.<sup>124</sup>

### **2.6.1 Hans Urs Von Balthasar:**

Balthasar sees the cross as the supreme expression of God's love, paradoxically in the abandonment of the Son by the Father. The summit of this love is realised on the cross. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, Balthasar emphasises the relationship between suffering and the Trinity. On the cross, the Son experiences the fate of the sinner, and dies on our behalf. The Son suffers in his obedience in the face of being separated from the Father. There is within the Trinity a separation and a unity by the Holy Spirit on Holy Saturday.<sup>125</sup> Gerald O' Hanlon's exploration of Christ's suffering on the cross and the Trinity's role in this is a useful resource in analysing Balthasar's position on God and suffering.<sup>126</sup>

The Trinity exists in an interpersonal relationship; Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an eternal, dynamic event of self-giving. Christ first encounters the loss of God's presence in the Garden of Gethsemane, where the weight of the sins of the world is laid on him. Christ suffered spiritually, building from the initial terror of sin experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane to the abandonment on Calvary. Aside from the obviously massive physical and psychological suffering Jesus endured on the cross, this spiritual suffering first experienced in the Garden was the hell Jesus experienced, culminating on the cross.

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<sup>124</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour*, trans. Robert Barr (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1983) 57

<sup>125</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 148

<sup>126</sup> Gerard F. O' Hanlon, *Does God Change? The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 164

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The spiritual suffering was the more intense, because its ultimate cause was so much deeper- offence against God and our separation from God and also because Christ's excess of love made him the more inclined to suffer.<sup>127</sup>

On Good Friday, the Son cries out on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). The Word Incarnate takes on the full experience of living while being cut off from the presence of God. John Thompson notes O' Hanlon's contention that suffering cannot be an experience solely attributed to the human nature of Christ:

It is the one Lord Jesus Christ in the totality of his being and action who suffered and died on the cross. Some form, therefore, of possibility must be attributed to the Son and so to God. Yet again it cannot simply be equated with ours.<sup>128</sup>

Balthasar is conscious of protecting the *communicatio idiomatum* but recognises that the separation of Father and Son has to include some manner of relational suffering within the Trinity.

This suffering touched the Son's divine relation with the Father. Although objectively, he was one with the Father, subjectively he experienced the Godforsaken, self-destitution of suffering Hell within himself.<sup>129</sup>

The Father experiences some manner of suffering in the Son's death on the cross and also in the Son's descent into the dead on Holy Saturday. This is not to say that Balthasar proposes that the Father suffers in the human sense of the word. God remains perfect in the divine life of giving and receiving as Father and Son through the Holy Spirit.

Holy Saturday is that hiatus between the Father and Son, a situation where the Son has descended into the dead. The Word is now silent and lies in the Godforsaken, experiencing the second death; that of hell and judgement. The Son is in the hell of isolation from the Father, suffering the fate of the sinner who has replied with the final "No" to God's love.

God's perfection is not compromised by Holy Saturday, but Balthasar is keen to apply some manner of suffering to Father and the Holy Spirit as a result of the

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<sup>127</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 104

<sup>128</sup> John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994) 57

<sup>129</sup> Matthew Lewis Sutton, Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday, (2010) 6 <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/MatthewSuttonpaper.pdf> (accessed on 29th January, 2014)

Son's distance. As God has entered into the world in *kenosis*, the Father gives Himself through His Son in suffering and death in the cross. Balthasar sees God as experiencing something corresponding to pain in Christ and in us, called "supra-suffering." By this, he means that there must be something in God that in some way is analogous to human suffering, which is beyond our comprehension. God as absolute love encompasses all modalities of love, even the modality of a love based in compassion and separation. This is inspired by the love exchange of the three persons in the one God.<sup>130</sup>

Balthasar acknowledges the limits of language, and that we cannot conceptualise the relationship between "suffering" and the Trinity. Analogy and comparisons in this respect fail. If we are to speak about God's nature in this way, we must remember there is no exact correspondence between Creator and creature; any attempt to find likeness only points to an infinite unlikeness.

Balthasar realises this imperfection of attempting to express the nature of the self-giving love of God in abstract terms, but through his theology of Holy Saturday, attempts to convey that such is the love of the Father that He can experience suffering as distance from His Son. "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit experience the relational distance of the Son during the Passion and descent to the dead from within and as a revelation of his love for humanity."<sup>131</sup>

Balthasar claims Rahner underplays the significance of Christ's 'bitter suffering' on the cross, focusing more on Christ's manner of facing the act of dying. Balthasar implies that Rahner allows the cross to dissolve into the general phenomenon of death.

The (purely philosophical) interpretation of the descent into Hell, which considers it as the 'foundation' of a new existential dimension in the radical depths of cosmic being, is neither biblically justified, nor theologically sufficient.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) viii-ix

<sup>131</sup> Matthew Lewis Sutton, Does God Suffer? Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology of Holy Saturday, (2010) 6 <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/MatthewSuttonpaper.pdf> (accessed on 29th January, 2014)

<sup>132</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 147

Balthasar does not see the same commitment to Christ's suffering on the cross in Rahner's theology as he sees in his own. Also, it seems ironic that Balthasar calls Rahner's interpretation of Christ's descent into hell theologically insufficient. It is true that Rahner's approach to the descent into the dead is influenced by his works on a general theology of death. However, it cannot be forgotten that Balthasar has based his theology of Holy Saturday on private revelation; the visions of Adrienne von Speyr. His own interpretation could also face the same criticism; that it is neither biblically justified, nor theologically sufficient.

### **2.6.2 Rahner's response to Balthasar:**

Rahner criticizes Balthasar's idea that suffering is immanent to the Trinity, which Balthasar developed from von Speyr's visions. Rahner's use of the word "gnostic" highlights his concern as to whether an example of private revelation is sufficient to be the basis of such a unique theology as that of Holy Saturday.

In Rahner's view, this notion would diminish the Christian's hope, grounded in the Incarnation, that the sorrows of this world have been overcome. For Rahner, in the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Son, the Godhead who cannot suffer has brought suffering into its own divine impassability.

### **2.6.3 Jürgen Moltmann:**

Following the horrors of the Holocaust and advances in nuclear armament, an awareness of the suffering and misery of the world was realized. This corresponded to a movement to involve God in the plight of suffering humanity, showing solidarity with us and how God could help us destroy suffering. Moltmann's experiences of the catastrophic tragedies of World War II must be acknowledged in exploring his work on God and suffering. Moltmann's criticism of the idea of the *apatheia* of God leads him to the other extreme; making suffering a pivotal and necessary facet of God.

The subject of a suffering God in Moltmann's theology has been covered in the previous chapter as it is the primary rationale to of his theology of the cross. This discourse will focus on what precisely puts him at odds with Rahner.

God's love for humanity is such that He too can suffer in love for them. The Son is abandoned and suffers in his love and Godforsakenness while the Father suffers in grief over the death of His Son.<sup>133</sup> The Spirit proceeds from this event and creates love for sinful humanity. This is a Trinitarian theology that incorporates the cross and divine suffering. It is the relationship between God and suffering that Moltmann disputes with Rahner.

#### **2.6.4 Rahner's response to Moltmann:**

Rahner's criticism of Moltmann is very similar to his criticism of Balthasar. Moltmann is unique in offering such a profound image of a suffering God who loves His people so much that He makes Himself vulnerable out of this love. The taking up of humanity's sufferings into Godself reveals a God who encounters all the pains and cries of the victims of this world. This is a concept that, while comforting in one sense, is radically tragic in another. Rahner raises an important question in his response. That is, how can we be saved if the God we place our hope in is subject to the same hideousness and folly as we are?

Rahner is not the only theologian to raise concerns with Moltmann's notion of a suffering God. Thomas Weinandy highlights other theologians who share the opinion of Rahner. These include Ronald Goetz:

Any concept of a limited deity finally entails a denial of the capacity of God to redeem the world and thus, ironically, raises the question of whether God is in the last analysis even love, at least love in the Christian sense of the world.<sup>134</sup>

Weinandy also cites Joseph Selling:

In the end, the image of a God who suffers along with creation is incapable of challenging the tragedy of human suffering itself... For if God suffers-

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<sup>133</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. John Bowden and R.A. Wilson (London: SCM Press, 1974) 248

<sup>134</sup> Ronald Goetz, *The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy, in The Christian Century*, 103/13(April 16, 1986) 388 <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1033> (accessed on 30/1/2014) cited by Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 2000) 157 (ref 20)

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experiencing pain without meaning or justification- then we are more alone and hopeless than our fear and anxiety could imagine.<sup>135</sup>

Moltmann is opposed to Rahner's position, stating:

...the Son of God who died forsaken by God, helped me... in a messy concentration camp in 1945, tormented and forsaken by God, and abandoned all hope. It is on the basis of this experience of God that I believe and think... I find no connection between consolation and apathy and therefore find no way into your experience of God and self.<sup>136</sup>

Moltmann's offers a harsh response to Rahner's criticism, stating that the comments sounded like those of someone unloved and incapable of love, whose life was fossilized and cold. He speculates: "Are these the pains of being cut off from natural relationships which celibacy imposes on a young man enthused by God?"<sup>137</sup>

Weinandy indicates the stark unfairness and offensive nature of Moltmann's jibe at Rahner. To disagree with Rahner is acceptable, but to call into question Rahner's ability to feel love due to his vow of celibacy is harsh in the extreme.<sup>138</sup>

The fact that Moltmann personally attacks Rahner on this issue suggests that the notion of a suffering God is paramount to Moltmann's theology. This is to be expected as the almost inconceivably horrific experiences of World War II profoundly influenced Moltmann. This perspective clearly led Moltmann to develop his theology that no impassible God could allow such evil and suffering to occur in the world. For Moltmann, only a suffering God could save humanity.

However this carries a serious danger to protecting the divine freedom of the eternal God, as Thompson notes:

First (Moltmann's) anti-apatheia is carried to extremes. Freedom and necessity are one in God. God must suffer because he is love and this suffering is carried into the very nature of God himself.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Joseph Selling, *Moral Questioning and Human Suffering: In Search of a Credible Response to the Meaning of Suffering* in *God and Human Suffering*, ed. by Jan Lambrecht & Raymond Collins (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1989) 170 cited by Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 2000) 157 (ref 20)

<sup>136</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991) 123

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 123

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 2000) 157 (ref 20)

One other criticism of Moltmann's work must be recognised. This relates to the suffering God in relation to analogous language. Balthasar admits the futility of language in expressing the divine. Moltmann is less pragmatic. Thompson argues that Moltmann is surprisingly unaware of ever stating his interpretation of what suffering actually is:

There is also in Moltmann an inadequate conceptuality. Remarkably, Moltmann never defines what he means by suffering. One of the chief defects of his whole theological approach is an almost total unawareness of the problem of applying human predicates to God. Or, to put it otherwise he fails to see that in applying suffering to God he is in danger of using this term not in an analogical way but in an illegitimate, univocal manner.<sup>140</sup>

### **2.6.5 Conclusion:**

Rahner's criticism of Moltmann is justified and as the remarks from other theologians demonstrate, Rahner is not alone in seeing the dangers of a God who can suffer. An approach such as Moltmann's completely throws the formula of Chalcedon into disrepute. The hypostatic union is broken as in the case of Moltmann, it seems to suggest that suffering is an integral and actually necessary part of the divine nature. Rahner's fears of the attributes of both natures being confused are confirmed here as he cannot accept that God suffers as humans do. Rather, this suffering is taken up into God's own divine impassibility.

Vorgrimler observes Rahner's almost unbelievably optimistic remarks about the suffering of humanity.<sup>141</sup> While one could argue that Rahner downplayed the significance of suffering, it can also be interpreted as a sign of Rahner's tremendous faith in the infinite mystery of God. Rahner witnessed bereavement and suffering in his lifetime too and was of a generation that was scarred by the Holocaust, but this does not mean Rahner was not aware of the everyday suffering of the world.

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<sup>139</sup> John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994) 63  
Thompson cites (Richard J. Bauckham, *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1987) p107f) on this point.

<sup>140</sup> John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994) 63

<sup>141</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 129

## ***Chapter 2- Criticisms of Rahner's Approach to the Cross***

Rahner's criticism of both Balthasar and Moltmann in the famous rebuttal at Freiburg is one of the very few documented examples of Rahner defending his theology of the cross. The notion of God suffering in either of the manners proposed by Balthasar and Moltmann was totally unacceptable to Rahner as it branched away from the formula of the hypostatic union set down at Chalcedon. Rahner's use of the word "gnostic" is apt, as both theologians are guilty of developing positions on God's nature that presuppose some form of knowledge independent of any Church teaching or scriptural basis. Balthasar is heavily influenced by the mystic Adrienne von Speyr's visions, particularly of Holy Saturday. Moltmann is deeply affected by his experiences of the horrors of World War II, following the mantra of the martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that "only a suffering God can save us."

Both Balthasar and Moltmann respond to Rahner's comments with emotive and quite personal rebuttals. Implicit factors in Balthasar's criticism have already been noted. Moltmann's response, surmising that Rahner's position is based on a lack of experience of love due to Rahner's celibacy, is in bad taste and overtly unfair.

Rahner's position is founded on his Incarnational theology which is keen to stress the *communicatio idiomatum* and protect both natures of Christ. This has significant implications for Rahner's theology of the cross. The interlocking of human and divine natures faces scrutiny when discussed in relation to the cross. The importance of sin and atonement and the question of suffering in God must be reconciled with the union of man and God.

With this in mind, a brief account of Rahner's theology of the Incarnation will be given, which will stress his position regarding the idea of a suffering God. This will highlight the critical importance Rahner places on the Incarnation in his theology, and by extension his theology of the cross. Also, it will make clear that Ratzinger's comments in the previous chapter on the tensions between theology of the cross and of the Incarnation are a factor in this investigation. It will shed further light on why Balthasar believed there was no cross in Rahner's theology. Firstly, the reader will be reminded of the occasional pitfalls of solely reading

Balthasar's criticism of Rahner. This is in relation to the starting point of Rahner's Incarnational theology. Rahner's position on the immutability and impassibility of God will then be evaluated. Rahner's stance on the "death of God" on the cross will also be noted. Finally, the importance "anthropological turn" in Rahner's Christology will be demonstrated, and how it is key to understanding the Incarnation in Rahner's theology.

### **2.7 Balthasar's misrepresentation of Rahner's Incarnational Theology**

The Incarnation is absolutely central to Rahner's whole Christology. Rahner is strongly influenced by the formula at Chalcedon and seeks to protect this union of human and divine natures.<sup>142</sup> This stringent loyalty is more rigid than Balthasar's to the Chalcedonian formula. Rahner is very keen to stress that the Incarnation is not the result of God being affected by sin. Rahner takes the salvific will of God as his starting point for the Incarnation (and the cross). Balthasar criticises Rahner for his perceived downplaying of sin in favour of the universal saving will of God. But as the exploration of the implicit factors in Balthasar's criticism has shown, these critiques are not always fair or accurate.

Balthasar accuses Rahner of lacking "the decisive dramatic element"<sup>143</sup> that occurs in the Cross of Christ. Stephan Finlan raises an important point on this critique. Balthasar may have legitimate concerns that Rahner subsumes the wrath of God into the saving will of God. Balthasar argues that for Rahner, sin is left to dissolve into the Incarnation, and strips the cross of its redemptive significance. But as Finlan points out, Balthasar actually misquotes Rahner:

Balthasar rejects Rahner's approach, saying it is not correct to "take references to God's anger" and "simply dissolve them in God's free, salvific will", although what Rahner actually says is; "God's free salvific will (is) the *a priori* cause of the Incarnation and of the cross of Christ, a cause which is not conditional on

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<sup>142</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Jesus Christ- The Meaning of Life, Theological Investigations 21*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988) 208-219, particularly 211-219. Rahner outlines clearly his understanding of Chalcedonism and neo-Chalcedonism. It is in the latter we see Rahner's position that the divine and human attributes are not mixed, and that the divine nature does not suffer outside of the hypostatic union.

<sup>143</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA : Ignatius Press, 1994) 283

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anything outside of Christ” In other words, God is not forced (by sin) to resort to the incarnation.<sup>144</sup>

Here we can see implicit factors of Balthasar's criticism of Rahner. In a polemical moment, Balthasar has generalized Rahner's point and given it a meaning that Rahner did not intend nor write. It is anything but fair on Rahner to misquote him as if you were to take Balthasar's quote as fact, you would have an inaccurate understanding of Rahner's position. As Kilby states: “Such criticisms contain elements of misrepresentation and caricature.”<sup>145</sup>

Rahner is not subsuming sin into God's saving will. Rahner points to the Incarnation (and the cross) as the result of God's salvific will. God is not forced to change His mind because of sin and resort to the Incarnation. God's open offer to us of salvation precludes and actually causes the Incarnation and by extension the event on Calvary. The fact that Rahner identifies the salvific will of God as the *a priori* cause of both Incarnation and cross is important. Rahner is not downplaying the significance of the cross but seeks to place it under the overarching context of God's will for humanity to be saved. The cross is the effect of God's salvific will, not its cause.

It is not easy to see how the cross of Christ can be the cause of God's salvific will for other people if God's salvific will is antecedent to the cross of Christ as its cause, and is not its effect... It would also contradict the fact that Jesus Christ is intended from the outset by God's salvific will as the redeemer of the world.<sup>146</sup>

Rahner highlights that it is neither the cross nor the Incarnation that cause God to save us. The Incarnation and cross are results of God's free gift of salvation. It also serves to remind the reader to be aware that Balthasar's criticisms (in this

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<sup>144</sup> Stephan Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MA: Liturgical Press, 2007) 76 Finlan quotes Balthasar's misquote of Rahner in (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA : Ignatius Press, 1994) 283) and quotes Rahner's actual statement in (Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 317)

<sup>145</sup> Karen Kilby, Balthasar and Rahner, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward Oakes and David Moss (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 260

<sup>146</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 317

case, of Rahner using the Incarnation as a device to underplay the wrath of God) are not always as accurate as he would argue.<sup>147</sup>

Rahner's position on the Incarnation and its relation to the idea of a suffering God will now be outlined.

### **2.7.1 Immutability**

As has been demonstrated, Rahner stays loyal to the Chalcedonian formula of the two natures of Christ. This shapes Rahner's consistent efforts to protect the immutability and impassibility of God. Regarding immutability, Rahner's claim is that: "God can become something, he who is unchangeable in himself can himself become subject to change in something else."<sup>148</sup>

In this way God's divine immutability has been safeguarded. This is not to say that Rahner's approach to immutability has been seen as unproblematic or straightforward. The idea that God can remain unchangeable yet be subject to change in some way is difficult to reconcile. As Heather Meacock argues, it borders contradiction to say that God who "is" in a total unchangeable way can subject to change to what God "is not".<sup>149</sup>

Meacock feels that Rahner does not offer an adequate explanation for this contradiction, that he merely argues: "here ontology has to be adapted to the message of faith and not be schoolmaster to this message."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Joseph Wong explores Balthasar's objection that according to Rahner, humanity owes their redemption to the always effective saving will of God, rather than the historical Christ event. Wong argues that Balthasar has misunderstood Rahner's view of "sacramental-symbolic causality". Rahner's idea of such causality when understood properly, allows one to say that man owes his redemption to the God's salvific will and simultaneously to Christ as Redeemer. Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Las: Roma, 1984) 240-244

<sup>148</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of the Incarnation, Theological Investigations 4*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 113

<sup>149</sup> Heather Meacock, *An Anthropological Approach to Theology: A Study of John Hicks Theology of Religious Pluralism, Towards Ethical Criteria for a Global Theology of Religions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000) 136

<sup>150</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 221 (cited by Heather Meacock, *An Anthropological Approach to Theology: A Study of John Hicks Theology of Religious Pluralism, Towards Ethical Criteria for a Global Theology of Religions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000) 136)

Systematic theologian Mark Fischer attempts to paraphrase Rahner's efforts to make clear how is it that God can become subject to change and yet remain unchangeable:

God's immutability has to be understood dialectically. Immutability is not the only characteristic of God. It must be understood in relation to other qualities, such as God's willingness to become incarnate. We understand the tension between immutability and incarnation the way we understand the tension between the unity and plurality of God in the Trinity. God, who is immutable, can "become"; God can become "less" than what God remains.<sup>151</sup>

In this way, the Word becomes flesh as it assumes the reality of that which it is capable of becoming. The Word can therefore assume the human reality of Jesus. In the Incarnation, God enters into our human history and brings together human nature and divine nature. This is why Rahner can say that the event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is the "event and history of God himself."<sup>152</sup>

This is not an attempt to evaluate the success of Rahner's efforts to protect the divine immutability of God. The contention is merely being raised that Rahner consistently argues that God can become subject to change without the divine immutability being compromised.

### **2.7.2 Impassibility:**

Again, Rahner does not stray from the dogma at Chalcedon and affirms that God is impassible. There is not to be a confusion of the attributes of one nature to the other. Human suffering cannot be made equivalent to divine suffering. Rahner highlights his opposition to the idea of the Word suffering in a way other than in full unity with the human nature of Jesus.<sup>153</sup>

Even on the cross, Rahner does not see any openness to suffering on God's part. Even in the crucifixion and death of Jesus, the Word does not lose its impassibility.

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<sup>151</sup> Mark Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, New York, 2005) 74

<sup>152</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 221

<sup>153</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, trans. Robert Barr (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1983) 57

Jesus' fate does not impinge on God's own life, with its metahistorical character and its freedom from suffering and its beatitude without guilt, since God's reality and Jesus' creatureliness remain unmixed.<sup>154</sup>

One can clearly see here why Rahner is so opposed to the theologies offered by Balthasar or Moltmann, as Rahner believes that they affirm a God who through some means suffers in a way that destabilises the divine nature of God. Rahner does not stray from Church teaching or scriptural basis in his efforts to state God's divine immutability and impassibility. He is uncompromising on this topic and the position he takes is important regarding his soteriology. If we are able to speak of a God who is subject to the same suffering as sinful humanity, then we cannot be saved. Only the one who is completely immune to such a condition devoid of our frailties can truly offer salvation from the wretchedness of our condition.

## **2.8 The Discussion of the Death of God**

It is important to note Rahner's input in this topic, particularly in light of Rahner's staunch defence of the divine attributes of God. Rahner does not attempt to underplay the death of the Word, nor does he wish for confusion over what death entails; not simply a biological event but an absolutely personal and human act.

Rahner's exploration of the *communicatio idiomatum* attempts to explain how death can be applied to God. God does not die in Himself; rather, the Word dies in full union with the human nature of Jesus. That is not to say Rahner underplays the death of the Logos.

If someone says that the incarnate Logos 'merely' died in his human reality, and implicitly understands this to mean that this death did not touch God, he has only said half of the truth and has left out the truly Christian truth.<sup>155</sup>

Through the Incarnation, the history of God encompasses the totality of Christ's life, including his death on the cross. Death enables us to encounter God in a radical way, to accept the eternal "Yes" before the infinite mystery God brought

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<sup>154</sup> Karl Rahner, Jesus Christ- The Meaning of Life, *Theological Investigations 21*, trans Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988) 215

<sup>155</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 305

about by the death of Jesus. "Just as Jesus' life expressed who God is... so Jesus' death expressed God as God is and wants to be in relation to us."<sup>156</sup>

Through the death of Jesus, we are enabled to experience God irrevocably in death by our final and ultimate free decision. The death of God is not to be understood in any heretical manner. Rather it is the experience where we encounter God radically in our confrontation of death. Rahner writes: "The death of Jesus belongs to God's self-expression."<sup>157</sup>

## **2.9 Christology and Anthropology:**

Rahner maintains that the relationship between the Word and the human nature of Jesus must be understood as having reached an immeasurable level of perfection, which is the perfection of the relation between Creator and creature. There is no competitive relationship. God is that which enables Being to Be, enables freedom to exist and gives this possibility of freedom to humanity.

The interlocking of human and divine natures is the basis of anthropology, which Rahner affirms must be comprehended in light of the relationship of creature to Creator. "Christology may be studied as self-transcending anthropology, and anthropology as deficient Christology."<sup>158</sup>

The relationship between Christology and anthropology is made clear; Christology is the key to anthropology, as it is in Christology we see humanity reach its perfection by virtue of the unity of human and divine natures in Jesus Christ. As Roman Siebenrock writes:

Theological anthropology can thus be developed from Christology, after this has been revealed to us. Christ is the archetype of humanity... the world, creation, etc. only exist with a view to the incarnation, the hypostatic union and Jesus Christ.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Mark Fischer, *The Foundations of Karl Rahner* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, New York, 2005) 111

<sup>157</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 305

<sup>158</sup> Karl Rahner, Current Problems in Christology, *Theological Investigations 1*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 164

<sup>159</sup> Roman Siebenrock, Christology, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 117

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From here, Rahner develops his “searching Christology”, attempting to do justice to both ascending and descending approaches to Christology. But what is most relevant to this comment is Siebenrock’s affirmation of Rahner’s “anthropological turn”. Balthasar’s criticism of Rahner included this turn, focusing too much on the subject and not on God as a starting point. Balthasar berates Rahner’s anthropologically influenced theology for reducing Christian living to “a bland and shallow humanism.”<sup>160</sup> One argument should be made regarding Balthasar’s particular criticism here.

As Siebenrock argues, “Rahner’s ‘anthropological turn’ ultimately has its basis in Christology.”<sup>161</sup> In the Incarnation, the perfection of humanity is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. All of Rahner’s writings indicate the human as the starting point for theology, as that subject who puts themselves into question before God, which reaches its zenith in the meeting of human and divine in Jesus. In the hypostatic union, the possibility to truly speak of humanity is realised because of the event of the Incarnation.

This makes a strong argument against Balthasar’s criticism of Rahner as reliant on philosophy which leaves his work open to post-Christian interpretation. There is no doubt that Rahner was influenced by philosopher Immanuel Kant’s work, which included the turn to the subject. But as Rahner stated: “I do not have a philosophy.”<sup>162</sup> Rahner’s Christology is anchored in this theology of the Incarnation. To place the charge of an over-reliance on philosophy is perhaps not very accurate by Balthasar after all.

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<sup>160</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 126

<sup>161</sup> Roman Siebenrock, Christology, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 117

<sup>162</sup> William Dych, *Karl Rahner* (London: Chapman, 1992) 18

**2.10 Chapter Conclusion:**

As has been explored, Rahner and Balthasar were not always the great rivals in twentieth century Catholic theology that they have been labelled. Despite obvious differences in background and methodology, there was great mutual respect for each other.

The implicit factors in Balthasar's criticism highlight some of the worst traits in Balthasar's character as a theologian. It is absolutely acceptable to disagree with a theologian on an idea, but to do so in such a bitter and polemical manner as Balthasar did in *Cordula* is beyond that. That is not to say Balthasar lacked any legitimate reasons to rebut Rahner's theology. He felt Rahner's philosophical leanings and the direction theologians such as Rahner were leading the Church were problematic, bordering on dangerous.

What has been demonstrated is that Balthasar's reasonable concerns were inflated by personal feelings towards Rahner being soured. Rahner's promotion to professor in Munich ahead of Balthasar contributed. Rahner's significant influence at Vatican II in comparison to Balthasar's exclusion added to this. Rahner's scepticism towards Adrienne von Speyr's influence was also a supplement.

Rahner's responses are few but his documented response at Freiburg is significant. It did not improve his relations with Balthasar<sup>163</sup> but it did reveal that Rahner felt he most certainly had a theology of the cross.

The idea of a God who suffers on the cross is alien to Rahner in the sense that God cannot suffer outside of the full union with the human nature of Jesus. Rahner's determination to safeguard the hypostatic union as laid down at Chalcedon is significant as it highlights the importance of the Incarnation within Rahner's Christology, and by extension his theology of the cross.

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<sup>163</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1998) 13. Balthasar references Rahner's dubbing of his theology as "gnostic" in this Preface. Balthasar notes that in this book, Rahner "in all probability will find his verdict even more strongly confirmed". But Balthasar also notes that Rahner's verdict is unacceptable as Balthasar feels he has sufficiently written on God's immutability.

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Balthasar's criticism of Rahner becomes less surprising when the difference in their approach arrives; namely that the central *motif* of Balthasar's work is the cross while the Incarnation is of absolutely fundamental importance to understanding Rahner.

Balthasar's claims that Rahner fails to do justice to the cross reflect his perception that for a theologian with such strong emphasis on the Incarnation that: "...all the individual events that followed pale before this one event of the one-ness of man and God, of God's becoming man"<sup>164</sup>

Also, Balthasar's criticism that Rahner downplays the significance of sin can underline the claim that such Incarnational leanings make for an overly optimistic view of the world and the suffering within it:

The sin of man appears quite easily as a transitional stage of fairly minor importance. The decisive factor is then not that that man is in a state of sin and must be saved; the aim goes far beyond any such atonement for the past and lies in making progress towards the convergence of man and God.<sup>165</sup>

These criticisms are valid when they are placed against a theologian of the Incarnation, who solely focuses on the Word becoming flesh. This optimistically eclipses the cross and its redemptive significance. But Rahner is not such a theologian. While it is totally fair to say that the Incarnation is a crucial factor in Rahner's theology, this does not equate to saying that he lacks a theology of the cross. The *theologia crucis* that Rahner is guilty of lacking is the *theologia crucis* of Balthasar.

Ratzinger writes:

...a properly understood theology of being and of the incarnation must pass over into the theology of the cross and become one with it; conversely, a theology of the cross that gives its full measure must pass over it into the theology of the Son.<sup>166</sup>

It will now be demonstrated that this will be true of Rahner, that his theology of the cross exists but also that it gives and receives by virtue of Rahner's theology of the Incarnation. It may not be a perfect, prescriptive theology of the cross, but

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<sup>164</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1969) 170

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 171

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 171-172

no theology is perfect as each falls to human limitation. Nonetheless, it will now be demonstrated that Karl Rahner has an explicit theology of the cross in the following chapter.

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**3.1 Introduction to Rahner's *Spiritual Exercises*:**

This chapter will demonstrate that Rahner does indeed have an explicit theology of the cross. This means that Rahner has expressed a clearly and coherently visible theology of the cross in his work. In contrast to criticisms aimed at him, Rahner's writings do contain meditations and spiritual discourses on the cross. The text that confirms this most emphatically is Rahner's *Spiritual Exercises*, which is a collection of meditations on *the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Rahner's purpose for this text was to explain Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* and attempt to give the reader the adequate theological foundation to approach it. Reflecting on Ignatius, Philip Sheldrake argues that: "it is possible to see the theology of the Cross as central to the Exercises as a whole."<sup>167</sup> Following Sheldrake's argument, the cross can be seen as central to Rahner's reflections in his *Spiritual Exercises*. In evaluating Rahner's treatment of Ignatius' *Exercises*, Rahner's own explicit theology of the cross will be revealed.

Rahner's explicit theology of the cross will be explored sequentially, following the structure of the Four Weeks that make up the *Exercises*. In the First Week, there is the contemplation on sin, and the role of the cross in emerging from our sinful condition. The Second Week is a meditation on imitating the life of Christ and his acceptance of his life (and his death). The Third Week reflects on Christ's Passion and death in the light of the Incarnation. Finally, the Fourth Week explores the resurrection from a Trinitarian perspective. The basic line of reasoning of Lois Malcolm in her essay on Rahner's theology of the cross<sup>168</sup> is being followed here, but this argument will be developed further, and also by citing other texts that reinforce Rahner's meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Malcolm's structure is the most comprehensive model found in this work to address Rahner's explicit theology of the cross. The work is indebted to Malcolm for this structure but will not restrict himself to Malcolm's research. Rahner's explicit theology of the cross is not by any means limited to the

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<sup>167</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Theology of the Cross and The Third Week, The Way Supplement 58* (Spring 1987) 31 (also accessible online at <http://ebookbrowse.net/theology-of-the-cross-and-the-third-week-philip-sheldrake-way-supplement-58-pdf-d50076788> (accessed on 6/1/14)

<sup>168</sup> Lois Malcolm, *Rahner's Theology of the Cross*, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 115-131.

*Spiritual Exercises*, and it will be highlighted that the cross is explicitly found in many of Rahner's writings.

This is not a proposal that Rahner's explicit theology of the cross is immune to criticism. A number of criticisms of Rahner's approach will be evaluated. These will include Balthasar's claim that Rahner subsumes the Christ event into the eternal salvific will of God and that Rahner's approach to the cross is deficient for lacking any dramatic element. This leads to the question as to what exactly makes Jesus the unique Redeemer of humanity in Rahner's theology. It also asks why Mary does not have a similar redemptive role if the cross is not as significant as Rahner is alleged to argue. Other criticisms include Rahner's lack of a pneumatological dimension in the Christ event. Rahner's use of pan-cosmic terms about the reality of Christ's death is also critiqued on the basis of being speculative and non-scriptural.

### **3.2 The First Week: Rahner's Exploration of Sin:**

Rahner meditates on the First Week of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, which focus on sin, judgement and hell.

#### **3.2.1 Sin and Death:**

Rahner's exploration of sin is underpinned by his understanding of the person's unthematic experience of self before the incomprehensible mystery of God in freedom known as fundamental option. This option exists in the subject's ultimate acceptance or refusal of God by way of moral action grounded in freedom. This freedom to decide what is final and irrevocable for us is ultimately realised in death. But it is not limited to our final moments, as death is a fundamental constituent of our human nature. As Jesuit theologian William Dych writes: "It is death that gives freedom its 'once and for all' character."<sup>169</sup> We live our life only once; every decision we make and our every interaction

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<sup>169</sup> William Dych, *Karl Rahner* (London: Cassell Publishers Limited, 1992) 140

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with reality participates in the “onceness” of our lives. Every act of letting go of the self in surrender to the mystery of God in faith and giving away oneself in love is part of the process of dying. As Rahner notes: “Our death is a culmination of the unrepeatable *onceness* of our personal human experience. The Epistle to the Hebrews (9 and 10) applies this “*hapax*” (onceness) to the death of Christ.”<sup>170</sup>

It is in death that we are given the ultimate freedom, to say “Yes” or “No” to God. Our response to death is decided by one of two options. The first is that we can refuse to accept the inevitability of death and cling to the finite and earthly reality of our lives. The second is that we can let ourselves willingly fall into the incomprehensible reality of the ultimate mystery that is God. Rahner writes:

Death, because of its darkness, is faced rightly when it is entered upon by man as an act in which he surrenders himself fully and with unconditional openness to the disposal of the incomprehensible decision of God, because, in the darkness of death, man is not in a position to dispose of himself unambiguously.<sup>171</sup>

Rahner summarises the consequences of either path, writing that: “In the first case death is the event of final perdition, in the second the beginning of redeemed finality in God.”<sup>172</sup> These two options represent the different ways Adam and Christ faced the reality that they would die. Adam disobeys God and turns away from the grace gifted to him. This sinful refusal by His creatures to listen to God’s call is for Rahner: “the basic characteristic of every sin.”<sup>173</sup> This decision pervades the lives of all humanity since, as the Original Sin of Adam permeates our being as we too have the freedom to turn away from God and say “No” to His love. Adam’s fall results in death becoming a consequence of sin.

And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’ (Genesis 3: 16-17).

Rahner states that before the rebellion in Eden, Adam’s grace was the grace of Christ.<sup>174</sup> That is not to say Adam was immune from death, but his death would

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<sup>170</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 90

<sup>171</sup> Karl Rahner, *On The Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 44

<sup>172</sup> Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified*, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 164

<sup>173</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 48

<sup>174</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 48

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have been one of absolute openness and trust to the mystery of God, not tainted by pride or rejection of God's love. This approach to death is the sinful option, barring humanity to be ultimately encompassed into the incomprehensible mystery of God.

Death is either that impotency which is the ultimate result of the sin that took hold of Adam, or it is a participation in the self-divestment of Christ that was never so great and so extensive as it was in His death on the cross.<sup>175</sup>

Adam's death is that consequence of sin, a "No" to God's loving invitation. Christ's death is fundamentally opposed to the choice of Adam. The second option is the acceptance of death demonstrated by Jesus. Christ's death is not an acceptance of nothingness. Christ's death is the faithful and trusting confidence in the infinite mystery of God. This death enables humanity to have such a death too, transforming the reality of our deaths from an experience of sin to a final acceptance of God's love and mercy.<sup>176</sup> This is achieved by the manner in how we accept our deaths. This dying is a process that occurs throughout our lives in our self-disposal and giving away oneself in love to God and neighbour. Dying in Christ is not really dying at all, as Christ says everyone who lives and believes in him will never die. (John 11:26). Our death is dissolved into Christ's death, and dying in Christ in a state of faith and love is a saving event.

Those who have died in faith are not "dead in Christ" only because they lived in Christ, but also their dying itself was in Christ. We may even say that death is the culmination both of the reception and of the effecting of salvation, when we recall that death, as a human action, is precisely the event which gathers up the whole personal act of a human life into one fulfilment.<sup>177</sup>

This 'letting go' occurs throughout our lives and at our death, which is the culmination of the lifelong process of dying. This release into the infinite life of God can only occur by letting go of the finite reality we currently live in. To not lose ourselves in the finiteness of our reality means we can appreciate the limited goodness of this world in its finiteness. One can live in freedom, accepting the goodness of life in its creaturely entirety while not being constrained by earthly attachments.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 91

<sup>176</sup> Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001) 194

<sup>177</sup> Karl Rahner, *On The Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 69

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This is what lies at the heart of biblical references to “denying self” and “taking up the cross” (Mark 8:34), which do not have to do with resignation and passivity but with living freely and fully, unencumbered by false attachments.<sup>178</sup>

To sin is to give an infinite value to that which is finite in this world, be it worldly possessions, personal temptations or any facet of our reality that is not God. By not following Christ's example of falling into the eternal mystery of God, we relativize our sinful lives. Instead, we choose to incarcerate ourselves in a self-made prison of our finiteness. This is truly what hell is, to turn away from God and to turn to the imperfect reality of our sinful nature.

Included in our sinful nature are venial sins. These sins, which Rahner calls “the moral disorder of our everyday life”<sup>179</sup>, are those moments that constitute our lives, where we fail to take the decision to turn towards God and instead turn away from God. These venial sins are crucial, as each of these moments is integrated into the totality of our lives. These sins, while not as damaging to our relationship with God as mortal sins, obscure our movement towards God and show “how far we are from what we should be.”<sup>180</sup> Rahner argues that some of these “disorders” can be treated by therapy and psychology, but that some of these personal defects must be accepted and suffered through, “since there is such a thing as a truly Christian suffering at the hands of one's own defects.”<sup>181</sup> These sins belong to this finite world and to us as finite beings, and Ignatius' call is to distance oneself from our sins and from this world.<sup>182</sup>

Rahner prays in the *Exercises* to the Father whose love for us is so great that He sends His only Son into our finite world and the sin that pervades it. The Father's mercy enables us to know Christ and to take up his cross, which enables Christians to distance themselves from the sin that blights both them and the world. Rahner writes: “When we have been caught up in His mercy, we

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<sup>178</sup> Lois Malcolm, Rahner's Theology of the Cross, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 119

<sup>179</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 60

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 61

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 62

<sup>182</sup> Rahner explores the notion of sin and balance between theology and psychotherapy in an essay found in

Karl Rahner, “Guilt and its Remission: The Borderland between Theology and Psychotherapy,” *Theological Investigations 2*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1963) 265-281

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no longer belong to the "world" and the struggles with venial sin have become nothing but a valid following of Christ."<sup>183</sup>

This finite world is contained within the foolishness of the cross, which reminds us that our home is not this world but in the incomprehensible mystery of God. This lies at the heart of Ignatian piety. Rahner writes:

The Cross of Christ belongs to our Christian experience, and when we actually meet it in our personal life, in the fate of our people, when the hour of darkness appears to have descended, then this is not for us Christians a failure of our true life, but the distress which is necessarily felt by him who does not have and does not want to have a permanent abode here, because he is on the way to the God beyond all the fulfilment of this world.<sup>184</sup>

Rahner's focus here is not how Jesus died, but that Jesus died.<sup>185</sup> Jesus dies the death of the sinner, yet his death transforms ours into one that is redeemed and emptied of all futility by God. Jesus' dying reaches its climax on the cross but occurs as a process throughout his life.

And this death- which in the first place is simply ours- Jesus died; he who came out of God's glory did not merely descend into our human life, but also fell into the abyss of our death, and his dying began when he began to live and came to an end on the cross when he bowed his head and died.<sup>186</sup>

Rahner writes extensively on a theology of death (which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4), and applies this to how Adam and Christ face death differently. Death is a consequence of Original Sin, and through following the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, Christians can detach themselves from the finite world which is pervaded by sin. This distancing of oneself from the world, enjoying this reality but not giving it a sense of being the ultimate, allows one to face dying every day and at the final point of death, accept death as falling into

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<sup>183</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 65

<sup>184</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World, Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 291

<sup>185</sup> Karl Rahner & Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 105

<sup>186</sup> Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified, Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 166

the incomprehensibility of God. This is what Rahner identifies as “following the Crucified.”<sup>187</sup>

### **3.2.2 Judgement:**

At the finality of my life lies the last decision. In death, there is the judgement that makes possible either the eternal existence in the effable mystery of God or the ultimate perdition; to be finally and absolutely cut off from God's love and mercy. Rahner uses the Greek word “*krinein*” utilised by Paul, to elaborate on this judgement in our distancing ourselves from the world and our sins.<sup>188</sup> “*Krinein*” has a double meaning, a separation and also a decision. The separation meaning entails divorcing ourselves from the wickedness of the world and the warped values that we place in our lives ahead of God. The decision meaning corresponds to a revealing of what is known to us in the very core of our being. The cross of Christ is the only means that we as humans have to undergo such a judgement. Rahner writes: “The cross of Christ remains as the judgement of grace in our human existence. It reveals both the absolute absurdity of sin and the still greater grace of God.”<sup>189</sup>

The cross is revealed as being central to Rahner's thought here. The only manner to see sin and how God overcomes it through His love and mercy is through the Crucified Christ.

### **3.2.3 Hell:**

The final meditation of the First Week of the *Exercises* is that on hell, which Rahner explains is to add humility to our love of God. It reminds us that because of our human weakness, we can forget God or deny Him through sin. It is a very real reminder that we can fall into the hell we lock ourselves into, through our freedom to turn away from God.

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<sup>187</sup> Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified*, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 157-170 (This essay explores this notion in greater detail, of how death is the advent of eternal life in the following of Jesus.)

<sup>188</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 91

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 86

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We do not fall into hell by accident. Our sin itself is infernal loneliness, darkness; it is something nonsensical, suffocating and dead- and what we call hell what is involved in man's every free act is the logical conclusion of the free rejection of God's mercy.<sup>190</sup>

This harrowing exploration of our potential to freely deny God's love is to stop complacency in the life of the Christian. An awareness that we are subject to temptation is a gift of grace and the call to humility are crucial in the path to avoiding our self-made hells and focusing on God's infinite love and mercy. The fact that we can still fall into this hell despite professing the Christian faith is crucial to dispelling any notion that just because you are Christian, you are guaranteed forgiveness or salvation by the merit of being Christian. Such an assumption is potentially catastrophic to make.

Rahner highlights the centrality of the cross in this meditation:

Because I have every chance in the world not to end up in hell, I must place myself with all the seriousness of the hell-meditation under the cross of my Lord. There, where I can see the love portrayed as nowhere else, and where I am challenged to return that love, with piercing fright I should feel the fickleness of my love.<sup>191</sup>

#### **3.2.4 Conclusion of the First Week:**

In the First Week of *Spiritual Exercises*, Rahner addresses the nature of sin in our lives. Following Ignatius' meditations, he is keen to stress the real presence of sin in our lives and because we are free, the possibility to sin exists throughout our lives. We each have the fundamental option in our lives, with each choice contributing to the totality of our lives. Each of our lives is a process of dying, culminating in our final death, where we are faced with the last option: a final "Yes" or "No" to the incomprehensible mystery of God.

Rahner approaches sin in a very practical manner<sup>192</sup> and at no point downplays its significance and its potentially catastrophic consequences for humanity at the point of death. Rahner's theology of death is absolutely fundamental to this understanding of hell as death being the final and deciding moment of our lives.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 95

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 96

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 28-33 (This chapter is even named "*Our Practical Attitude toward Sin*".)

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This is where our sinfulness either enables us to enter into the “abyss” of the infinite mystery of God or into hell; a self-made prison where we ultimately lock God out of our existence, devoid of love or any hope of escaping this prison. This notion of hell will be dealt with in greater detail in the Third Week, chronicling Jesus’ experience of this hell.

The First Week immediately opposes Balthasar’s criticism that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross that confronts human sin. Rahner does indeed reveal that his theology of the cross is actually central to opposing sin. The cross is the place which reveals the nature of sin and God’s grace which ultimately overcomes it. Rahner summarises this argument succinctly:

...if God did not tell us about sin in the revelation of His grace, then we would either deny the existence of guilt, or else we would utterly despair. There is no neutral position between these two. Thus we can only get a clear knowledge of guilt, both of its essence and its actuality, from the cross of Jesus Christ.... The first meeting with the theme of sin takes place before the cross of Christ and only there.<sup>193</sup>

### **3.3 The Second Week: Rahner’s Exploration of the Imitation of the Life of Christ:**

The Second Week of the *Exercises* focuses on imitating the life of Christ, and following the direction of life he led, not in circumstances as such, but “his indifference to all things in view of his commitment to God’s reign.”<sup>194</sup> This indifference ultimately leads to the death of Jesus. He is prepared to sacrifice material wealth, power or the vices of this world, instead focusing on the completion of the will of the Father. His death is the ultimate example of his self-giving nature, as he gives his life in absolute trust to the Father. It is a call to follow the inner orientation of his life, which reaches its zenith and nadir on the cross.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 39

<sup>194</sup> Lois Malcolm, Rahner’s Theology of the Cross, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 120

**3.3.1 The Following of Christ's Life and Commitment to his Mission:**

Rahner makes it clear that we cannot just focus on following Jesus at the time of our deaths, but also following his life during our lives.<sup>195</sup> The final fulfilment of his mission is of course crucial but one must also take into account how Jesus lived throughout his ministry.<sup>196</sup>

Life in a Carthusian monastery can certainly be a following of Jesus and in fact also and particularly in what cannot be found in other Christian lives. Jesus' life is reflected diversely and fragmentarily in the lives of Christians.<sup>197</sup> Following the Crucified can be done so in many ways, but the need to be grounded in humility and being detached from the finite pitfalls of this world are vital. In doing so, we may hope to enter into the Kingdom of God.

This Week is a call to discern how we contribute to, and become part of the Kingdom of God, placing ourselves at God's disposal. Rahner explores this in different chapters of *Spiritual Exercises*, which will be explored. Each of these chapters is set against the background of sin in the world and the temptation to stray from God. Following in the footsteps of Christ means a life of humility and poverty. "The following of Christ is the following of the Crucified; it is a sharing in the descent of God into creaturehood, into darkness, into the abyss of sin; it is the suffering of death."<sup>198</sup>

The key themes in this imitation of Christ's life are detachment from the materialistic traps of this world and indifference to those finite promises of this life. Both fade into nothingness when one focuses on God alone. This understanding of detachment is developed in the First Week where the person on retreat reflects on and becomes mistrustful of their sinful lives. Under this

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<sup>195</sup> Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified*, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 158. Rahner makes clear that we cannot be expected to reproduce the life of Jesus, but to follow the path of the Crucified which is to participate in Christian dying.

<sup>196</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Spirituality of the Secular Priest*, *Theological Investigations 19* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 115. Rahner highlights a tension within his own theology here by stating that priests' spirituality must contain the resistance and opposition that is "a participation in the lot of Christ."

<sup>197</sup> Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified*, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 161

<sup>198</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 133

presupposition, the chapters that will be explored call the exercitant to make a lasting decision, no matter how insignificant, which will affect their life and its orientation towards God's will in participating in the life of Christ.

Ignatius wants the exercitant to stir up in himself the courage to make a binding choice that will truly affect his life, even if it is only in a very small matter. In the Exercises, he is primarily interested in finding the concrete way in which God wants the exercitant to follow Christ.<sup>199</sup>

### **3.3.2 The Kingdom of Christ:**

The first of these Chapters is entitled; *The Kingdom of Christ*. Christ sets this example throughout his life, not focusing on the material attachments found in life; instead following the will of the one he called Abba. The call to his disciples is to leave his possessions behind and follow the path of Jesus. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24).

To enter the Kingdom of God is to suffer. It is a path that contains poverty, labour, foolishness and scandal. It is an offering of self to the greatest good, which is the will of the Father. Jesus lives this reality, putting the temptations of this sinful and materialistic world behind him in order to fulfil what is wanted of him by God. The Kingdom of Christ will be laid at the feet of the Father and we are invited into responding to the call of Christ the King in preparation for the Kingdom that is to come. We must accept the cross and the poverty of this world so that we might share a partaking in the Kingdom of God. We must offer ourselves to God, which opens ourselves to the Kingdom that is to come.

The meditation concentrates on these labours. 'Consider that all persons who have judgement and reason will offer themselves entirely for this work.' This offer must be directed toward the cross of the Lord; anything else would be idealistic illusion.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 126

<sup>200</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967)

**3.3.3 The Two Standards:**

The next chapter is entitled; *The Two Standards*. The first is the Standard of Lucifer, which is that of temptation. Humanity falls under this standard when they choose material wealth and possessions. This is the reminder that sin really exists in our world and that we are constantly in danger of falling into Godlessness, deifying the finite possessions of this reality. By giving infinite value to the finite vices of this world, one attaches oneself to that which is other than God. This is the way of sin.

The second is the Standard of Christ. This is the opposite of the first standard. To follow Lucifer is to seek outward success, material rewards for what has been accomplished in world. Rahner points out that these are not the rewards one achieves for ushering in the Kingdom of God. We are called to follow Christ's example which is to shun these material rewards, which give way to greed and sin.

These false forms are worlds apart from the poverty and humility Ignatius describes as the characteristics of the standard of Christ. These characteristics are only present when they are subject to the cross of Christ, when they are submerged in the daily fulfilment of duty, when they bring in contact in order to help others and to be ready to leave all judgment to Him.<sup>201</sup>

This standard calls for the difficult choice for sinful humanity; to turn away from the temptations of this finite world and follow the path of Christ. Jesus forsook an easier life of comfort and security in order to dedicate himself totally to the will of the Father. We are now called to follow his example in our lives. The cross of Christ is that which reveals to us our freedom to break the cycle of sinning against God and usher in a Kingdom where material attachments are broken, and humanity is brought into full and right relationship with God.

Jesus' words to the Pharisees are: "Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."(Luke 17:21). The Kingdom exists in each of us, and it is down to us to help usher in this reality to full fruition by following the example of Jesus. In following the Standard of Christ, and being subject to his cross, humanity can experience poverty. This poverty

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 178

exists in the material sense, by detaching oneself from material goods and the snares of devoting oneself to worldly possessions. A new poverty is revealed through the cross. This poverty is the ability to leave all things behind, and to truly abandon oneself in trust to God, as Jesus did on the cross.

### **3.3.4 The Three Classes of Men:**

The third chapter is *The Three Classes of Men*. The three classes relate to releasing oneself from attachment to earthly goods. The first two classes fall short of being able to serve God totally. They are unable to truly detach themselves from their material possessions. The third class of man wishes to shed the attachment of commodities but does so in such a way that they are indifferent to the sinful nature of this world and seek to serve God. Reflecting on our sinfulness and realising even more so our total dependence on God, we experience the hellishness of our own guilt and encounter God, Who is merciful love itself.

Man in his sinfulness must allow himself to be loved by this Lord without being able to find even a trace of a motive for it in himself. The incomprehensible element in this human existence is that it is able to receive from God the gift of coming before the Crucified who came in our weakness and necessity in order to try and win our love... We should surrender ourselves to this Lord unconditionally.<sup>202</sup>

The third class of man is the class of Jesus. By following in his footsteps, we too can let ourselves fall into the abyss of God's ineffable mystery. It is through the cross that this has been revealed to us; that despite the truly awful nature of sin in the world, the incomprehensible love of God still triumphs. Following the path of the Crucified enables us to achieve salvation and to ultimately share in God's love and mercy.

The final chapter in the *Spiritual Exercises* to be explored in the Second Week is *The Three Degrees of Humility*. Like the other chapters, it seeks to shift one's perspective away from its own finite ends as a sinful creature. One's innermost reality is to be seen from the perspective of its life in God. There are three

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<sup>202</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967)  
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varying degrees of humility which the exercitant is called to consider before making the decision of how to live one's life, which is the purpose of the *Exercises*. The first degree of humility means that the person remains in constant danger of compromising themselves by the potential to commit a mortal sin and grievously damage their relationship with God. The second degree signifies that the person is actively indifferent to the limits of this world and has sights on God alone. "He does not hesitate to choose a definite means when he sees it is more suitable than others to attain the end established for him by God."<sup>203</sup>

The person who possesses this second degree of humility is able to be orientated towards God and to achieving an end that is deemed appropriate by God. The first degree of humility must be sincere and consistent to develop into this second degree.

The third degree is the most perfect humility which means one is totally dedicated to God and is grounded in accepting the cross. Contained within it is a deep and profound love for the Crucified Lord. The Christian who achieves this level is utterly selfless, giving oneself away totally to the disposition of God.

In the third degree of humility, a love for the cross of the Lord is lived out that no longer seeks this-worldly reasons. It is simply presupposed that whoever follows the Lord and Master, the Crucified, Him Who is a scandal and foolishness to the world, is on the right path. A person of the third degree desires to walk no other path but that of an unconditional following of Christ, always, of course, with that discretion which does not neglect the greater honour of God.<sup>204</sup>

The person of the third degree has left their former self behind and as a follower of Christ, now exists in total subjectivity to the will of God. This is the example Jesus sets in his life. To follow the Crucified Lord is to accept the absurdity and darkness of sin which pervades the world we live in. Jesus gives himself away utterly in love and trust to the one he called Abba. We too are called to be utterly humble and dedicate ourselves completely to God. It is the cross that reveals the depths of God's love and by imitating the life of Jesus, who lived out his humanity as we do.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 198

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 199

In making the decision which Ignatius calls us to, we must understand that imitating the life of Christ is accepting human life as Christ did. Rahner reflects on the Son living out the life He assumed by "allowing us to exist in our own right"<sup>205</sup>, which incorporates all that constitutes our humanity.

### **3.3.5 Conclusion of the Second Week:**

To imitate Christ is to accept the cross. The cross reveals God's inconceivable love for us and that through the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary, we have the freedom to let go into the mystery of God at our death. We imitate the life of Jesus by shedding our attachments to the material realm and taking up the cross; which is suffering and foolishness.

This acceptance knows about itself by perceiving another person- *the Other Person*- taking up his cross as *the* event of life. In him it can be seen that there is such an acceptance. As Christians we believe that we see Jesus of Nazareth as this Other Person taking up his cross. And in doing so we do not believe that he is only a sort of 'productive example' for us which really might just as well be not there. We believe rather that God lays the cross upon us, and, within, it, his own fullness *because* he wills Jesus of Nazareth and has accepted and worked in him as his own life in time and history.<sup>206</sup>

The cross that we take up must be accepted in freedom and trust in God. To be under the Standard of Christ is to take up this cross. To be the class of man that can be indifferent to the snares and traps of deifying material possessions is to take up this cross. To accept with absolute humility, that you are utterly subject to the unconditioned disposition of God is to take up this cross.

Rahner's exploration of imitating the life of Christ in the Second Week reveals an explicit theology of the cross that is grounded in accepting life with all of its sins and dangers. Rahner demonstrates again a true awareness of the pitfalls of sin but also the gracious gift of being aware of this sin and following the path of Christ to salvation in God. The cross is central to achieving this *telos* as it reveals to us the life we must strive to lead: to abandon oneself totally to God in life and finally in death.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 118

<sup>206</sup> Karl Rahner, *Self-Realization and Taking up One's Cross*, *Theological Investigations 9*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1972) 255

### **3.4 The Third Week: Rahner's Exploration of the Passion and Death of Christ**

The Third Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* gives the reader clear evidence of Rahner's explicit theology of the cross, through his meditation on Christ's Passion and death. In this week of meditations, Rahner focuses on the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Passion and the directions for contemplation from Ignatius. Another text that is most useful in demonstrating Rahner's faithfulness to the cross is his text: *The Priesthood*<sup>207</sup>.

#### **3.4.1 The Importance of the Incarnation:**

Rahner's incarnational theology is critical to this meditation. The interlocking of the human nature and divine nature in the hypostatic union is something Rahner is very keen to protect. He argues that while both natures of Christ are fully "communicated- and therefore all the attributes of another nature can be attributed to the other- they are not to be confused."<sup>208</sup>

This protection of the hypostatic union will put Rahner in opposition to Balthasar and Moltmann regarding the suffering of Jesus. This has already been explored in greater detail in the previous chapter. What is most important at this point is to stress that for Rahner, the Passion and death of Jesus are meaningless without being grounded in the hypostatic union.

God would then still be the one absolutely untouched in himself, and mortality, futility, impotence, weakness would be on our side only, on this side of the infinite abyss between God and the creature. Where then would be the greatness of the act? How would we be redeemed?<sup>209</sup>

Rahner does not shy away from the grievous experiences Jesus suffered in the final and most critical days of his life. He states this clearly:

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<sup>207</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1973)

<sup>208</sup> Lois Malcolm, Rahner's Theology of the Cross, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 122

<sup>209</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1973) 217

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Even though it is theologically certain that Jesus always had the immediate vision of God, that still does not give us the right to water down the Gospel accounts of His agony, fear, weakness, and Godforsakenness.<sup>210</sup>

This Third Week will clearly demonstrate Rahner's commitment to the cross; to Jesus' agony in the garden to the excruciating process of abandonment and torture which culminated in his death at Golgotha. Rahner's meditation on sin is further reinforced in this Week as it is Jesus who is confronted with the full hatefulness and absurdity of sin. Jesus who is sinless must experience this hell for the sin of the world to be overcome, and Rahner's theology of the cross draws heavily on this exploration of sin.

#### **3.4.2 The Garden of Gethsemane:**

The exploration of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane reveals that the Son was now entering into the weakness of the human condition, experiencing the fear of death and the isolation of hell that only the sinner suffers. The agony Jesus endures is that which the hateful, evil sinners of the world make him confront. This experience is utterly alien to Jesus, as he loves men unto death. Jesus does not turn away from the sinners and block them out through hatred, and so identifies with those who crucify him out of love. Rahner meditates on sin and Jesus:

In each particular sin we look into the face of the sin of the world as a whole and of our own sin. When Jesus thus encounters sin, he experiences the inescapable, universal domination of sin as a whole, poisoning all dimensions of life. Thus he suffers himself the agony of the presence of sin and he suffers it in a strange identification with sinners.<sup>211</sup>

Despite almost capitulating before the chalice set before him, Christ does not turn away from the decisive event of his life. Having received the isolation of abandonment from God, Jesus submits himself totally to the will of the Father. This decision to accept the reality of sin is made in total freedom.

He accepted His Father's will completely, and therefore He lets his strength trickle out in weakness, His courage drown in fear, and His love sink into the darkness of Godforsakenness.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 218

<sup>211</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1973) 220

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 218

All of this suffering is accepted by the Son in the ultimate all-embracing manner. Jesus is obedient to the Father's will and selflessly gives himself completely to this will. The manner in which Jesus faces this signals he is now prepared to meet his fate on the cross. Rahner notes that this is true Christian renunciation for the follower of Jesus: "It is the freedom with which we really go to meet what is really our cross."<sup>213</sup>

This ability to say "Your will be done, not mine" is not to be considered an act of Jesus' own power, but "as an incomprehensible miracle of grace- a miracle produced in Him by God alone."<sup>214</sup> Rahner stresses that this is what we must be aware of; only through God's intervention can we be saved.

### **3.4.3 The Abandonment on the Cross:**

Rahner revisits the mediation on hell, as the Son is left alone and unanswered by God. Jesus' words no longer reach the Father. Rahner highlights that for the Godless man, such an experience would appear pleasant: "I am pleased that this God as finally gone elsewhere and left me alone!"<sup>215</sup> But for hell to be truly hell, it must contain a nearness to God. Rahner applies the Ignatian 'application of the senses' to Jesus' experience. Jesus' singular closeness to God magnifies his terrible agony of loneliness and abandonment from the Father. Rahner notes:

For hell really to be hell it must contain a nearness to God- a nearness to God, though, that means damnation for the sinner. Consequently, Jesus' nearness to God is the real and ultimate reason why He experiences His entrance into the world- a sinful world standing before the damning judgement of God- as the Godforsakenness of the agony.<sup>216</sup>

The unique closeness of Jesus to God radically underpins the utter agony of the Son in Godforsakenness. Jesus experiences this terrible application of the senses in the Garden of Gethsemane but this hell is fully realised on the cross.

He is alone with the suffocating malice of the entire world, which is stupid and at the same time diabolically malignant. He knows that the guilt of the world, which clutches ravenously for his heart and life, is not the sort of misunderstanding that turns out on closer examination to be a harmless mistake. It is the incomprehensible guilt which leads to condemnation. He is alone with this. The

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 216

<sup>214</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 225-226

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 223

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

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light of his Father's nearness is transformed, so to say, into the dark fire of judgement.<sup>217</sup>

Rahner's vivid, spiritually rich discourse affirms the abandonment of the Son. This man is caught up in the destructive potency of sin in the world which seeks to annihilate him. The man experiences absolute death, where he is left utterly alone by God. It is only through this dreadful experience that Jesus can offer himself into the hands of his Father, an offering that the Father accepts.

This offering, made in full obedience is realised on the cross. Rahner explores the suffering Jesus endures prior to this, including Christ's rejection and his scourging. Rahner includes a chapter, entitled; "From the Garden to the Cross" where Rahner explores Jesus's way to the cross.<sup>218</sup> The foolishness of sin permeates this world and it is only through Christ's Passion and death on the cross that we can understand the course of world history. This is why Rahner says: "World history itself is really one big way of the cross leading to ruin or salvation."<sup>219</sup> The presence of sin highlights the ignorance of those who reject Jesus's love as foolishness.

Jesus is rejected by the Jews as a scandal, as something which must be rejected in the name of God who has revealed himself, which is rejected therefore with almost supernatural passion. He is rejected by the pagans as folly, folly that is rejected by the judgement of their wisdom and their understanding of life.<sup>220</sup>

Jesus suffers the ignominy of rejection by those he sought to save. Jesus has descended into the hopelessness of a criminal who is condemned by all around him as only worthy of death. This suffering becomes tangibly vicious in Rahner's meditation on Jesus being beaten and crowned with thorns. This is the beginning of the fatal breaking of Jesus' physical body. Rahner does not downplay this suffering; instead he explores it to highlight God's self-revelation in a world torn apart by sin.

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<sup>217</sup> Karl Rahner, See, What A Man!, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 139

<sup>218</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 227-233

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 227

<sup>220</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1973) 225

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This scourged body, this head, becomes the image of the world as a whole, in which God wills to reveal himself: the image of the nature of sin, the scourging of God and his crowning with thorns in the suffering of the world.<sup>221</sup>

Rahner reminds us that Good Friday is:

...also the death of the one man, the Lord. It is in the case of this one man, initially, that we find the courage to believe that he was not only put to death, was not only swallowed up and engulfed by the absurdity of existence, but that he himself died. In other words he has made death into his own act, in which he accepts the inconceivable which is beyond all human control, and himself acts out what has to be endured.<sup>222</sup>

This is the day that marks not just Jesus' death, but the day that Jesus made death his own. By accepting death, Jesus falls into the abyss of the incomprehensible mystery of God, modelling the way in which the Christian should follow. Rahner treats the cross itself as the culmination of Christ's life and mission. "For the sake of this 'hour', He came into the world."<sup>223</sup> This is a life where Jesus accepts the guilt that is not his and the sin that does not belong to him. Rahner argues that one must look at the cross as the "Yes" to abandonment and death, done so in complete obedience.

We must not make distinctions too easily or too quickly in order to soften these words. We have already seen that he identifies himself with sin: for he endures guilt in his cruel death and at the same time loves his hangman. But then there is really nothing more to rely upon. Not even a protest against the people who do this to him. The cross is the culmination of his life's work. To that extent, the cross is the "Yes" to the end, to impotence, abandonment and death.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 226

<sup>222</sup> Karl Rahner, See, What A Man!, *Theological Investigations 7* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 141

<sup>223</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 236

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 232

#### **3.4.4 The 'Bitter' Suffering of Christ:**

Rahner recognises that it is Christ's acceptance of death that we should focus on. The manner in which he faces this death is one of obedience, where he takes on sin and stares into the face of utter abandonment. The fact that Rahner's focus is such is a concern for Balthasar.

On a number of occasions, Balthasar takes exception to Rahner's treatment of the 'bitter suffering' of Christ. In Christ's redeeming of humanity, Balthasar argues that Rahner has limited Christ's solidarity with us. The darkness of the cross becomes synonymous with the emptiness attached to the general phenomenon of death.<sup>225</sup> Rahner is accused of making unclear in what way the Christian is to share in the death of Christ, if Christ is meant to be more than just an example of obedience.<sup>226</sup> Balthasar criticises Rahner for a failure to properly understand Anselm's doctrine of satisfaction, leading Rahner to argue that the 'bitter sufferings' of Christ are not to receive as much attention as the death.<sup>227</sup>

Rahner does not focus on this "bitter" suffering. For Rahner, a focus on the mortal sufferings of Jesus transforms Christ's death into a relief from the suffering.

It is almost automatic in the theology of the death of Christ and its soteriological significance to discuss the mortal suffering and to treat the death itself as the almost happy ending of the suffering to which attention has been confined. But then theology is discussing a subject, called the death of Christ, which is really not essentially different from any other possible work which Christ did or could have done during his life. And then its significance in the work of salvation can only be assessed in moral categories.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 1990) 146-147 (ref 106)

<sup>226</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 278- 279 On 280, Balthasar goes on to argue, based on this logic, why the death of Mary did not lead to the same hypostatic union as she too was without sin. Balthasar points out that Rahner does not offer much by way of what place Mary takes in soteriology here.

<sup>227</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 108

<sup>228</sup> Karl Rahner, Dogmatic Questions on Easter, *Theological Investigations 4*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 127

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Rahner argues that understanding the death itself is central to a theology of Christ's death.<sup>229</sup> This death is the separation from God and experiencing the hellish reality of sin. But Jesus' cry of abandonment is not forgotten by Rahner at all.

The endurance of God's incomprehensibility reached its peak for Jesus on the cross. It becomes so much a part of Him that his very life is poured out in the death-dealing cry, 'My God, My God, what have you abandoned me?' (Mt 27: 46) Jesus experiences death not as a biological fact, but as the absolute darkness of hell.<sup>230</sup>

Rahner affirms that despite this revelation of sin, Jesus' obedience serves as a model for the follower of Christ. It is absolute trust in God. In this way, the sufferings of Christ are not bitter. Obedience to the will of God allows one to look beyond the pains of this world and fall completely into the mystery of God.

If we can enter into this attitude even partially, then we will begin to understand that the saints, who could obey when commanded, could, as it were, tumble into the most holy life of God with this silent obedience of theirs- an obedience brought about into this world by the Incarnate Son of God.<sup>231</sup>

Rahner focuses on this trust in God as Holy mystery, which Jesus demonstrated in his life, cross and death. The manner in which Jesus accepts the will of the Father is what is most important, and provides a model of faith for the Christian. Rahner states that: "The acceptance of suffering without an answer other than the incomprehensibility of God and his freedom is the concrete form in which we accept God himself and allow him to be God."<sup>232</sup>

All Rahner can offer by way of explaining why there is suffering in the world is that God is God. Any further understanding of this reality is beyond us as it belongs to the incomprehensible mystery of God. Accepting God as mystery despite the woeful suffering in the world is the model that Jesus offers. In accepting suffering, Jesus accepts the will of the Father, completely forgetting

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<sup>229</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 57-58. Here Rahner discusses how that it is Christ's death which brings about our redemption. He argues that we have to consider that there is no single feature of his death that brings about the redemption and that death taken in its totality may need to be considered.

<sup>230</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 239

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 238

<sup>232</sup> Karl Rahner, *Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer?*, *Theological Investigations 19*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) 207

his own desires and wants. Jesus falls into the abyss of the eternal mystery of God, in complete faith and obedience and despite the suffering he endures.

### **3.4.5 Christ's Acceptance of Abandonment:**

Rahner stresses that this obedience is Jesus's greatest act on the cross. This is the acceptance of not only suffering abandonment, but also the incomprehensibility of God. "Jesus' death is His own free act of falling into the consuming judgement of God."<sup>233</sup> Christ has gone beyond accepting death in the biological sense. Jesus accepts the state of being abandoned by God. This is the consequence of sin which Jesus takes upon himself for humanity. Rahner applies the Patristic statement that 'all that was received and accepted was redeemed' here.

He has accepted abandonment by God. Therefore God is near even when we believe ourselves to have been abandoned by him. He has accepted all things. Therefore all things are redeemed.<sup>234</sup>

Jesus' acceptance of suffering and Godforsakenness is a personal act. It is done in complete freedom and love. Even in hell, there is the nearness to God that is the damnation of the sinner. But through this experience of hell, sin is overcome. Jesus who is the Word incarnate knew no sin and yet became sin, which God's absolute goodness is radically alien to. The divine love, manifested through the obedient sacrifice of the Son destroys sin. This revelation of God's love and mercy is what we receive through Christ's death on the cross. This truth is something that Rahner points out as difficult to understand, as it is rooted in God's incomprehensible love which is beyond our human understanding.

The salvation of the world grows out of the strangely incomprehensible, even paradoxical, unity between the revelation of sin which inflicts a terrible paroxysm on God Himself who came into the world in order to destroy death by

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 238

<sup>234</sup> Karl Rahner, See, What A Man!, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 138

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His own death, and between the ineffable pouring of His love which did not hesitate to sustain sin and death. Out of death and love!<sup>235</sup>

Rahner does not downplay the significance of Holy Saturday in the Christ-event. This is the day that Christ falls into the realm of the dead. He enters into this disembodied state in obedience to his Father's will.

His own death was the price which he paid in order to ensure that the state of being dead should have a new significance for us. He descended into this state of death. He endured the nadir of human existence, the ultimate fall into immeasurable depths to which it is subject. And because he submitted to this fate, yielding himself up into the hands of his Father, his entry into this eternal love was initially experienced by him as a collapse into the darkness and anonymity of death, into the real and genuine state of being dead.<sup>236</sup>

#### **3.4.6 Conclusion of the Third Week:**

Rahner's exploration of the Third Week in the *Spiritual Exercises* firmly unites the themes of the first two weeks together. The Passion and death of Christ involve the fatal, destructive power of sin in the world. It also involves the acceptance and trust that Jesus shows in his Father's will. We are called to imitate this obedience to the incomprehensible mystery of God.

Jesus' experience of hell and abandonment are explored as Jesus prepares for the culmination of his life and mission. The surrender to God's will means Jesus can face his suffering and destruction without despair. Rahner does not neglect the suffering of Jesus but reminds us that it is not the suffering that Jesus faces which saves us; it is the manner in which Jesus faces and accepts his death, the death that brings redemption.

This death is a falling into the abyss of the sinner, where there is a nearness to God that is perdition for the sinner. Jesus who is sinless experiences the sin that is absolutely alien to him. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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<sup>235</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 241

<sup>236</sup> Karl Rahner, He Descended into Hell, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 149

Jesus takes on this burden in absolute freedom and gives himself away in love to the incomprehensible mystery of the one he called Abba. God's absolute love and goodness shatters sin and enables salvation. The cross is thus the revelation of God's love overcoming sin through the death of Christ.<sup>237</sup>

### **3.5. The Fourth Week: Rahner's Approach to Jesus' Resurrection**

Rahner states: "The goal of the fourth week is to impress on the retreatant that he can only achieve the glory of the Resurrection through the cross."<sup>238</sup> The realities of cross and resurrection cannot be separated if one is to consider the Christ event as significant for our salvation. Both events are united as Jesus has died into the resurrection. The Spirit of life takes hold of us through the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross. Jesus, as the incarnate love of God becomes the source of this Spirit. This divine life has been received by the Christian and gives humanity hope that through Christ, death has finally been conquered. Rahner stresses that in this Week, "we should particularly relish the fruit of our redemption- life from the Holy Spirit as the beginning and the finality of our new and redeemed life."<sup>239</sup>

#### **3.5.1 Rahner's Approach to Resurrection:**

Rahner defines resurrection as:

The final and definitive salvation of a concrete human existence by God and in the presence of God, the abiding and real validity of human history, which neither moves further and further into emptiness, nor perishes together.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 136-176 for Rahner's exploration of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Also, see Karl Rahner, *The Content of Faith: The Best of Karl Rahner's Theological Writing*, ed. Karl Lehmann, Albert Raffelt, trans. Harvey D. Egan (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1999) 307-310 on a translated article entitled "Gratitude for the Cross".

<sup>238</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 244

<sup>239</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 244

<sup>240</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*. trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 266

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This is not the physical reawakening or biological reanimation of one who is dead. It differs radically from the raising of Lazarus and the widow's son in Scripture. Such an approach would lead to a misinterpretation of both the meaning of 'resurrection' generally and also the significance of Christ's resurrection.<sup>241</sup> What is radically unique about Christ's resurrection is that it is the permanent validity of a person's life in God.

For unlike everything which the Old and New Testaments report elsewhere about the raising of the dead, the Lord's resurrection means the ultimate deliverance of actual human existence by God and before him.<sup>242</sup>

It is not an afterlife in the sense that Jesus' life is some way incomplete and is continues on in a temporal manner. The resurrection cannot be understood in temporal terms, as Rahner states:

For it seems to me that things cannot simply go on after death in temporal extension, since that would mean that the finality of judgment at death (at least for someone who has come to a radical personal decision in his earthly life) is no longer credible.<sup>243</sup>

The moment of death signifies the last and ultimate decision of the person. It is their "Yes" to the incomprehensible mystery of God or the "No" to God's love and fall into the hell of being finally and decisively cut off from God. If there was a continuation of life in the spatiotemporal sense, then the finality of death would no longer be as definitive or valid. In the resurrection, "the past is not lost."<sup>244</sup> Jesus' human life has not lost its meaning. It has irrevocably and definitively become part of the eternal life of God. Rahner states that: "The whole Christ with His whole destiny and with everything He experienced and suffered on earth with His human nature, has now entered into the glory of the Father."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Karl Rahner, Jesus' Resurrection, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 20

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Karl Rahner, Purgatory, *Theological Investigations 19*, trans. Edward Quinn (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) 183

<sup>244</sup> Lois Malcolm, Rahner's Theology of the Cross, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 124

<sup>245</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 244

### **3.5.2 The Unity of Death and Resurrection:**

Rahner stresses the unity of cross and resurrection, which illustrates that Jesus' faithful obedience to the will of the Father has not been in vain.<sup>246</sup> The pain and abandonment that Jesus suffers is taken into the eternal life of God. Jesus' life is in its totality is absolutely validated into the life of God. Jesus' historical life is completed and "His eternal life is... the ultimate form of his earthly life itself."<sup>247</sup>

Rahner states that there is an intrinsic relationship between Jesus' death and resurrection. "The death of Jesus is such that by its very nature it is subsumed into the resurrection. It is a death into the resurrection."<sup>248</sup> Rahner consistently stresses the need to understand the relationship of cross and resurrection as unified to make possible our redemption.

At all events, the meaning of Jesus' resurrection in terms of fundamental theology cannot offer any obvious *spiritual* relevance as long as the inner relationship between Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection has not become clear as being the *single* event of our redemption. For if the resurrection really belongs to the redemption on the cross as an intrinsic aspect, not merely as an event that follows the cross in time and confirms it outwardly, then it is part of the spiritual significance of the event of the cross for us.<sup>249</sup>

The whole life of Jesus is integrated and exalted in the life of God. This includes the suffering on the cross and the death itself. Rahner speaks of the spiritual 'realisation' of the Easter faith and realises who the glorified Lord really is.

The risen Lord is the One who was crucified. This 'is' does not merely indicate the identity of a substantial subject, who now sustains a different life from before. The 'is' states that this very earlier life itself is completed and has found eternal reality in and before God.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner & Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 109-117, especially 114-117. Here Rahner stresses the unity of cross and resurrection as a single saving event. In Jesus' victorious death, God's salvific grace becomes irrevocable through the resurrection.

<sup>247</sup> Karl Rahner, On The Spirituality of the Easter Faith, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 13

<sup>248</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 266

<sup>249</sup> Karl Rahner, On The Spirituality of the Easter Faith, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 9 For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 266-267

<sup>250</sup> Karl Rahner, On The Spirituality of the Easter Faith, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 13

There is no duality in the Lord who has been crucified and resurrected. The human life of Jesus is completed, and made ultimately final and definitive in the life of God.

### **3.5.3 The Spirit that Flows from Christ's Side:**

Rahner notes the significance of the blood and water that flows from Jesus when his side is pierced. The resurrected Lord becomes the source of the divine life of the Spirit.

Jesus was glorified because as the corporeal love of God He was raised on the cross and pierced through by the guilt of the world. He became the source of the Spirit for us because He sacrificed Himself and poured out His blood for us.<sup>251</sup>

Rahner references John's Gospel, where Christ speaks of the living water that flow from those who believe in the Lord (John 7:38). Jesus as source of the living water is source of the Spirit but it cannot be seen as separate from the blood of the Redeemer (1 John 5:6). Christ's heart is pierced in the depths of weakness and abandonment. The blood that flows from the wound is the sacrifice of Jesus to his Father's will. This must be seen in unity with the gift of the Spirit that we possess from the living water that flowed from Christ's side. It can only come from the one who has been crucified and exalted.

Without being touched in the heart, there is no Spirit, for the source of this Spirit is the elevated Lord Who gained His triumph on the cross in the midst of weakness and Godforsakenness. ... Because He came in water and blood, we are saved!<sup>252</sup>

This Spirit is communicated through the Father and the Son and Rahner notes the New Testament names attributed to the Spirit, including "Spirit of the Father and of the Son" and the "seal of freedom."<sup>253</sup> Since the death and resurrection of Christ, the Spirit dwells in the hearts of all in the community of Christ. This is a gift to the world that is been made permanent and decisive through Jesus' deliverance into the life of God.

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<sup>251</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 252-253

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 253

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 253-254

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God himself, therefore, had to come in order to lift us out of the cycle of death, and in order to build a way for us by which we could be led out of the bondage of our humanity, confined as it was to the finitude of its own nature and of the world, into the life of God himself. And *this* God who comes into *this* world for *this* purpose we call the Holy Spirit.<sup>254</sup>

#### **3.5.4 Conclusion of the Fourth Week:**

Rahner's exploration of the Fourth Week is built upon the intrinsic unity between cross and resurrection. Christ's life is made finally and definitively valid in the life of God through his death and resurrection. Rahner consistently affirms the crucial importance of the relationship between the cross and resurrection. Jesus' life and mission culminates in his final decision; the "Yes" to God in death and abandonment. It is this life that is accepted and glorified by God.

Jesus' death means the complete validation of his life, not in the manner of his death but by the virtue of his death. His death in complete obedience to the will of the Father is integrated into the eternal life of God.

Rahner identifies the Spirit that flows as the living water from Christ's side on the cross. The Spirit flows alongside the blood of the Redeemer. In this way, Rahner highlights the significance of the sacrifice made by Christ in total obedience to the salvific will of the Father.

#### **3.6 Criticisms of Rahner's Explicit Theology of the Cross:**

This chapter highlights that Rahner clearly possesses an explicit theology of the cross. This does not mean that it is an explicit theology of the cross devoid of issues or imperfections. Critiques of Rahner's approach to the cross are not limited to those of Balthasar alone. The most significant criticism here is obviously Balthasar's belief that Rahner has stripped the cross of its redemptive efficacy. In his view, Rahner subsumes the Christ event, with all of its suffering and drama into the eternal salvific will of God. This raises the question as to

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<sup>254</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Church as the Subject of the Sending of the Spirit*, *Theological Investigations* 7, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 188

what exactly made Jesus the unique Redeemer of humanity. It also asks why Mary does not have a similar redemptive role if the cross is not as significant as Rahner approves. Other criticisms include Rahner's lack of a pneumatological dimension in the Christ event. Rahner's use of pan-cosmic terms about the reality of Christ's death is also critiqued on the basis of being speculative and non-scriptural. It again raises the argument that Rahner is overtly influenced by his philosophical academic background. The validity of these critiques will now be evaluated.

### **3.6.1 Redemption without the Cross:**

Balthasar claims that Rahner has dissolved any meaning redemptive meaning of the cross into the salvific will of God which undermines Christ's role in our redemption. In his opinion, Rahner has neglected the divine will being present on the cross on Good Friday but also in the abandonment of Holy Saturday.

For according to what we have said, man does not owe his redemption actually to Christ, but to the eternal saving will of God, which is made manifest to him in the life of Christ. There is no need, then, for the *Ernstfall*, and there is no more talk of it.<sup>255</sup>

The central concern here for Balthasar is that the cross is essentially made redundant. God's salvific will is what is really significant and the cross should not be seen as the event which makes redemption a true reality. Rahner makes clear that we must always return to God's saving will as our starting point in any discussion about our redemption.

For a saving will related solely to Christ would be meaningless from the beginning and would contradict the fact that through the saving will of God Jesus Christ is meant from the very beginning to be the redeemer of the world.<sup>256</sup>

Rahner's position is made clear in the *Foundations*, where he stresses that it is both the life and death of Christ in unity which makes God's saving will irrevocable.

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<sup>255</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 109

<sup>256</sup> Karl Rahner, Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions, *Theological Investigations 17*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 45

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The pure initiative of God's salvific will establishes the will of Jesus which reaches fulfilment in his death, and hence this salvific will becomes real and becomes manifest as irrevocable. The life and death of Jesus taken together, then, are the "cause" of God's salvific will (to the extent that these two things are regarded as different) insofar as this salvific will establishes itself really and irrevocably in this life and death, in other words, insofar as the life and death of Jesus, or the death which recapitulates and culminates his life, possess a causality of a quasi-sacramental and real-symbolic nature. In this causality, what is signified, in this case the death of Jesus along with his resurrection, and in and through the sign it causes what it signified.<sup>257</sup>

Jesuit theologian Roger Haight offers a succinct note on what Rahner means by this quasi-formal causality.

Rahner speaks of "quasi" formal causality because it is predicated of God and therefore only analogically. It is distinguished from "efficient causality" by which God creates and sustains all being. God's quasi-formal causality is, as it were, a second action of God in relation to the creature, the basis of a new supernatural relation with human existence.<sup>258</sup>

In quasi-formal causality, God gives Godself to humanity. God's transcendence is not lessened by this giving of Godself, instead it creates a unique supernatural connection with humanity. Rahner draws upon sacramental theology to develop the term: quasi-sacramental causality, in order to understand the salvific significance of the Easter event. In quasi-sacramental causality, Jesus becomes the sacrament of God's salvific will through his death and resurrection. God has enabled this will to be made finally and definitively present in the world because of Jesus' salvific death. As God has raised Jesus to new life, we too can attain salvation in the divine life of God. At all times, it is the eternal will of God that is the primary cause of our salvation.

Rahnerian theologian Joseph Wong argues that Balthasar has misinterpreted Rahner's view of sacramental-symbolic causality and offers a different perspective to Balthasar's.

A sacrament is at once the effect and cause of what is signified. It is produced by the signified and at the same time renders the signified really effective by giving it concrete historical shape. Therefore, the saving will of God is "always effective" precisely in view of the event of Christ, both proleptically and retrospectively.

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<sup>257</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 284

<sup>258</sup> Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979) 139 (ref10) Haight admits to offering a limited interpretation of Rahner's theology of grace but does highlight Rahner's efforts against the problem of dualism between the natural and supernatural orders in his chapter entitled; Rahner: Grace and History (119-142)

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Moreover, the sacramental-symbolic causality does not subtract from the personal commitment on the part of Christ but implies it... Consequently, when one can say that man understands properly the concept of quasi-sacramental causality, one can say that man owes his redemption to the eternal saving will of the Father, and, at the same time, to Christ the Saviour.<sup>259</sup>

In this way, Rahner's theory of quasi-sacramental causality has not undermined the role of Christ as Redeemer in any way. Christ is the sacrament of God's salvific will. A sacrament effects and causes what it signifies. In this case, what is signified is the divine will for salvation. There is also a real-symbolic nature to the cross.<sup>260</sup>

Rahner stresses that the cross in itself does not save. The cross cannot be the cause of salvation as it would suggest that the cross has "changed God's mind", which would be at odds with the Chalcedonian formula which protects God's immutability.

The event of the crucifixion... cannot be the cause of uncaused salvific will of God... By contrast we must say: because God wills salvation, therefore God died and rose again, and not: because the crucifixion occurred, therefore God willed our salvation. God is not transformed from a God of anger and justice to a God of mercy and love by the cross.<sup>261</sup>

As Rahner has consistently argued, one has to take the life and death and resurrection of Christ together as a single event in order to understand how we are saved.

His victorious death is the fulfilment and the victorious appearance of this fulfilment makes God's saving will, always and everywhere at work in the world, irreversible. As the historical manifestation of this fulfilment, the death of Jesus is both the effect and also the cause of the grace in which God is always and everywhere the deepest energy and force of salvation history.

This is a more precise and circumscribed definition of the causality of the cross in its relation to God's saving will... provided that one realises all the time that this whole event of the cross derives totally from God's merciful will to communicate himself, which has no other cause than God himself.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las, 1984) 242

<sup>260</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) xv. In the Glossary, *Realsymbol* in Rahner's theology means "how sacraments are intrinsically real symbols (in contrast to mere signs) genuinely effecting what they signify."

<sup>261</sup> Karl Rahner, *The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation*, *Theological Investigations 16*, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979) 207

<sup>262</sup> Karl Rahner & Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 117

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Rahner's position is made absolutely clear here. Rahner sees the victorious death of Christ as the moment at which God's salvation in the world becomes irreversible and final. The cross plays its obviously significant role but it must never in itself be seen as the cause of salvation. The ultimate and singular cause of our salvation is God's saving will.

Jesus dies in utter obedience to the will of the Father but without the resurrection, this death would be the ultimate destruction of our own deaths. The resurrection marks the culmination of Jesus's life; his life is made definitively and finally valid in the eternal life of God. Jesus' triumphant death is a death which is subsumed into the resurrection.

It is also clear that Rahner's primary concern is to protect the divine immutability of God. The level of redemptive efficacy given to the cross by Balthasar is impossible for Rahner to engage with, as for Rahner, this would make possible the idea that the cross causes God to undergo a change on a level outside of His divine perfection.

For Rahner, God has never stopped being a loving God of mercy who wills humanity to be saved. The cross would not then change the mind of God who is wrathful and vengeful.<sup>263</sup>

Eamonn Mulcahy offers a concise view of Rahner's approach to the cross.

Rahner can be said to understand the death of Christ along the lines of a demonstrative theory of the cross. By demonstrative is understood the opposite of an effective theory and means that the cross does not *provoke* or *produce* any effect (such as expiation or satisfaction or reconciliation) but *evidences, shows, reveals* something. For Rahner, strikingly, the cross does not produce salvation nor obtain redemption. The cross does not *do* anything at all! It discloses.<sup>264</sup>

Rahner's view that the cross does not produce any effects such as satisfaction or expiation stems from his reservations over Anselm's theory of satisfaction.

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<sup>263</sup> For further reading, see Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998) 290-291. Marmion provides an excellent summary of how Rahner sees God's universal salvific will being made permanent and irrevocable through the victorious death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>264</sup> Eamonn Mulcahy, *The Cause of Our Salvation: Soteriological Causality According to Some Modern British Theologians, 1988-1998* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2007) 401 On 398-402, Mulcahy writes a piece entitled: "Karl Rahner on Soteriological Causality" which offers an excellent summary of Rahner's position on the soteriological dimensions of Christ's saving work, including the place of the cross and resurrection in this.

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Rahner's reluctance to accept aspects of this theory will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Rahner is aware that there are limitations to his proclaiming that Jesus is the sacramental sign of God's salvific will. He attempts to justify the claim.

Certainly this form of explanation does not do full justice to the causality of Jesus and cross where salvation is concerned, or entirely explain the dogma of the redemption through the cross. But in a sacramental sign the saving will of God and grace find historical expression. Sign and signified are essentially one, in contrast to the above assumption, so that the reality signified comes to be in and through the sign, and the sign therefore, in this specific and limited sense, causes the reality signified.<sup>265</sup>

The cross is not then the cause of salvation. Rather, it is the cause of salvation signified.<sup>266</sup>

#### **3.6.2 The Role of Mary in the Redemption:**

Balthasar raises a significant concern about Rahner's approach to the cross, in relation to the role of Mary in our redemption.<sup>267</sup> Balthasar believes Rahner is downplaying the unique quality of Christ's surrendering his life to God. With such depreciation, Balthasar deems it necessary to question what was distinctive about the lives of Jesus and Mary in relation to our redemption.

Furthermore, we would have to ask why the death of Mary (and her life, which was a preparation for it) did not lead to the same hypostatic union. Was she not free, according to catholic teaching, from all inherited and personal guilt? And, as such, since she was perfect, was her death not of the same quality as that of Jesus?<sup>268</sup>

Rahner states his position on Mary's involvement in our redemption.

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<sup>265</sup> Karl Rahner, *The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation*, *Theological Investigations 16*, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979) 215

<sup>266</sup> Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (NY: Continuum, 2005) 96-97 Haight cites (1 Cor 15:17) "if Christ was not raised, your faith has nothing in it..." He suggests that Paul is arguing that the resurrection of Jesus is what makes the cross salvific. Haight states this bluntly, that the cross in isolation is completely negative and bears no salvific value at all. Rahner's position is not as extreme as this. While the cross does not cause salvation, it should not be seen in isolation but as being intrinsically linked to the resurrection. Rahner has in fact been faithful here to Paul's dialectical thinking of life through death.

<sup>267</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 280

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

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She lets the Son of God into the world; and she does it only by his power and in virtue of his grace. She can only let him into the prison of the sinful and mortal world because he wishes to come, and because her letting him in is itself again the work of the grace of his coming. But it is she who does it. She could do nothing if he did not grace her by his coming. But he graced her in just such a way that in her (flesh and faith together) the salvation of the world has definitively begun, and that in her God spoke his final, because total, word in the dialogue between him and humanity which had till then remained open... in her and through her (both) Christ's salvation (his alone!) was bestowed upon the world. She does not thereby become 'Co-redemptrix' 'by the side of' Christ, as though the Son and the Virgin 'shared' in the redemption of the world in a kind of 'synergism'.<sup>269</sup>

Rahner makes clear that Mary is not to be understood as being on an equal platform to Christ as the person who redeems. It is God's grace that enables her to bring the Redeemer into the world. The salvation of the world is brought about through this grace, not through Mary herself. She is of great importance to the Christian, but it is God's salvific will that we are saved, not Mary's grace. In this way, Rahner clarifies the distinction between the redemptive roles of Christ and Mary. It is Christ who is the Redeemer through his life, death and resurrection.

#### **3.6.3 The Role of the Spirit in Rahner's Christology:**

Rahner has been criticised for lacking a pneumatological dimension in his reflection on death and resurrection of Jesus. The critics include Balthasar, Wong and Vincent Battaglia. Wong notes the significance of this missing aspect. "This is particularly felt since Rahner holds a trinitarian view of God's self-communication in salvation history."<sup>270</sup>

Balthasar highlights Rahner's neglect of the Spirit when speaking about the cross.

It is strange that Rahner, who otherwise pleads so energetically against Augustine for an economic doctrine of the Trinity, here, when it comes to the point, speaks only of "God" as if the divine saving will were not at work here on the Cross between the "allowing" Father and the Son abandoned by the Father

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<sup>269</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption, Theological Investigations 1*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) 218

<sup>270</sup> Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las, 1984) 243

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and the Son abandoned by the Father in the form of the Holy Spirit that unites them both in separating them.<sup>271</sup>

Balthasar asserts that Rahner has left out the dramatic element of the Christ-event. Balthasar's approach is to illustrate the 'rupture' between Father and Son on the cross and that it is the Spirit who permits this 'hiatus' of abandonment. He cannot accept Rahner's speaking only of God and not the persons of the Trinity. Balthasar's accusation that Rahner has neglected the Spirit has some merit.<sup>272</sup>

Wong in particular stresses this weakness in Rahner's Christology. Wong cites the clear biblical basis for the Son's surrender of self to the Father's will found in Hebrews.<sup>273</sup> "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14). Rahner does not seem to employ this in his Christology.

Wong also argues that while Rahner has not taken the opportunity to develop an explicit Trinitarian theology of the cross, implicitly his work could potentially develop such a theology.<sup>274</sup> Wong lists Rahner's missed chances to integrate the Spirit into in aspects of his Christology. Particularly, Rahner could have been more Spirit-orientated in relation to the Christ event itself. "Above all, it might be shown that, at the climax of his life, it was through the eternal Spirit that Christ offered himself to the Father on the cross."<sup>275</sup>

Finally, Battaglia highlights that Rahner's Trinitarian work has not explicitly explained the relationship between the Christ event and his axiom of the Trinity. He writes: "The *Grundaxiom* does not tell us much about how the event

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<sup>271</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 108

<sup>272</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 280. Here, Balthasar asks why Rahner does not speak of the Spirit being handed over into the hands of the Father.

<sup>273</sup> Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las, 1984) 243 and (ref103)

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, 243 and (ref104) Wong argues that Rahner has "presented Christ's death on the cross as sacramental-symbol of both the saving love of the Father and the self-surrendering love of the Son. In his trinitarian theology the Spirit is presented as the self-communication in love of the triune God."

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 243-244

of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ bears on our understanding of the immanent Trinity."<sup>276</sup>

Rahner's writing of experiencing the Spirit and sharing in the victorious death of Christ does offer a response of these critiques. Rahner argues that this experience of the Spirit is a result of the acceptance of the abandonment Christ faced in death. In following the example of Christ who died in complete obedience to the will of the Father, we too can have this pneumatological experience.

Experience of the Spirit and sharing in the victorious death of Jesus, only in which the true good fortune of our death is experienced in a community of faith, are one and the same thing. In this life, the chalice of the Holy Spirit is identical with the chalice of Christ. But only that man drinks from it who has slowly learnt- to some extent- how to find fullness in emptiness, uprightness in downfall, life in death, and discovery in abandonment. Whoever learns these things undergoes the experience of the Spirit.<sup>277</sup>

Rahner argues that it is Jesus' solidarity with us, especially in his death, that makes possible us experiencing the Spirit. There is not the dramatic focus of Balthasar on the separation of Father and Son on the cross. Rahner instead explores Christ's acceptance of death and abandonment on the cross. If we follow this example and die the death that Christ has made possible for us, then such an experience of the Spirit is made possible for us. This view is made consistently by Rahner.<sup>278</sup>

While Balthasar and Wong can claim with some justification that Rahner has neglected the pneumatological dimension, Rahner is not as devoid of the Spirit in his Christology as their critique argues. As has been seen at the end of Week Four in the *Exercises*, Rahner speaks of the water of the living Spirit that flows from Christ's side. It is only through Christ's acceptance of death in total abandonment and failure can the Spirit enter the hearts of humanity. The Spirit is the fruit of our redemption, and as Rahner writes: "For those of us who are

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<sup>276</sup> Vincent Battaglia, An Examination of Karl Rahner's Trinitarian Theology, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 9 (March 2007) 12  
[http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/378604/AEJT\\_9.17\\_Battaglia\\_Examination.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/378604/AEJT_9.17_Battaglia_Examination.pdf)  
(accessed on 18/3/14)

<sup>277</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church*. trans. John Griffiths (London: Burns & Oates, 1979) 27

<sup>278</sup> Karl Rahner, Reflections on the Experience of Grace, *Theological Investigations* 3, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 89

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very close to Him, blood and water of the living Spirit are very closely related.”<sup>279</sup>

Balthasar's specific criticism that Rahner has excluded the Spirit in his discussion of the cross can also be countered. Rahner makes clear his position on the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and Son.

The starting point is the experience of faith, which makes us aware that, through what we call “Holy Spirit”, God (hence the Father) *really* communicates *himself* as love and forgiveness, that he produces this self-communication in us and maintains it by himself. Hence the “Spirit” must be God himself.<sup>280</sup>

Rahner's writings on the cross could be interpreted as the Spirit playing an implicit role in the Christ event. The Spirit is God; therefore the implication would be that the Spirit is very much active in the Christ event, although Rahner does not explicitly say this. It can be argued that Rahner has not explicitly expressed the role of the Spirit in the cross. As Wong has pointed out, “the internal logic of his Trinitarian doctrine is pointing in this direction”.<sup>281</sup>

Balthasar and Wong rightly point out that Rahner's neglect of the Spirit in any explicit discourse on the cross is a limitation of his work. Wong concludes that “the sacramental-symbolic significance of Rahner's Logos Christology can be greatly enhanced by a Spirit-orientated Christology.”<sup>282</sup> Battaglia has also highlighted that there is no great clarity between Rahner's axiom of the Trinity and its relationship to the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>283</sup>

Rahner's explicit theology of the cross could be enhanced by a more expressive development of the Trinity on the cross. But, Rahner does not completely neglect the Spirit. Rahner places his focus on the acceptance by Christ of his death and abandonment. By following the example of Christ, we too can experience the Spirit in our lives.

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<sup>279</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 253

<sup>280</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (London: Burns and Oates 1975) 67

<sup>281</sup> Joseph H.P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: Las, 1984) 243

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, 244

<sup>283</sup> Vincent Battaglia, An Examination of Karl Rahner's Trinitarian Theology, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 9 (March 2007) 12

[http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/378604/AEJT\\_9.17\\_Battaglia\\_Examination.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/378604/AEJT_9.17_Battaglia_Examination.pdf) (accessed on 18/3/14)

Rahner's exploration of the living water of the Spirit that flows from Christ's side highlights that the Spirit is the *fruit* of our redemption. The Spirit is not the *cause* of our redemption and it is God's salvific will that makes possible this redemption. Rahner does to an extent involve the Spirit in the Christ event, but it is clear that a more explicit Trinitarian theology of the cross needs to be developed in Rahner's Christology, rather than the implied role of the Holy Spirit at present.

### **3.6.4 The Speculative Nature of Christ's Death and Resurrection**

A criticism that has been aimed at Rahner is his speculative exploration of Christ's relationship with the cosmos in death. John W. Williams posits that Rahner has gone beyond scriptural or traditional discourse in his pan cosmic exploration of Christ's death.

Williams cites Rahner's article on the death of Christ in the *Concise Theological Dictionary*:

Through Christ's death, the spiritual being which was his from the beginning and which he gave active expression to in the life that was completed by his death, became open to the whole world, has been inserted into the totality of the world, and has become a permanent, ontological modification of the world in its root and ground.<sup>284</sup>

... Part of the innermost being of the world in what we call Jesus Christ in His life and death, that which was poured forth upon the whole world at the moment when the vessel of His body broke in death and Christ really became, even in his humanity, What of right He always was, the heart of the world, the innermost of all created being.<sup>285</sup>

Williams points out the speculative nature of these comments and the vagueness of terms such as 'the world in its root and ground' and 'the heart of the world.' Rahner has gone beyond dogmatic teaching in this exploration.

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<sup>284</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler & Karl Rahner, *Concise Theological Dictionary*, ed. Cornelius Ernst trans. Richard Strachan (Freiburg : Herder; London: Burns & Oates, 1966) 118 (cited by John W Williams, Karl Rahner on the Death of Christ (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14) (1971) 47)

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

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Williams notes such speculative development of Rahner's discourse as "pantheistic" and beyond the words of Scripture.<sup>286</sup>

This in itself is a fair argument. It is difficult to work out what Rahner precisely means by these terms. It is clear that Rahner sees the death of Christ as crucial in humanity's redemption, but the level of speculation that Rahner applies to this subject is admittedly problematic. The universalistic language that Rahner uses here is not scriptural or of traditional teaching. Using such pantheistic terms does not help Rahner in discussing the death of Christ theologically.

Peter C. Phan makes an important comment on Rahner's "pan-cosmic" hypothesis. Phan notes that Rahner later discarded this hypothesis in favour of Gilbert Greshake's hypothesis of immediate resurrection after death.<sup>287</sup> In this way, Rahner has acknowledged shortcomings in his own hypothesis and turns to one that offers fewer problems. Rahner's use of "pan-cosmic" terms in relation to Christ's death will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

#### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion:**

This chapter has demonstrated clearly that Rahner does indeed have an explicit theology of the cross. His meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises* reveal a distinctly Christocentric and incarnational theology, profoundly permeated by Ignatian spirituality.<sup>288</sup> Rahner is not sentimental or overtly philosophical in his meditations. These are very much the spiritually rich writings of a devout Jesuit who never undermines the centrality of the cross in our lives and in relation to our salvation. Rahner states this clearly: "Ignatian piety is a piety of the Cross, like all Christian mystic piety before it."<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> John W. Williams, Karl Rahner on the Death of Christ (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14) (1971) 50

<sup>287</sup> Peter C. Phan, Eschatology, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 191 (ref14)

<sup>288</sup> For further reading, see Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998) 199-280 for a comprehensive reading of the Ignatian dimension of Rahner's spirituality.

<sup>289</sup> Karl Rahner, Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World, *Theological Investigations* 3, Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 281

### ***Chapter 3- Rahner's Explicit Theology of the Cross***

In the First Week of *Spiritual Exercises*, Rahner addresses the nature of sin in our lives. In the freedom we are gifted throughout of our lives and crucially at the culmination our lives, we have choices. At the climax of our lives, which is death, we can finally accept or reject God's love and mercy. If we have chosen the finite reality over God, we lock ourselves into our self-made hell, definitively denying God's invitation of salvation. It is only through the cross that can we find salvation as it reveals the vileness of sin and the still greater power of God's love.

The Second Week reveals an explicit theology of the cross, rooted in following the way of the Crucified; in abandoning self and recognising that our salvation is with God, not with this sinful reality. The cross is the place where we see our depravity in sin but also what Christ's cross has revealed to us; the incomprehensible mystery of God. Christ has shown us the path to salvation, through the manner in which he lived and accepted his life, trusting totally in God.

The Third Week explores explicitly the horrors that Jesus endured as he faced death, abandonment and hell. Christ's Passion and suffering is not diluted of meaning. Rahner vividly speaks of the dreadful reality of being separated from God, being utterly alone and experiencing the deadliness of sin. Rahner again focuses on Christ's acceptance of his Father's will and calls the retreatant to truly trust in the Holy Mystery. As followers of Christ, we too should "let go" in absolute trust in God.

The Fourth Week reinforces Rahner's stringent fidelity to uniting the cross and resurrection to approach understanding how we are saved. This intrinsic relationship ensures that we see Jesus as dying into his resurrection in a single event. Without the cross, the resurrection would be hopelessly optimistic. Without the resurrection, the cross would be an incalculable tragedy. But when they are united, we see Jesus' life finally being made irrevocably and definitively part of God's life. The Spirit that flows from Christ's side is the fruit of our redemption.

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Balthasar's criticisms must be evaluated in light of this research. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, among other texts referenced, Rahner definitively takes seriously the reality of sin. Declan Marmion notes that Rahner clearly treats sin as critically important. It is through Jesus' cross and resurrection that God's love defeats the absurdity of sin.<sup>290</sup> Rahner does not undermine sin and this is graphically illustrated in his writings on hell, where Jesus experiences sin, even though he is sinless. There is no greater demonstration of this than in Christ's abandonment on the cross.

Also, Balthasar is incorrect when he accuses Rahner of stripping any redemptive efficacy off of the cross. Rahner's use of sacramental-symbolic causality allows the Christian to recognise Christ as the sacrament of salvation, which is at once the effect and cause of what is signified. In this way, we can see our redemption as caused by both the Father's universal salvific will and Christ the Redeemer.

Rahner seeks to protect the formula of Chalcedon far more staunchly than Balthasar. Rahner can not envisage the cross being the cause of salvation as that would mean that it brought about a change in God, from one of wrath to one of mercy. It is the salvific will of God that is absolutely the cause of our salvation.

There is not the dramatic element in Rahner's theology of the cross that Balthasar possesses. This is because Rahner stresses the acceptance of the Son to the will of the Father. There is no "hiatus" within the Trinity; rather Christ is utterly obedient to the Father and this surrender is done so in faith and love. In this way, there is no tragedy in Rahner's theology as the Son has remained true to the Father, even in death and abandonment. Rowan Williams succinctly summarises this distinction between the two theologians aptly on this point: "The heart of the difference here seems to be that Rahner thinks of human frustration in terms of incompleteness, Balthasar in terms of tragedy."<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998) 292 and (ref34)

<sup>291</sup> Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (London: SCM Press, 2007) 99

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That is not to say that Rahner's theology of the cross is free from limitation. Balthasar is correct to judge Rahner's lack of a pneumatological aspect as harmful to his discourse. There is evidence of pan-cosmic terms which do not improve Rahner's theology as they are speculative and not scripturally based. However, as Phan argues, Rahner amends this shortcoming by applying Gilbert Greshake's hypothesis of death into resurrection to his theology.

It is clear that Rahner's explicit theology of the cross has an Ignatian influence. This world is not to be loved or accepted as God should be. By seeking God in all things, we are enabled to follow the path of the Crucified to salvation. This Christocentric dimension is not just seen in the *Spiritual Exercises*, but in the many cited primary sources of Rahner that demonstrate a clear theology of the cross.

It is clear that Rahner is guilty of not having Balthasar's theology of the cross. However, as has been demonstrated, this does not mean that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross. Rahner's explicit *theologia crucis* is more faithful to the Incarnation than Balthasar's and is of profound Ignatian spirituality in nature.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> For further reading, see Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998) 282-296

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**4.1 Introduction:**

Rahner's theology of the cross is not limited to just an explicit approach that is grounded in Ignatian spirituality and incarnational doctrine. Rahner also offers an implicit theology of the cross, which latently manifests itself in a number of themes Rahner explores. This chapter will concentrate on how the cross is implicitly present in three of these themes.

The first of these will be Rahner's theology of death. Rahner's exploration of death and Christian dying will be examined and how it is through Jesus' death that our deaths find meaning. The manner in which Rahner approaches the radically unique death of Christ will also reveal a definitively Ignatian spirituality. Rahner's criticism of Anselm's satisfaction theory will also be explored, which will reveal both strengths and weaknesses in Rahner's theology of death, which has implications for his theology of the death of Jesus. Rahner's approach to martyrdom will reveal a distinctive, implicit theology of the cross. It will also offer a response to Balthasar's critique of Rahner in *Cordula*, suggesting that Rahner could in fact complement Balthasar's approach to martyrdom rather than be seen as his adversary.

The second theme explored will be Rahner's exploration of the Eucharist. Rahner treats this sacrament as a participation in Christ's suffering and death and its nature as both bloody and unbloody sacrifice. Rahner is keen to stress that his position cannot support vicarious representation. This will demonstrate limitations in Rahner's implicit theology of the cross. These will include biblical weaknesses over the *pro nobis* term, "for us". This will also highlight how the foundation of Rahner's argument, that Anselm has presented a God who can be appeased by a bloody sacrifice is a misreading of Anselm's satisfaction theory. Rahner's treatment of self-redemption will be explored in regard to how Rahner's theology of freedom can accommodate it. Finally, the question of whether other sacraments reveal Rahner's implicit theology will be briefly explored.

The final theme explored will be Rahner's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The significance of the loving obedience of the Son towards the Father at

Calvary will demonstrate Rahner's implicit theology of the cross. Christ's heart sheds blood for us out love. This acceptance of death transforms our sinful destiny into salvation in God's eternal life. This approach will highlight Rahner's strongly Ignatian influence and how the cross reveals God's love defeating the reality of sin. Finally, a comment will be made on Balthasar's criticism that Rahner has strayed from the Sacred Heart in his meditations on the cross. It will be clear that Rahner has not forgotten the Sacred Heart and that it in fact reveals Rahner's implicit theology of the cross.

#### **4.2 Rahner's General Theology of Death:**

Rahner's general theology of death is heavily influenced by his theology of freedom and understanding of Martin Heidegger's concepts of *Dasein* and *zum-Tode-Sein*.<sup>293</sup> He presents death as more than just a biological occurrence and not simply a dichotomy of body and soul, as per the traditional understanding. As scholar Terrance W. Klein notes:

To be human is "to be there," to be thrown into a world, to be that part of this intensely physical place which has the role of questioning both itself and its place. To my mind, the greatest insight Rahner drew from Heidegger is the notion that one can never separate a human from a world. To be human is to be in the world, indeed, it is to be precisely that part of the world that questions.<sup>294</sup>

For Rahner, death is that which gives meaning to our lives. If we were to live forever, then all of our deeds would lose their significance as there would not be a finality to them. Our lives are characterised by these decisions which we make as they have a finality or "death" about them. The finiteness of our lives gives them a significance that is only realised in their end in death. This freedom is realised in death, where we make the conclusive decision of our lives. This freedom is:

...not the power constantly to change one's course of action, but rather the power to decide that which is to be final and definitive in one's life, which cannot be

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<sup>293</sup> For further reading, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) 279-304, the chapter heading is Dasein's Possibility of Being-A-Whole and Being-Towards-Death

<sup>294</sup> Terrance W. Klein, Karl Rahner on the Soul, *Anselm Journal* 6.1 (Fall 2008) 2  
[http://www.anselm.edu/Documents/Institute%20for%20Saint%20Anselm%20Studies/Abstracts/4.5.3.2.a\\_61Klein.pdf](http://www.anselm.edu/Documents/Institute%20for%20Saint%20Anselm%20Studies/Abstracts/4.5.3.2.a_61Klein.pdf) (accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014)

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superseded or replaced, the power to bring into being from one's own resources that which must be, and must not pass away, the summons to a decision that is irrevocable.<sup>295</sup>

Death is a universal and personal act for the human subject. Rahner's position is that death affects the whole person. "As a natural event, death cannot be adequately defined as the separation of the soul from the body."<sup>296</sup> This makes clear that Rahner understands that the soul in some way exists after death despite the dissipation of the body.<sup>297</sup> This raises some concerns over the pan-cosmic existence of the soul after death, particularly seen in the death of Christ. This has been highlighted in the previous chapter.

Rahner is criticised for applying speculative, philosophical reasoning to the destiny of the soul after death. In the case of Christ, Rahner speaks of Jesus who "surrendered himself to the innermost part of the world."<sup>298</sup> Jesus is now somehow integrated into the ontological being of the world, which can read as speculative thinking which is not based on Scripture.

One possible solution to this is to view death as potentially the definitive "Yes" to God's love and entry into the eternal life of God. This is what is manifested in the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the ground of our being is God, who enables Being to be. In entering into the life of God, Jesus has entered into that incomprehensible mystery which is the singular basis of all existence. This is the Holy mystery we are orientated towards and it is only in death that we can enter into this eternal life through Christ. It is the ground of our Being and to attain salvation is to definitively realise our Being in God.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Karl Rahner, *On Christian Dying*, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 287

<sup>296</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Eschatology*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 180

<sup>297</sup> Rahner makes clear that this separation of body and soul is not a definition of death for theologians to use. Rather, it "is a description and nothing more, and by no means a definition of death in its very essence." Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 17

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, 71

<sup>299</sup> Rahner makes many references to the Holy Mystery that is the ground of our Being. See Karl Rahner, *Christian Living Formerly and Today*, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 15, Karl Rahner, *The Task of the Writer in Relation to Christian living*, *Theological Investigations 8*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 114, *Ibid*, *Unity-Love-Mystery*, 243, Karl Rahner, *The Need for a Short Formula of Christian Faith*, *Theological Investigations 9*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton Longman

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This is a possible defence to Rahner's philosophical approach to death affecting the person totally, both body and spirit. As Phan highlighted in the previous chapter, Rahner later disposed his previous pan-cosmic theory in favour of Gilbert Greshake's hypothesis of immediate resurrection after death.<sup>300</sup> Based on this, the criticism of Rahner's pan-cosmic tendencies is dated and can only relate to the earlier work of Rahner. As has been demonstrated thus far, Rahner's emphasis on death into resurrection is extremely important to understanding Rahner's theology of the cross.

There are certain issues over Rahner's speculative, unscriptural hypothesis of Christ retaining a cosmic unity with the world as has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, it is possible to understand this as a development of Rahner's theology of God as that which enables Being to Be, the incomprehensible Holy mystery. In the overall discussion of Rahner's theology of the cross, it is clear that more focus should be on Rahner's understanding of the unity of death and resurrection. This is a far more consistent and reliable approach to understanding the significance of Christ's death.

The universal nature of death is manifestly important. The personal aspect of death is of greater significance. It is the "plenitude of a person's attainment of total self-possession, the independence and pure immanence that characterize personality."<sup>301</sup> It is the ultimate act of freedom by the subject. This decision is the ultimate "Yes" or the ultimate "No" to the incomprehensible mystery of God. Jesus shows the graced acceptance of the subject who transforms death into a free act. Jesus accepts his fate and puts his trust in his Father's will.

This approach by Rahner can lead critics to claim he has presented an overtly optimistic perspective on death. This is not totally inaccurate. Rahner writes:

When a man dies patiently and humbly, when death itself is seen and accepted, when it not merely "happens" in the course of striving for something else and when perhaps death is not envisaged through blind eagerness for something

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& Todd, 1972) 122 It is acceptance of this mystery that is our ultimate goal and basis. See Karl Rahner, Marriage as a Sacrament, *Theological Investigations 10*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 10

<sup>300</sup> Peter C. Phan, Eschatology, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 191 (ref14)

<sup>301</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 41

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(flight from shame, something obstinately sought, etc.), when death is loved for its own sake, and explicitly, it cannot but be a good death.<sup>302</sup>

Rahner argues consistently that death is the manifestation and consequence of sin. Rahner states: "Death is a blow of fate, a thief in the night an emptying and reducing of man to powerlessness, in fact the end."<sup>303</sup> Death is that final weakness of the person who cannot know whether they have achieved ultimate fullness of life or complete emptiness of existence. However, Rahner is also guilty at times of promoting an extremely positive view of death. Death cannot be "good" as something good cannot be the direct product of something evil. He argues that it is a moment of true freedom, where the subject can make a final, eternal decision which is irrevocably significant.<sup>304</sup> It becomes clear that while death is itself an evil as it is a result of sin, it is God's salvific will that enables our salvation. Rather than seeing death as something positive, it should be seen as something sinful which is transformed through God's mercy and love.

However, Rahner does stress consistently that Jesus faces the destructive abyss of sin which is the cause of death.<sup>305</sup> As a result of sin, each of us must face that moment in death where the final goal of our existence is hidden from us; to attain the ultimate fullness of life or complete and final separation from God. Rahner states the reason for this apprehension is not simply because of Original Sin but also through venial sins. The fact that Rahner includes the "the moral disorder of our everyday life"<sup>306</sup> is significant as it highlights Rahner's deeper exploration of sin regarding the sorrowful state of sinful humanity.

The Fall is not the only cause of our need to be saved. By our own sinful actions in our everyday lives, we damage our relationship with God. It is through the death of Christ that this relationship is made right to a God who wills our salvation. But the painful reality of sin cannot be undermined and Rahner accordingly does not downplay it, contrary to the claims of Balthasar. Sin is the

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 111

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 40

<sup>304</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 436-441

<sup>305</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 217-239, Karl Rahner, *Grace in Freedom*, trans. Hilda Graef (London: Burns & Oates, 1969) 113-125 and Karl Rahner, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (Freiburg: Herder & Herder, 1973) 216-237

<sup>306</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 60

cause of our final question before God in death; have we achieved salvation or perdition? The only way to approach this uncertainty of death is in freedom and in faith, which is revealed in the death of Christ on the cross.<sup>307</sup>

#### **4.2.1 Rahner's Approach to the Death of Christ:**

Rahner has been criticised by Balthasar for overemphasising humanity's solidarity with Christ's death<sup>308</sup> and downplaying its exclusivity. The death of Jesus on the cross is both the nadir and apex of his life and ministry.<sup>309</sup> Rahner states clearly:

That Jesus died on the cross "had to be" and everything else, His life and work, all of His words- and even the totality of world history, can only be properly interpreted from that starting point. Of course, this high point of Jesus' mission is also the supreme catastrophe of His life... so that His life is given over completely to death.<sup>310</sup>

The death of Jesus is a human death, and death is also the great catastrophe of our lives. Like Christ, we too are shorn of our human power and face the weakness and emptiness of death. But as Rahner consistently states, it is not *how* Jesus died that is important. It is *that* he died. Balthasar takes issue with this.

Rahner too directs our attention away from the suffering: everything important comes about "through the death itself, and not, in the watered-down and superficial way it is often put, through his mortal suffering."<sup>311</sup>

In this way, Balthasar understands Rahner's position as removing any emphasis on the suffering of Christ and stressing the general, speculative nature of the

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<sup>307</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Self-Realization and Taking up One's Cross*, *Theological Investigations 9*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1972) 253-257, especially 255 and Karl Rahner, *Following the Crucified*, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 157-170, especially 162

<sup>308</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 273 (ref 35)

<sup>309</sup> Philip Endean notes that a careful reading of Rahner's texts "suggest that there were, in Rahner's mind, closer links between his Christology and his theology of death that commentators have recognised." In Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001) 188

<sup>310</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 237

<sup>311</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 278

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death itself. Rahner is also accused of not making clear in what sense we share in Christ's death. This leads to Balthasar's central question: why is Jesus' death on the cross unique?<sup>312</sup>

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, Rahner does not focus on the "bitter" sufferings of Christ to downplay the historical life of the human Jesus. Rahner reveals his deeply Ignatian influence by arguing that Christ's death is not a happy ending after his sufferings. Rather, Jesus' acceptance of the will of the Father represents to the Christian a model of how to follow the Crucified Lord.

This renunciation is the daily acceptance of our orientation towards the inevitability of death. This obedience to the will of the infinite mystery of God is strongly influenced by Ignatian indifference. By trusting in the Holy mystery, we do not place our faith in the finite, sinful reality we exist in. In following the example set by Christ in the manner he approaches his death, we too attempt to share the faith of Christ. Jesuit theologian Philip Endean states:

When, therefore, Rahner replies to challenges about Christ's role in his interpretation of Ignatius by evoking Calvary, Rahner must be understood as invoking two theological convictions: Christ's unreserved sharing in the human condition, and death as the paradigm moment in which earthly reality, through promise and negation, can mediate the transcendent.<sup>313</sup>

It is clear that Rahner understands our sharing in the death of Christ as tremendously significant. However, this still leaves Rahner open to the accusation that he has undermined the exclusivity of Christ's death.<sup>314</sup> Rahner's response to the question of the uniqueness of Christ's death is to be found in a series of correspondences between Rahner and theologian Karl-Heinz Weger. It is here that Rahner makes clear what he sees as distinctive about Christ's death.

What we have here is not just a human being who, through a death accepted without reserve, himself found God's freedom. That much we may hope from the death of every human being in the long history of the human race. But that the death of some other person means for me a promise from God himself, that we can know in faith of no other death than that of Jesus. For, in the case of other

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 280

<sup>313</sup> Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001) 193

<sup>314</sup> For further reading, see Bruce Marshall, *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) Marshall proposes that Rahner represents the cross as an example to humanity, rather than the unique event of God's self-revelation to humanity.

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people, how can we know that they are dying in solidarity with me, that they (and this is a bold statement) wish to obtain their salvation from God's incomprehensibility only if and insofar as this wish means me too and not just them? Of what other human being, except precisely of Jesus, can we know in faith that the surrender of death was an act of unconditional trust and not an ultimate despair at the disappearance of all support?<sup>315</sup>

Christ's death is unique as it is built on a grace we as sinful humans do not have. Christ can accept in total self-surrendering the unfathomable mystery of God. Despite complete abandonment, Christ does not despair in his "bitter sufferings". Christ accepts it in absolute obedience, dying not just in solidarity with us but dies for us, winning our salvation.

Rahner elaborates on this uniqueness of Christ's death.

Where, except in Jesus' resurrection, can I find the certainty that this capitulation is nothing other than the victorious outcome of his death, victorious for us in history (even if in its end) and therefore accessible, an outcome which in all other cases remains questionable? His victorious death is the fulfilment and this victorious fulfilment makes God's saving will always and everywhere at work in the world, irreversible. As the historical manifestation of this fulfilment, the death of Jesus is both the effect and also the cause of the grace in which God is always and everywhere the deepest energy and force of salvation history.<sup>316</sup>

Rahner stresses the intrinsic unity of the death and resurrection of Jesus once again. The resurrection makes an otherwise tragic death triumphant for all humanity. This is not a death that we could have experienced without Christ's death. There would be no hope of resurrection unless Jesus had not died into new life before us.

These remarks by Rahner highlight succinctly his understanding of the exclusive element of Jesus' death. One cannot ignore the strongly Ignatian element in Rahner's approach to death. This is an asceticism which stresses the calm acceptance of death, which is done so by taking up the cross of Christ and following the Crucified in complete obedience to God throughout our lives. Despite the suffering of life and the uncertainty of death, it is Ignatian asceticism and indifference that the cross reveals God's saving love.

With our eyes raised to the cross, we should ask ourselves: Where in my life am I trying to avoid the cross? Naturally, I do not call that which I am trying to escape

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<sup>315</sup> Karl Rahner & Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 117

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

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and that which I bitterly protest against in the depths of my being- I do not call that the cross of Christ. But that is exactly the place where I should accept it. If I do, it will bless me with the fullness of its grace.<sup>317</sup>

The cross is implicitly central to Rahner's theology of death. Christ's death and resurrection is the unique event which makes possible our salvation through God's salvific will, which is accepted in complete obedience by Jesus. Rahner recognises the radical nature of Jesus' death<sup>318</sup> is not the fact that he suffered greatly despite being innocent. Jesus died in a way that we could not, because we are sinful beings. Jesus who is sinless, accepts the abandonment of God and experiences hell; that which is absolutely other to him. Despite the destructive and annihilating reality of sin, God's love overcomes it.

Through the fact of Christ's death, the justifying grace of God illustrates and confirms something which before it did not show but which was hidden from us; at the very moment in which sin reached its fullest measure, grace prevailed; it can even overcome sin. And through the death of Christ, when he surrendered himself to the innermost part of the world, this grace became ours.<sup>319</sup>

This death on the cross is a revelation of God's all-conquering love. This is the love that takes sin into itself and defeats it. Through the Incarnation, the Word really encounters the vileness of sin and overcomes it.

The salvation of the world grows out of the strangely incomprehensible, even paradoxical, unity between the death-dealing revelation of sin which inflicts a terrible paroxysm on God Himself who came into the world to destroy death by his own death, and between the ineffable outpouring of His love which did not hesitate to sustain sin and death.<sup>320</sup>

Jesus' death is so distinctive because it is the death of both man and God. The personal act of Jesus is his obedience to the Father's will. By accepting death, Jesus faces death as the manifestation and effect of sin, which is alien to him. Rahner states that the followers of Ignatius are called to accept the sufferings of their lives through Ignatian indifference and asceticism. Rahner does not mean that our deaths are the same as that of Jesus. We can only hope to imitate the path of the Crucified, but our imitation will never be of the same merit as

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<sup>317</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 243

<sup>318</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 57-67

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 70-71

<sup>320</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 241

Christ's death. We can attain salvation only through Christ's death which has made redemption possible.

...the 'death of Christ, understood as the death of the Son of God, i.e. of him who – in a true sense and in spite of his humanity which is capable of suffering – does already stand also beyond the natural and sinful world . . . that this death shows a characteristic which cannot apply completely and in the same sense to the dying and *ascesis* of the Christian.<sup>321</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Rahner and Anselm's Theory of Satisfaction:**

Rahner stresses that we must consider Jesus' death as redemptive, even if it is not clear on which particular dimension of death our redemption is based. Rahner argues "we have to entertain the possibility that redemption rests on no single feature of Christ's death, but upon that death taken as whole, embracing all its manifold factors."<sup>322</sup> Rahner demonstrates why Christ's death is redemptive in relation to his critique of the satisfaction theory offered by Anselm.

Rahner is less than satisfied with this theory for a number of reasons. Firstly, Rahner cannot accept Anselm's argument that any moral act of Jesus could have saved us rather than his death on the cross.

Since any other moral act of Christ in his human nature, because of the dignity of his divine person, would also possess infinite value, it would have been just as possible on this theory, for God to have prescribed and accepted any other moral act of Christ as the satisfaction required.<sup>323</sup>

Rahner identifies this as a deficient idea<sup>324</sup> and argues that the redemptive significance of Christ's death "cannot be attributed to it as directly as this in its general quality as a moral act but only in its precise character as death."<sup>325</sup> For Rahner, it is the specific nature of death that is pivotal. He argues that Scripture

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<sup>321</sup>Karl Rahner, *The Passion and Asceticism*, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 81

<sup>322</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 58

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*, 59

<sup>324</sup> Eamonn Mulcahy, *The Cause of Our Salvation: Soteriological Causality According to Some Modern British Theologians, 1988-1998* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2007) 457. Mulcahy points out that this is all the more surprising as Anselm's soteriology focuses exclusively on the death of Jesus while simultaneously arguing that any moral act could have been equally salvific due to it having infinite value.

<sup>325</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 60

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emphasizes Christ's death as not being equivalent to any other moral act of his life.<sup>326</sup> Death is the consummation of one's life and is the personal act of the Word Incarnate.<sup>327</sup>

Therefore, the Incarnate World is really able to experience all the dimensions of human existence as His very own: the dignity of a mission, the abyss of ruin, the consummation of obedience, and the deep love of the heart- a heart that can say "Father" to this God who still stands before Him as the consuming fire of judgement, a heart that can surrender its poor life into His hands.<sup>328</sup>

In this way, the Word encounters all facets of human existence, even sin. For Rahner, no act could have been redemptive other than the death of Christ. As is consistent with Rahner's theology of the cross, it is not important how Jesus died, but that he died. This was a death in obedience to the Father's will.

Rahner also critiques Anselm for seemingly ignoring the life and ministry of Jesus in regard to redemption.

According to Rahner, Anselm's theory renders the rest of the life of Christ, apart from the passion and resurrection, irrelevant to our salvation. The theory, therefore, would undermine the integral unity of the form of God's revelation in Christ, a form which reveals saving significance of Christ's passion. He does, however argue that it must be seen within the context of Christ's life.<sup>329</sup>

This is one of the most striking flaws in Anselm's theory. By isolating a single dimension of Christ's life, one distorts the true revelation of God's mercy on the cross. Rahner asserts that the death of Jesus is the consummation of his life. It cannot help to separate the life and death of Christ as it would do justice to the salvific will of God.

The pure initiative of God's salvific will establishes the life of Jesus which reaches fulfilment in his death, and hence this salvific will becomes real and becomes manifest as irrevocable. The life and death of Jesus taken together, then, are the "cause" of God's salvific will (to the extent that these two things are regarded as

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<sup>326</sup> See also Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 217-243. Rahner bases his meditations on Matthew 26, 36-46; Mark 14, 32-42; and Luke 22, 40-46

<sup>327</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 239

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid*, 239-240

<sup>329</sup> James Voiss, Rahner, von Balthasar and the Question of Theological Aesthetics, in *Finding God in All Things: Celebrating Bernard Lonergan, John Courtney Murray and Karl Rahner*, ed. Mark Bosco and David Stagaman (NY: Fordham University Press, 2007) 177

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different) insofar as this salvific will establishes itself really and irrevocably in this life and death.<sup>330</sup>

Rahner has legitimate reason to find Anselm's theory lacking in this regard. Balthasar also critiques Anselm on this point, noting that Anselm "does not see that Jesus' entire life, work and suffering are meritorious."<sup>331</sup>

Finally, Rahner is critical of Anselm for portraying God as an insulted, wrathful God whose mind is changed by the cross of Christ.

We can see from the history of preaching and theology how this theory consistently obscured the simple fact that the event of the cross did not originate in an angry God who demanded reparation, but from a God of gratuitous and merciful love... the theory, almost of necessity, introduces the metaphysically impossible idea of a transformation of God and obscures the origin and cause of the crucifixion which is the mercy and love of God.<sup>332</sup>

Rahner is faithful to the formula of Chalcedon and cannot accept the notion that God's mind can be changed by Christ's death as God is divine and thus immutable. Both Balthasar and theologian Rik van Nieuwenhove point out a clear lack of first hand reading of Anselm's text *Cur Deus Homo?* on the part of Rahner regarding this issue. Balthasar asserts that Anselm was perfectly conscious of the immutability of God.

“(Anselm) ...spoke of the whole work of salvation proceeding from the loving Father, a Father who does not need to reconcile himself with the world but undertakes to reconcile the world to himself.”<sup>333</sup>

Van Nieuwenhove echoes this point, also highlighting the incompatibility of a God who was subject to change for medieval theologians.

First, the idea that God's anger was somehow appeased by the sacrifice of his Son need not detain us, as the idea of a changeable God was unacceptable to medieval

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<sup>330</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 284

<sup>331</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 261

<sup>332</sup> Karl Rahner, The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation, *Theological Investigations 16*, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979) 208. See also Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity* trans, William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 211

<sup>333</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 275

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theology. Moreover, salvation is *pro nobis*, it affects us and our relation to God rather than God himself.<sup>334</sup>

Rahner has misinterpreted Anselm's work in this respect. God is not subject to changing His mind after Christ's death on the cross. There is no transformation from a wrathful God to a placated God in Anselm's satisfaction theory. God has not demanded the torture and gruesome death of His Son as a form of vengeance. Rather, this is God willing our redemption as He does not require redemption. The crucifixion and death of Jesus do not honour God who has been offended. "For Anselm, honouring God means nothing else than living a life of virtue in obedience to God's will."<sup>335</sup>

Rahner's approach to immutability has already been stated in a previous chapter. Balthasar criticises Rahner's theologoumenon that: "God can become something, he who is unchangeable in himself can himself become subject to change in something else."<sup>336</sup> Rahner has not helped himself by explaining how this is possible from a theological perspective. His desire to protect the Chalcedonian formula seems to have overtaken a clear exploration of how God can be subject to something other than God. The Incarnation is a self-emptying and this is emptying into the weakness of the human condition.<sup>337</sup>

In fact, Balthasar offers Rahner a resource on this issue. He raises the subject of Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of intercessory prayer, that "the immutable God is affected by the freedom of his creature insofar as, from eternity, he has included in the latter's prayers his providence as contributory cause."<sup>338</sup>

This could be a complement to Rahner's approach to the immutability of God in relation to the cross. While Balthasar does go beyond scripture in his understanding of God's supra-suffering, his proposal of Aquinas' doctrine would be useful to Rahner. In this respect, Rahner has misinterpreted Anselm's

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<sup>334</sup> Rik Van Nieuwenhove, 'St Anselm and St Thomas Aquinas on 'Satisfaction' or how Catholic and Protestant understandings of the Cross differ' *Angelicum 80* (2003) 159-161  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10395/1422> 169

<sup>335</sup> Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 95

<sup>336</sup> Karl Rahner, On the Theology of the Incarnation, *Theological Investigations 4*, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) 113

<sup>337</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 278

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, 278

understanding of God's immutability and could find Balthasar's suggestion a helpful resource.

### **4.2.3 Rahner and Martyrdom:**

Balthasar's implicit criticism in *Cordula* is that Rahner allegedly promotes a "bland and shallow humanism"<sup>339</sup> that satisfies true Christian living. This is part of Balthasar's broader critique of Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian.<sup>340</sup> In relation to this work, Rahner lacks the decisive moment which occurs on the cross, in Balthasar's opinion. As theologian Declan Marmion notes: "Balthasar laid special emphasis on the readiness to suffer and on the value of martyrdom where the *Ernstfall*, or the decisive moment which is the cross of Christ, becomes the permanent pattern or form of Christian discipleship."<sup>341</sup>

It is worth remembering the Barth-Schleiermacher parallel offered in Chapter 2 (p61-62). Balthasar has not been fair to Rahner on the subject of martyrdom. If one were to solely read Balthasar's comments on Rahner's approach to martyrdom, the findings would be considerably different than those offered by a primary reading of Rahner. Following Balthasar's criticism of Rahner alone, one could accuse Rahner of having diluted the ultimate example of Christian living; to lay one's life down for the faith. This is not the case at all.

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<sup>339</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 126

<sup>340</sup> Eamonn Conway, *The Anonymous Christian - a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar's criticism of Karl Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1991) Conway covers comprehensively how Balthasar is less than fair to Rahner in this critique. It highlights the consistency in Balthasar's lack of generosity when discussing a concept offered by Rahner that he disagrees with.

<sup>341</sup> Declan Marmion, Rahner and His Critics: Revisiting the Dialogue, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 4 (February 2005)  
[http://aejt.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/395536/AEJT\\_4.10\\_Marmion.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/395536/AEJT_4.10_Marmion.pdf) 2

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Rahner's approach to martyrdom is one rooted in Ignatian spirituality and inextricably related to Rahner's theology of death.<sup>342</sup> Rahner views death as the total self-surrender of the human to the unfathomable mystery of God.

Whenever a man dies in this way, freely, believing and trusting, detached from all that is particular and concrete in the frank confidence that in this way he will obtain everything, at the point where he is apparently experiencing a collapse into emptiness, into the fathomless abyss, he is doing something that cannot be done except by the grace of Christ which celebrates its victory thereby.<sup>343</sup>

This is an acceptance of dying, and is grounded in Ignatian indifference. To detach oneself from the sinful, finite nature of the world is what Ignatius calls for. Despite the ignominy of the death, our death can be made victorious through the triumphant death of Christ,

It is the freedom of the martyr's death that makes it unique as it possesses a profound closeness to God. Malcolm notes: "Given Rahner's axiom, the closer a creature is to God, the more autonomous it is, the freer it is, the more it simply "is". Humans only attain their "true reality", their true "nature" when they give themselves in love."<sup>344</sup>

Christ's death is a giving away of himself in love and faith to the will of the Father. The martyr follows this detachment from the finite reality of the world and trusts totally in the incomprehensible mystery of God. This does not mean that the martyr's death is equal to the death of Christ. Rather, the martyr's death is made possible through the death of Christ, which has revealed God's eternal triumph over sin and death.

In a violent death which could have been avoided and which is, nevertheless, accepted in freedom, the freedom of a whole life is gathered into the one burning moment of death. Then the death of life (in its totality and freedom) enters into the death of death, in an act of complete freedom affecting the totality of life and so life's eternal finality. The death of martyrdom is a death of genuine liberty.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 82. Rahner writes exclusively on martyrdom in the final section of this book. 81-119. For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Dimensions of Martyrdom, Theological Investigations 23*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1992) 109-112

<sup>343</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 99

<sup>344</sup> Lois Malcolm, Rahner's Theology of the Cross, in *Rahner beyond Rahner: A Great Theologian Encounters the Pacific Rim*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) 123

<sup>345</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 98

There is no undermining the value of martyrdom on the part of Rahner. His work demonstrates that through the lens of Ignatian indifference, martyrdom can be seen as the most liberating death we can achieve as witnesses to our faith. The suffering of a violent death does not make martyrdom the liberating death that it is. It is the acceptance of such suffering by trusting totally in the mystery of God that is beyond this sinful world.

#### **4.2.4 Rahner's Ignatian Spirituality and Martyrdom:**

Rahner has been criticised for neglecting the seriousness of suffering of humanity.<sup>346</sup> This is not totally fair to Rahner as his later writings do show a strong awareness of the reality of suffering.<sup>347</sup> Leo J. O' Donovan makes note of this.<sup>348</sup> In relation to martyrdom, one should not view Rahner as treating suffering lightly. Herbert Vorgrimler notes that Rahner placed his total faith in God, even in the face of the horrendous suffering of the world. This reflects the Ignatian indifference to the world and absolute trust in the Holy mystery beyond it.

Rahner had contemporary experience of the human catastrophe which is referred to as 'Auschwitz' and took it into account in his theology, nor was he blind to the possibility of nuclear destruction. But he was capable of letting literally everything go over into his God.<sup>349</sup>

Instead of accusing Rahner of possessing apathy towards suffering, it is clear that he has instead re-iterated the fact that all suffering is less than God's love. This was revealed on the cross where Jesus accepted his death despite his agonising suffering. The martyr dies in freedom, where their sufferings are not

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<sup>346</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 128. In light of these criticisms, Vorgrimler cites examples of what he calls "almost incomprehensibly optimistic remarks of Rahner about the specific suffering of humanity."

<sup>347</sup> See Karl Rahner, *Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer?*, *Theological Investigations 19*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983) 194-208 and Karl Rahner, *Nuclear Weapons and the Christian*, *Theological Investigations 23*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991) 16-32

<sup>348</sup> Leo J. O' Donovan, *A Journey Into Time: The Legacy of Karl Rahner's Last Years*, *Theological Studies 46* (1985) 628 "As Rahner himself approached death, he seemed to see the cross ever more clearly focusing the solidarity of Christ with men and women throughout history and with the God who in history offers life to them all."

<sup>349</sup> Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner*, trans. John Bowden (London SCM Press Ltd, 1986) 129

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bitter. In absolute faith, they are willing to give their lives to a God whom they have absolute faith. In this way, Rahner has demonstrated a theology of martyrdom grounded in Ignatian spirituality and made effective through the cross of Christ.

Philip Endean highlights the Jesuit contemporary of Balthasar and Rahner, Alfred Delp who was martyred in a concentration camp. He argues that Rahner and Delp are similar in their attitudes to maintaining the faith despite aggressive opposition. Obviously, Delp has faced the ultimate opposition and is martyred for his faith. But Endean rightly argues that Rahner's theology and spirituality should not be as easily dismissed in regard to martyrdom. "Delp's prison writings show us that critics—both conservative and liberationist—of Rahnerian theology and spirituality need to make their case more carefully."<sup>350</sup>

Rahner's deeply Ignatian spirituality manifests itself in his perspective on martyrdom. Despite the suffering and trials experienced in life, Rahner's fundamental attitude is one of complete trust and faith in the incomprehensible God.

And in 1961, Rahner gave the ordination retreat for the candidates in the Jesuit community in Innsbruck. Perhaps symbolically, we only have a fragment of the opening talk of this retreat. The text breaks off in mid-sentence:<sup>351</sup>

The most important Exercises in life are mostly not made during the Exercises as such. Rather they happen where God brings us up against life's final, bitter, serious moment ....<sup>352</sup>

Rahner may offer a complement to Balthasar's theology here. Rather than focusing on the "bitter suffering" of Christ, Rahner demonstrates true Ignatian indifference in his theology. On the cross of Christ, God's salvific will of love and mercy is victorious over sin and death. By placing absolute trust in God, one can face the suffering in this world and not view it with hopelessness. It is through this life of accepting death in freedom that we can be true witnesses to the faith.

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<sup>350</sup> Philip Endean, A Symbol Perfected in Death: Rahner's Theology and Alfred Delp (1907-1945) *The Way*, 43/4 (October 2004) 70-71 <http://www.theway.org.uk/back/434Endean.pdf> (accessed on 7/4/14)

<sup>351</sup> Ibid,

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, Endean notes that the text he cites this quote from was published as *Meditations on Priestly Life*, translated by Edward Quinn (London: Sheed and Ward, 1970)

This more explicit emphasis on Ignatian indifference could be a possible resource to Balthasar's approach.

### **4.3 The Eucharist as Participation in Christ's Death:**

Rahner's theology of Eucharist reveals an implicit theology of the cross. The sacrifice made by Christ is remembered as both unbloody and bloody. Rahner recognises here that in both cases:

"...the sacrificial offering made is Jesus Christ himself. The manner of offering indeed is different: on the Cross, the sacrificial offering was offered to God by the shedding of blood, here it is offered in an unbloody manner by the transubstantiation of the human gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Redeemer.<sup>353</sup>

Christ's sacrifice at the Last Supper is offered out of love and obedience to God. "This unbloody sacrifice is a visible expression of His offering of Himself to the Father."<sup>354</sup> Christ's attitude of self-sacrifice is definitively realised on the cross on Good Friday. It is "a true, visible sacrifice whose purpose is to render present the bloody sacrifice offered once and for all on the Cross and to preserve the memory of this sacrifice until the end of time."<sup>355</sup> In both offerings, Christ gives himself totally to the will of the Father.

The Eucharist is the celebration of the salvation offered to us by God, and can only truly receive the grace of this sacrament by acknowledging the sacrifice it constitutes. Rahner highlights the Ignatian spirituality which permeates his theology of the Eucharist. This is seen in Rahner's *Spiritual Exercises*.

The reception of the Eucharist corresponds to the attitude that is to be striven for in the meditation on the Two Standards- an attitude of putting away all feelings of reluctance to sacrifice for Christ, for it is with these feelings that the devil begins to tempt us.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Eucharist and Suffering, Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 163

<sup>354</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 210

<sup>355</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Eucharist and Suffering, Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 161

<sup>356</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 211

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Rahner recognises that the sacrament stands for the Crucified Lord and his death.<sup>357</sup> We are redeemed through that which was offered up and sacrificed. Rahner does not undermine the painful consequences of such a sacrifice; this was not a serene obedience that overlooked the reality of sin. Rahner meditates on Christ's cry of abandonment at Calvary.

This Good Friday was loneliness itself. This Good Friday was that mysterious cry, the real meaning of which man cannot so much guess at, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This Good Friday was the futility of life, the hatred of enemies, betrayal of friends, loneliness, remoteness from God, an exposure of the stupidity of human aims and designs, and death.<sup>358</sup>

Christ's death is experienced as that total separation from God. Jesus suffers the destructive nature of sin and the futility of sinful humanity in a finite, flawed world. We are called to recognise our death as well as Christ's death in the Eucharist. We are sinners and as such face the consequence of sin, which is death. Christ offers himself for us, and through this sacrifice, we too face the desire for giving ourselves totally to God.

It is the sacrificial disposition of Christ "which made his suffering on the Cross a world-redeeming action."<sup>359</sup> Rahner elaborates on this desire to obey the will of the Father that possesses Jesus.

It is the will for the Cross, the obedience unto death, the voluntary sacrifice of his life by the one of who has the power to give his life or keep it, by the one who gave it because this was his Father's will. It was therefore a will for sorrow, for the chalice of bitterness, for desperation, because God was to be glorified precisely by such a voluntary acceptance of suffering.<sup>360</sup>

It is important to state that sacrifice does not mean appeasing an angry God. Theologian Edward J. Kilmartin outlines that:

Sacrifice in the New Testament understanding- and thus in its Christian understanding- is, in the first place, the self-offering of the Father in the gift of his Son, and in the second place the unique response of the Son in his humanity to

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<sup>357</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Eucharist and Our Daily Lives*, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 217

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, 218

<sup>359</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Eucharist and Suffering*, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 162

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid*, 163

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the Father, and in the third place, the self-offering of believers in union with Christ by which they share in his covenant relation with the Father.<sup>361</sup>

When understood in this way, Kilmartin can state that: "The eucharistic sacrifice, just as the historical sacrifice of the cross, is grounded on the initiative of the Father."<sup>362</sup> This initiative is God's salvific will; for humanity to be reconciled to Him and enter into His eternal life. By entering into the sacrificial mind of Jesus, we too are graced into closer relationship with the Father.

The Eucharist calls us for such a participation in the sacrifice offered by Christ. This involves an acceptance of our own deaths as well. "In the Eucharistic celebration, therefore, we announce not only the death of Christ, but also our own death."<sup>363</sup>

Rahner cites Gregory the Great's term '*prolixitas mortis*' for the moments of death that occur throughout our lives.<sup>364</sup> This alludes to a thread of death that exists throughout our lives. We are "beings unto death" and face death each day in our choices and in our freedom. But in the Eucharist, we receive Christ, who on the cross has demonstrated the acceptance of death that transforms it into a free, personal act. "For we have received the crucified Lord and have thereby received his death and his Cross as well."<sup>365</sup>

Rahner elaborates on how Christ's death has revealed our salvation in relation to the Eucharist.

Since the Eucharist immerses us in the death of the Lord, it is a participation in His power on the cross. In order to be able to die our death in such a way that we can truly endure it as our salvation, or, in other words, in order to discover the death of Jesus Christ in our death, we receive the body that he offered for us and we drink the blood that flowed from His heart so that He might always be with us.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN : Liturgical Press, 1998) 382

<sup>362</sup> Ibid

<sup>363</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 212

<sup>364</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, Christian Dying, *Theological Investigations 18*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1983) 226-256, particularly 226-231

<sup>365</sup> Karl Rahner, The Eucharist and Our Daily Lives, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 219

<sup>366</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 213

**4.3.1 The Eucharist and Ignatian Spirituality:**

We are strengthened through the Eucharist to endure the sufferings of everyday life in patient obedience and trust in the incomprehensible mystery of God. By partaking in Christ's sacrifice on the cross through the Eucharist, we receive the Crucified Lord. Rahner states that in consuming the Lord, we "become more attuned to the suffering of Christ himself and are borne more and more in such a way that they are truly the continuation of the suffering life of Jesus."<sup>367</sup>

There is a strongly Ignatian element to this. As seen in Chapter 3, Week Two of *Spiritual Exercises* (95-101) is based on following the path of Christ. We are called to attempt to follow the dynamic orientation of Christ's life, which was one devoted faithfully to the will of the one that he called "Abba".

The relationship between Ignatian piety and the cross is so fundamentally profound that Rahner can state: "Ignatian piety is a piety of the Cross".<sup>368</sup> Ignatius calls for self-denial and a flight from this world. This is a renunciation of the finite world and placing oneself totally in obedience to the God that is beyond this world. "Ignatian joy in the world springs from the mysticism of conformity with him whom we have joined in the flight from the world contained in the foolishness of the Cross."<sup>369</sup>

In following the direction of the life of Jesus, we do not place our faith in this world but the existence that exists in eternal life in God. This renunciation of the world manifests itself in the acceptance of death, which Christ demonstrates.

In Christian terms this kind of renunciation in letting things die in faith and hope is called taking up one's cross. As an act of free acceptance it takes a step in the direction of death's inevitability and is thus a preliminary exercise in the acceptance of that particular death which is our unavoidable lot.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Eucharist and Suffering*, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 170

<sup>368</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World*, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 281

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, 293

<sup>370</sup> Karl Rahner, *Self-Realization and Taking up One's Cross*, *Theological Investigations 9*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1972) 255

## **Chapter 4- Rahner's Implicit Theology of the Cross**

In the Eucharist, we receive Christ whose death was the ultimate transformation from sin to a revelation of God's saving love and mercy. Jesus' life was irrevocably made valid through his death and resurrection. By dying the death and experiencing the hell of the sinner,<sup>371</sup> Christ redeems us through God's ineffable love and salvific will. Christ's absolute obedience to the Father, even in the face of abandonment is a model of acceptance of death for our own lives. The Eucharist is the receiving of Christ, who trusted in God even in his suffering.

The Eucharist should bring us to the point that we say to Christ: "I want to love you in your crucifixion; I want to practice right now the readiness that you will one day inexorably demand of me- how, I know not- so that I will not have to suffer my soul to be torn away from me in the despair of the Adamic sinner; I want to give you my life with a final, silent, actively indifferent faith and love. This is the only way to endure your death."<sup>372</sup>

The Eucharist is the holy reality of faith that enables the recipient into participation in the Passion and death of Christ. This sacrament reveals a strongly Ignatian implicit theology of the cross in Rahner's work.

### **4.3.2 Redemption and Vicarious Representation:**

Rahner has reservations over the treatment of redemption in current theology.

...as far as soteriology is concerned, the average theology current in our schools today is only interested in the formal value of Christ's redemptive act, not in its concrete content, the inner structure of the redemptive process in itself.<sup>373</sup>

Rahner blames this on satisfaction theories that:

...not only assumes tacitly but also explicitly maintains that Christ would equally have been able to redeem us by any other moral action, provided only that God had so willed it and had accepted this action as vicarious satisfaction. The inner content of the redemptive act (i.e. the Cross, death, obedience, abandonment by God, death due to the action of sinners themselves) thus only has significance for the Redemption as such in its abstract moral quality, which as it were gives up its substratum and its matter for

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<sup>371</sup> Karl Rahner, See, What A Man!, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 136-139

<sup>372</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 213

<sup>373</sup> Karl Rahner, Current Problems in Christology, *Theological Investigations 1*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 192

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the value which this action acquires in virtue of the dignity of the divine Person; the precise content of the action makes no difference.<sup>374</sup>

Rahner stresses that it is the death and obedience of Christ which constitute the redemptive action rather than any event outside this obedient death. In this way, the Passion of Christ and the suffering he endured are not in themselves redemptive as they are outside Christ's giving up of his life.

Rahner highlights legitimate deficiencies in Anselm's satisfaction theory here. Firstly, Anselm's focus on the crucifixion of Jesus is at the cost of placing any importance on the salvific value of Christ's life, ministry and resurrection. Secondly, while Anselm does place central importance on the crucifixion, he does not emphasise why it is Christ's death that is redemptive and not any other act of the same moral quality.<sup>375</sup>

Karl-Heinz Weger notes Rahner's position is that, "...we must not place the specific mode of Jesus' death on the cross in the centre of the soteriological event, but Jesus' obedient acceptance of death, which began with the incarnation itself."<sup>376</sup>

For all of Rahner's reservations regarding Anselm, Balthasar sees them as both guilty of the same deficiency over the suffering and death of Christ.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, trans. C. H. Henkey (NY: Herder & Herder, 1961) 60

<sup>376</sup> Karl-Heinz Weger, *Karl Rahner: An Introduction To His Theology*, trans. David Smith (NY: Seabury Press, 1980) 173

<sup>377</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 261. Also, at (ref17) on this page; Balthasar cites the work of Hans-Ulriche Wiese, "Die Lehre Anselms von Canterbury über den Tod Jesu in der Schrift 'Cur Deus Homo'" in *Wiss. U. Weisheit 41* (1979) 53-54. Anselm's view is that of Rahner... Death is a greater self-surrender than suffering... Anselm and Rahner- unlike von Balthasar- approach the death of Jesus in a predominantly abstract way, not on the basis of biblical reflection on the suffering and death of Jesus.

### **4.3.3 Limitations in Rahner's Approach to Vicarious Representation:**

Christ's vicarious representation of us in his sacrifice is also a significant point of contention between Rahner and Balthasar. Rahner is resolutely against the idea of Christ as a substitute for us, who carries our sins in our place.

A conception of vicarious redemption in which Jesus does for me, what I actually ought to do myself but am not capable of doing, and which will then be "credited" to me is a conception that I consider to be wrong or at least a misleading formulation of the dogmatic truth that my redemption is dependent on Jesus and his cross.<sup>378</sup>

Rahner's interprets the *pro nobis* as meaning vicarious expiation and promptly rejects it. Balthasar provides a sharp critique of Rahner's soteriology and highlights the serious deficiencies he observes in Rahner's approach.<sup>379</sup> These include exegetical and speculative concerns.

The exegetical issue arises out of Rahner's interpretation of the Pauline term *hyper hēmōn*. Paul writes of Christ who "died for us". Examples of this include "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is also seen in relation to Christ "who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." (Galatians 1:4). Rahner rejects the term as he sees it as an obstacle to the possibility of self-redemption for humanity.

One cannot appeal to the New Testament term *hyper hēmōn* to justify this notion of vicarious representation. It is certain that *hyper* is used in a great number of passages to mean "for the benefit of," and in none of these passages is it necessary to understand it in a different sense. Furthermore, if we look at the totality of Christian theology, we see that its entire tendency excludes vicarious representation in this sense.<sup>380</sup>

Balthasar is strongly critical of Rahner's interpretation and depreciation of the term. Balthasar highlights the fact that the term is actually pre-Pauline and for Rahner to undermine the term as he does equates to a:

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<sup>378</sup> Karl Rahner, The Christian Understanding of Redemption, *Theological Investigations 21*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988) 248

<sup>379</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 273-284

<sup>380</sup> Karl Rahner, Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation, *Theological Investigations 21*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988) 265

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...downgrading of practically the entire high theology of the New Testament- a theology from which members of the Church down through the centuries have drawn their spirituality, whether they were ordinary folk or the great saints.<sup>381</sup>

Rahner himself noted his limitations in relation to biblical exegesis.<sup>382</sup> Joseph S. O' Leary also highlights that Rahner's method is limited by focusing more on his metaphysical system rather than biblical exegesis. "Where the limits of this metaphysical vision appear is in its failure to engage closely with the phenomenality of the biblical world."<sup>383</sup> Balthasar illustrates a significant issue that arises in Rahner's understanding of Christ's sacrifice because of this misunderstanding of *hyper hēmōn*.

Rahner states that:

We have to say that this is not established historically beyond dispute whether the pre-resurrection Jesus himself already interpreted his death as an expiatory sacrifice, and did this in the context of the servant of God suffering in expiation in Deutero-Isaiah, and of the just man suffering innocently and in expiation in late Jewish theology.<sup>384</sup>

Rahner seeks to keep speculation limited by making minimal assertions about the relationship of the pre-Resurrection Jesus to his death.

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 regards to his claim. But this means that his death is an atonement for the sins of the world and was adequately consummated as such.<sup>385</sup>

Balthasar comments on the impact such remarks would have on Christ's explanation of what the Eucharist constitutes.

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<sup>381</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 274-275

<sup>382</sup> Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of his Life*. ed. and trans. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, translation ed. Harvey D. Egan (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1990) 16 Rahner states; "I have never been an exegete, and only in a very limited sense have I done work in dogma and historical theology. In this respect, I readily admit that my theology has limits. It is a speculative reflection on data available in the general faith-consciousness and scholastic theology"

<sup>383</sup> Joseph S. O' Leary, Rahner and Metaphysics, in *Rahner: Theologian for the Twenty First Century*, ed. Pádraic Conway & Fáinche Ryan (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010) 24. While O' Leary is right to point out the limitations of Rahner's biblical method, suggesting Rahner is hampered by German Idealism is not as fair. It would be worth treating Rahner's Ignatian spirituality as a starting point for Rahner's theology. For further reading, see Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 7

<sup>384</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 283

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, 255

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...if we say that Jesus had no knowledge of the true meaning of his suffering and dying (in accordance with the pre-Pauline *pro nobis*), we are also obliged to delete those words in which he authoritatively explains the meaning of his institution of the Eucharist.<sup>386</sup>

Rahner's biblical limitations are problematic here. Rahner is correct in the sense that there is no definitive answer to whether Christ saw his death as sacrifice in expiation. But Rahner has not recognised the history of the *pro nobis* actually being pre-Pauline. This could raise questions over what meaning can truly be taken from the Eucharist if Christ did not see it as expiatory sacrifice.

Theologian Gerald O' Collins may offer a defence for Rahner regarding the sacrificial nature of the crucifixion. O' Collins examines Paul and highlights that some approaches that focus on the *pro nobis* are in danger of distorting the event at Calvary.

...any stress on Calvary's consequences 'for us' tends to exclude the theme of its consequences 'for God' and hence its sacrificial quality. Paul knows the cross to be an effect of God's saving will, not its cause. And that belief restrains the apostle's readiness to proclaim Good Friday as an atoning sacrifice which establishes a new relationship between God and man.<sup>387</sup>

Rahner too sees the cross as an effect of God's salvific will and not the single cause of our redemption. God wishes for humanity to be reconciled to Him, not for humanity to try to reconcile with an angry God.

### **4.3.4 Representation and the Wrath of God:**

This leads to the second issue that Balthasar takes with Rahner, which is over the supposed "changing of God's mind" that Rahner sees present in Anselm's satisfaction theory. This has already been explored previously in the chapter. In regard to vicarious representation, it raises another issue, does Jesus die in solidarity with us or representing us?

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<sup>386</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 275

<sup>387</sup> Gerald O' Collins, *The Calvary Christ* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1977) 108

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Rahner vehemently argues that Jesus is not the sacrificial victim of a sadistic God, and that this tyrannical deity is not somehow placated by the death of an innocent offering.

...we must say: because God wills salvation, therefore Jesus died and rose again, and not: because the crucifixion occurred, therefore God wills our salvation. God is not transformed from a God of anger and justice into a God of mercy and love by the cross; rather God brings the event of the cross to pass since he is possessed from the beginning of gratuitous mercy and, despite the world's sin, shares himself with the world, so overcoming its sin.<sup>388</sup>

This has led to Balthasar's accusation that Rahner has undermined sin and consequently downplayed the wrath of God, dissolving them into the Incarnation. Guy Mansini posits that one of the conditions of Rahner's theology of the cross is that:

...it will be a theory in which the anger of God at sin and the sinner becomes a minor or even non-existent theme. For presumably, there is no wrath in God to neutralize, and if there were, how could it be borne by another in our stead?<sup>389</sup>

As has been explored in the previous chapter, Rahner addresses the reality of sin in his theology of the cross. The cross is the revelation of God's love and the sin of humanity, which God defeats through his salvific will of love and mercy. Mansini rightly notes that Rahner's understanding of representation is limited by both shortcomings in biblical research and Rahner's understanding of humanity's freedom.

It might be argued that Rahner does not do justice to the New Testament foundations of the notion of representation. His motive for jettisoning this notion, he says, is to ensure the recognition of the role of our freedom in the process of redemption. The idea that Christ represents us, or substitutes for us, however, never meant to deny this. It meant rather to indicate that the offer of the grace of conversion was, in fact and as determined by God, costly. It was costly to God's incarnate Son... He (Rahner) takes it, perhaps that Christ's representation of us, and prior to our freedom, makes one thing with the view that the only change that the Cross can effect is a change in God.<sup>390</sup>

It can be argued that Balthasar's portrayal of the cross as an event in world history would be of use to Rahner's theology of the cross. Rahner's presentation of the cross as the revelation of God's salvific will is obviously significant but

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<sup>388</sup> Karl Rahner, *The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation*, *Theological Investigations* 16, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979) 207

<sup>389</sup> Guy Mansini, *Rahner and Balthasar on the Efficacy of the Cross*, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998) 233

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, 246

lacks Balthasar's dramatic perspective. Rahner is also hamstrung by his misreading of Anselm. As has been illustrated, Anselm's satisfaction theory does not present a changeable God who is appeased from anger to placation through the cross. Rahner's desire to protect the impassibility of God seems to supersede the idea of Christ representing us. It is surprising that Rahner does not recognise that Anselm presents a God who is not subject to "changing His mind". God's wrath is not against Jesus but against sin, and this sin is destroyed by God's eternal love.

This by no means denies that the holy God rejects sin absolutely and in that sense is "angry" with the sinner. But this rejection always coexists in God with his desire to forgive and to overcome human sin. The cross, the reality of Christ, his love, his faith, his hope, his surrender to God's incomprehensibility are, however, the result of a redeeming love of God which itself has no cause outside of itself. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, and it was not because the Son gave himself that an angry God with great effort changed his mind about the world.<sup>391</sup>

#### **4.3.5 Self-Redemption and Freedom:**

Rahner has a final issue with vicarious representation. His concern is that satisfaction theories imply that it would undermine the freedom of the self to achieve self-redemption. Rahner does not accept that a subject can be redeemed by Christ taking on the responsibility of our sins. "Can another person really relieve me of a task, or an attitude or a deed before God and oriented to him, of demands which are in fact imposed on me, but which I am not capable of meeting?"<sup>392</sup>

Rahner is concerned that the subject's freedom is undermined if Christ takes on our sins in our place. If we are culpable for our actions, then we cannot expect Christ to bear our sins in a way that lessens our responsibility as we choose to say "Yes" or "No" God in freedom. This does not mean that we attain redemption without God's salvific will.

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<sup>391</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Christian Understanding of Redemption*, *Theological Investigations 21*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988) 249

<sup>392</sup> Karl Rahner, *Reconciliation and Vicarious Representation*, *Theological Investigations 21*, trans. Hugh M. Riley (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988) 265

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If, however, self-redemption means that a man can achieve his fulfilment without God, then any form of self-redemption is foreign to Christian teaching. Christian salvation can only be understood as self-redemption in the sense that a man does not merely receive his salvation in a passive manner but rather realises it with total, and not just partial, freedom.<sup>393</sup>

Self-redemption is made possible through Christ's cross. Christ's obedient death is one of complete freedom. It is because of this death that we are enabled to attain self-redemption. Christ turns his death from a consequence of a sin into a personal act of acceptance. We too can achieve this obedient death into new life through the cross of Christ. In giving ourselves more to God, and forgetting ourselves in the incomprehensible mystery, we in fact move closer to God and to ourselves. Only in giving ourselves away totally in love and faith can our deaths be transformed to new life. In this way, we attain self-redemption precisely through the Christ event.

### **4.3.6 Sacraments and the Cross:**

It is important to highlight that Rahner's exploration of other sacraments reveal an implicit theology of the cross. Rahner elaborates on the clearly relationship between the sacraments and the promise of salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

...we can and indeed we have to say that the world as a whole is redeemed, that the drama of salvation as a whole will reach a positive conclusion, and that God has already overcome the world's sinful rejection through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one. And to this extent of course the individual sacrament encounters the individual person with this eschatological finality and certainty.<sup>394</sup>

All sacraments are intimately connected with the cross of Christ. The person who lives in the hope of the resurrection accepts that we are saved through God's salvific will which is manifested on the cross. Rahner notes Aquinas' meditations on sacraments and the redemptive act of Christ.

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<sup>393</sup> Karl Rahner, *The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation*, *Theological Investigations* 16, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979) 207

<sup>394</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction of the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978) 414

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St. Thomas Aquinas says in the third part of his *Summa Theologica*, where he treats the sacraments, that each sacrament is a commemorative sign (*signum rememorativum*) of the redemptive act of Christ, and efficacious sign here and now of grace, and a prognostic sign of the final redemption.<sup>395</sup>

Rahner does refer to this relationship between the cross and other sacraments besides the Eucharist. These include baptism, where “a person dies into the death of Christ in a sacramental, social and tangible way in time and space.”<sup>396</sup> The sacrament of penance is also significant. Rahner states:

In this sacrament, the event of the cross of Christ, which is God's judgement on sin, enters into our life in a historically tangible way. Because we truly undergo a change of heart in this sacrament and take our place under the cross, we are proclaiming the death of the Lord until He comes again.<sup>397</sup>

It raises a possible question in response of Balthasar's critique of Rahner. It could be possible that Rahner has an implicit theology of the cross in his Sacramentology as all sacraments point to the redemptive act of Christ and the final Kingdom of God.<sup>398</sup>

### **4.4 The Sacred Heart of Jesus**

Rahner's writings on devotion to the Sacred Heart reveal an implicit theology of the cross. He writes that: “Only a lover is able to pronounce the word ‘heart’ with understanding, and only one who is lovingly united to the crucified Lord knows what is meant when the ‘Heart of Jesus’ is spoken of.”<sup>399</sup>

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the most profound mystery of the Easter event. It is Christ's heart ripped open and his blood poured out into the world out of love. Rahner treats the Sacred Heart as crucial to approaching the love Jesus possessed in redeeming humanity. It is a loving obedience that Jesus shows as he faces a hellish death in abandonment.

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<sup>395</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 85

<sup>396</sup> Ibid, 416-417. For further reading, see Karl Rahner, On Christian Dying, *Theological Investigations 7*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 252-254 and more generally Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O' Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1974)

<sup>397</sup> Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1967) 85

<sup>398</sup> For further reading, see Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments* (London: Burns & Oates, 1977)

<sup>399</sup> Karl Rahner, ‘Behold This Heart!’: Preliminaries to a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart, *Theological Investigations 3* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1961) 321

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In the actual economy of salvation of sin and its conquest by the Cross of Christ (where sin was conquered by the Lord by the lovingly obedient bearing of precisely the consequence of sin, namely the distancing of the world from God and death), reparation for the sin of the world (one's own and that of others) consists primarily and essentially in the trusting, obedient and loving acceptance of a share in the fate of the Lord, in a taking upon oneself of the appearance of sin in the world: body, darkness, persecution, distance from God, death.<sup>400</sup>

The Sacred Heart of Jesus reveals his absolute love and obedience to the will of the one he called Abba. This love manifests itself in Jesus' acceptance of his death and experiencing the manifestation of sin in the world; the death itself but also the state of Godforsakenness.

Rahner speaks also of the contemplation of Christ's sufferings. This does not mean some improper, pious imitation of the brutal injuries of Christ or seeking to partake physically in torture, suffering and death. Rather, it is to inform our lives of the suffering Christ faced in opposition to sin out of love for us.<sup>401</sup> It is also important to make clear that the resurrection is to be constituted in these prayers as it is through the risen Christ that Christ's suffering and death are submerged into God's eternal life. The cross and the resurrection are not to be seen in isolation from each other in such devotion.<sup>402</sup>

Contemplation of the sufferings of Christ ...and the most intensive possible making-present to oneself of the suffering and dying Redeemer which is so useful to it, undoubtedly belongs to the most important and indispensable practises of the spiritual life, if this is to develop fully and inform the whole of life.<sup>403</sup>

In this interaction with the Passion of Christ, we are called to remember that the sufferings of Christ were for us. The consequence and manifestation of sin was death, which Christ suffered. This encounter with sin meant being plunged into the darkness of hell; being cut off from the loving Father. Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the Father's salvific will, the evilness of sin is trumped

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<sup>400</sup> Karl Rahner, Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 345

<sup>401</sup> Rahner highlights the importance of the word "heart" for the love that Christ manifests in Karl Rahner, Theological meaning of the Veneration of the Sacred Heart, *Theological Investigations 8*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971) 215-228 and Karl Rahner, Unity-Love-Mystery, *Theological Investigations 8*, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971)229-248

<sup>402</sup> Karl Rahner, Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart, *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1974) 348

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 347

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by the love of God. In this way, we as venerators of the Sacred Heart must remember the loving obedience of the Son towards the Father, even in the agony of abandonment. All suffering as a consequence of sin is engulfed and destroyed by this divine love. In this way, we must detach ourselves from this sinful world and look with hope to the life beyond this which is the incomprehensible mystery of God.

The Sacred Heart is itself a mystery so we can never truly understand its significance. Rahner does make the point that we must turn to the Sacred Heart in times of pain as well as joy as it is the place where we find Jesus who suffered out of love for the Father and despite the darkness of sin.

It is impossible properly to teach devotion to the Sacred Heart. With confidence in the Church and the Spirit, we must try to approach its mystery. We must eventually, in the luminous and in the dark hours of life, try to pray: "Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me."<sup>404</sup>

Balthasar comments that Rahner previously had emphasised this devotion to the Sacred Heart. He laments that Rahner has strayed from it but also suggests that it may have been the potential key to Rahner breaking away from the alleged restraints of Immanuel Kant's philosophy.

Is, then, devotion to the Sacred Heart a "categorical" supplement to a transcendental spirituality? Or does perhaps this "original source of love" mean also the end of this whole Kant philosophy? Do I see in the broken heart of the crucified Christ the love of the triune God- or don't I?<sup>405</sup>

The Sacred Heart of Jesus reveals that Rahner has not been trapped by his supposed philosophical allegiances. Rahner demonstrates his implicit theology of the cross in the loving obedience of Jesus. His death is one of suffering but not despair as sin can never overthrow God's salvific will. There is no dramatic element in Rahner's theology of the cross for this reason, as Jesus' suffering can never take on the importance of our salvation. Jesus' loving acceptance of death makes possible our salvation and redemption. Rahner presents the devotion to the Sacred Heart as the reminder of Jesus' Passion but also the path to Ignatian

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<sup>404</sup> Karl Rahner, *Devotion to the Sacred Heart Today*, *Theological Investigations 23*, translated by Joseph Donceel (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991) 129

<sup>405</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness*, trans. Richard Beckley (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994) 110

indifference. It is not the sin in this world that will dominate us, but the love of God through Jesus' death on the cross that liberates us.

#### **4.5 Chapter Conclusion:**

This chapter has demonstrated Rahner's implicit theology of the cross. Through the exploration of three themes in Rahner's work, it is clear that not only has Rahner presented an explicit theology of the cross, he undeniably reveals an implicit theology of the cross as well. Rahner's theology of death, his theology of Eucharist and his theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus are three themes that have demonstrated this.

An implicit theology of the cross is revealed in Rahner's writings on death. Christ's death turns the manifestation and consequence of sin into a personal act. Rahner's theology of death highlights the reality of sin in the world, despite Balthasar's claims to the contrary. The culmination of our lives is in our deaths, where we face the choice of finally accepting or rejecting God's loving invitation of salvation. But as Phan points out, there is a definite exploration of the punitive aspect that is present in our deaths.

This penal character is seen in what Rahner calls the "hiddenness of death" (*die Verhülltheit des Todes*), that is, the ineluctable and unresolvable uncertainty as to whether the goal reached in death will be for the dying individual fullness of life or sheer emptiness. This hiddenness is the result of not only original sin but also personal sins- a fact, in Rahner's judgement, not sufficiently adverted to traditional eschatology.<sup>406</sup>

Rahner's theology of death addresses the reality of sin and this approach is critical to understanding how Christ faced the same expiration of life that sinful humanity faces. Rahner's theology of death only finds meaning in light of the fate suffered by Christ on the cross. "Ultimately, the full meaning of human death can be seen, according to Rahner, only in the light of Jesus' death."<sup>407</sup>

Rahner demonstrates the uniqueness of Christ's death. His death is the victorious fulfilment of God's salvific will which is made irrevocable on the

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<sup>406</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Eschatology*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary Hines (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 181

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*, 182

## **Chapter 4- Rahner's Implicit Theology of the Cross**

cross. Ignatius reminds us that we are called to follow the path of the Crucified, not in the circumstance of his death but in the inner direction of his life. This was a life that was given totally to God, and found final fulfilment in the cross and resurrection. By following the path of Ignatian asceticism and renunciation, we can transcend this sinful, finite world and find our true destiny, which is in God's eternal life.

Rahner's approach to martyrdom and its relationship to Ignatian spirituality are significant and Balthasar's criticisms in *Cordula* are not as fair as first speculated. Rahner stresses that we can still be true witnesses to our faith, by following the way of absolute faith in God, and being indifferent to the sins of the world as these are finite and God's love is not.

Endean's citing of the similarity between Jesuit martyr Alfred Delp and Rahner is telling. Delp's letters reveal his sincere faith in trust in God, that despite his obvious sufferings and impending death, he is prepared to die for his faith. This manifests itself in the calm Ignatian indifference that Delp demonstrates and that Rahner writes extensively on. In this way, perhaps Rahner would be a useful resource in complementing Balthasar's approach to martyrdom.

Rahner's theology of Eucharist reveals an implicit theology of the cross. Rahner draws upon Aquinas' writings on the sacraments as each being an efficacious sign of grace and a sign of Christ's redemptive act. The Eucharist is the summit of the sacraments and a participation in the death of Jesus. It is both a bloody and unbloody expiatory sacrifice where Christ surrenders himself to the will of the Father. Rahner's understanding of sacrifice is hampered by a misreading of Anselm's satisfaction theory as he understands the theory as promoting an angry, vengeful God who is appeased by a bloody victim. Also, his use of the Pauline term *hyper hēmōn* highlights that biblical exegesis is a limitation of Rahner's theology. Balthasar is right to cite this error on the part of Rahner as *hyper hēmōn* is in fact a pre-Pauline term and this raises questions over how precisely Christ's death can truly be for us if it is not Christ's representation of us.

## ***Chapter 4- Rahner's Implicit Theology of the Cross***

It can be argued that Rahner's understanding of vicarious representation is also constrained by his theology of freedom. For Rahner, Christ taking on our sins in a vicarious, transactional way implies that we are not truly free subjects in the world and that we cannot truly be redeemed through the actions of another. Instead, Rahner argues that we can attain self-redemption through Christ's cross as it is Christ's loving obedience that transforms death from sinful perdition to possible salvation in God.

Other sacraments such as penance and baptism reveal an implicit theology of the cross but due to the constraints of this work, they cannot be explored in as much depth as the Eucharist.

The final theme that presents Rahner's implicit theology of the cross is Rahner's writings on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This profound Easter mystery highlights the Ignatian spirituality at the heart of Rahner's theology. We are called to meditate on the Passion of Christ as his heart is opened to the world in love and the blood that flows from it is for us. These sufferings are caused by Christ's experience of sin, not by being punished by God for our sin. These sufferings are not the final destiny of our lives, as the resurrection transforms our sinful lives into salvation in the ineffable mystery of God.

Rather, the Sacred Heart is the reminder of the loving obedience Christ showed to the Father even to death on the cross. It is not some masochistic worship of suffering but a representation of the love that overcomes all sin. Rahner writes that it is to the Sacred Heart we must turn to during the suffering in our lives as it Jesus' heart that reveals the love that was manifested on the cross. It was Christ's love for us that makes the suffering so profound, and it is God's eternal salvific will that reveals the depths of love illuminated at Calvary.

## **Chapter 5- Evaluation of Rahner's Theology of the Cross**

### 5.1 Introduction

### 5.2 Criteria for Rahner's Theology of the Cross

5.2.1 A theology of the cross must address the sinful nature of humanity

5.2.2 Jesus' death on the cross cannot be separated from his obedience to the Father's will

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5.2.4 Jesus' death on the cross must be addressed within the context of his life and ministry

5.2.5 The place of representative language used to discuss the events of the cross

5.2.6 A theology of the cross must address the problem of suffering

### 5.3 Summary

### 5.4 Conclusion

### **5.1 Introduction:**

This final chapter comprises an evaluation of Rahner's theology of the cross. Firstly, the criteria for a theology of the cross developed in Chapter 1 will be revisited. These criteria have been derived from an exploration of theologies of the cross offered by five major contemporary theologians; Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jürgen Moltmann and Jon Sobrino. Following this, the established criteria will be applied to Rahner's theology. Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated Rahner's explicit and implicit theology of the cross respectively and will be evaluated by these criteria. The claim of this evaluation is that despite the criticisms offered predominantly by Balthasar and to a lesser extent Moltmann, Rahner does indeed have a theology of the cross. A careful reading of Rahner demonstrates that he has been profoundly influenced by Ignatian spirituality. This influence translates into Rahner's theology, revealing both implicitly and explicitly a theology of the cross. This is a response to Balthasar's claim that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross (see Chapter 2), and in applying the criteria developed from Chapter 1, clear evidence of Rahner's theology of the cross will be demonstrated.

### **5.2 Criteria for Rahner's Theology of the Cross**

#### **5.2.1 A theology of the cross must address the sinful nature of humanity.**

As has been established in Chapter 1 (p33-34), a theology of the cross must include the reality of sin in the world and how it affects humanity. The human condition is blighted by this destructive nature of sin. By sinning, we turn away from God and deny ourselves the gift of God's grace. It is through sin that we lock ourselves out of the eternal life of salvation that God offers us. It is through the salvific will of God which is revealed in Jesus' death on the cross that we can be saved. The cross is the revelation of the malignant reality of sin and the still greater love of God that overcomes it.

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One of Balthasar's central criticisms is that Rahner downplays the significance of sin in favour of a more optimistic perspective; that all of sin and suffering (including the cross) can be subsumed into the salvific will of God in the Incarnation. This critique is inaccurate, and it has been consistently demonstrated that Rahner treats sin seriously, with particular reference to his theology of the cross. Rahner does not underplay sin in his theology of the cross. The cross is the revelation of the evil of sin but also of the still greater love and mercy of God. Sin is manifested on the cross but it is ultimately destroyed by God's grace.

### Explicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner's approach to sin is heavily influenced by his Ignatian background. Rahner's exploration of sin in the First Week of *Spiritual Exercises* demonstrates this.

Rahner consistently explores the reality of sin in our world. Ignatian spirituality is a call to place oneself in the world as a follower of Christ that trusts totally in God. Faith in God despite the sin of the world calls for an indifference to this sin. The ultimate mystery of God is always at the forefront of our desires and by placing our lives totally in service to God, we can calmly face sin in the knowledge that it will never defeat God's love. Through this indifference to sin in the world, we place our faith in the incomprehensible mystery of God which is beyond and above the sinful nature of this world. By trusting totally in God, sin does not overcome us. On the cross, Christ's faith and obedience in God reveals that we can be saved despite sin.

The element of tragedy found in Balthasar's theology of the cross is revealed to be unnecessary to Rahner's theology of the cross. Rather, Rahner's focus is on the salvific will of God to which Jesus was obedient, which ultimately defeats sin on the cross. There is no need for such tragedy as Christ's faith never wavers and the only tragedy that could have occurred in Rahner's theology of the cross would be if there was no resurrection after the death on the cross.

Rahner consistently stresses the grave reality of sin, in contrast to any notion that he allows sin to be absorbed serenely into the salvific will of God. Rahner's

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approach to sin has been explored throughout Chapter 3, particularly in relation to the First Week (p88-94) and the Third Week (102-110) of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The cross is following Christ into the darkness of sin. It is a stark reminder of the hellish reality of existing in isolation from God. Christ's endurance of abandonment and suffering reveal this, in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary.

Rahner argues that venial sins are of great significance. These moments in our lives are the decisions where we turn away from God. They are not as destructive as mortal sins, but mark us as cutting ourselves off from God, seeking to give this finite, sinful world an infinite value. It is worth highlighting that Rahner includes these venial sins along with Original Sin in his exploration of the sinful nature of humanity. It highlights the destructive nature of sin and its potential catastrophic consequences for the person who refuses God's salvific will.

Rahner stresses that God does not suffer sin in the manner that we do as He is beyond such categorical experience. Rather, Rahner's theology of the cross illustrates that sin affects a "terrible paroxysm" in God but it is God's ineffable love that overcomes and eternally defeats the annihilating nature of sin. (Chapter 3 p109-110)

The cross is the revelation of sin. Christ who is sinless, experiences sin in a more complete way than sinful humanity could have. Sin is absolutely foreign to Christ and in experiencing sin, he faces the true reality of hell and being separated from God. Rahner does not take Balthasar's approach of stressing the "bitter sufferings" of Christ as he does not want to imply that there is some salvific value in them. Also, he does not want to present Christ's death as a final relief from such sufferings. Rahner explores Christ's physical suffering in great depth (Chapter 3 p104-107) but does not want to take away from the more profound spiritual suffering of Christ; separation from God. Christ experiences being forsaken by the Father on the cross and experiences the hell of this abandonment. While Christ faces this torment in complete obedience to the Father, Rahner does not undermine the fact that Christ did experience hell and

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the reality of sinners who have cut themselves off ultimately from God. Christ's unique closeness to the Father makes his experience of hell more profound than anything any other human could have endured. (Chapter 3 p93-94 & p103-107)

### Implicit Theology of the cross:

Rahner's implicit theology of the cross demonstrates that sin has penalised humanity through death. (Chapter 4 p132-140) Rahner faces criticism that his approach to death is too optimistic and that he presents death as the culmination of one's life in freedom. Some of this criticism is justified but in relation to Rahner's theology of the cross, sin is implicitly central. (Chapter 4 p136-140) Death is the manifestation and consequence of sin. Humanity is penalised for its sinfulness in the hiddenness of death. That is, at the moment of our deaths, we do not know if we have attained salvation or perdition. Christ experiences the fate of the sinner and could only have done so by dying into this hiddenness of the sinner's death. No other death could have achieved this for humanity. Christ is sinless and can give himself totally in faith to God and in love for us.

The sacrament of Eucharist reveals an implicit theology of the cross, but other sacraments, such as Penance and Baptism could also demonstrate such a theology in Rahner's work. (Chapter 4 p159-160) Rahner addresses the reality of sin here, particularly in the case of the sacrament of Penance, where the cross of Christ enters our lives, enabling us to proclaim that the risen Lord has made possible our salvation through His death and resurrection.

Rahner highlights the infinite love God has for humanity and that through Jesus' obedient death, the cross reveals God's salvific will which overcomes sin. Rahner's position is not as extreme as that of Schillebeeckx who argues that we are saved despite the cross. Rahner's theology of the cross stresses that sin is not the final word for humanity. Sin is revealed in all its horror on the cross, but it is utterly blotted out by God's love, which makes possible our salvation. Jesus' death on the cross makes possible our salvation through God's salvific will.

Implicitly and explicitly, Rahner's theology of the cross consistently addresses the nature of sinful humanity.

**5.2.2 Jesus' death on the cross cannot be separated from his  
obedience to the Father's will**

A theology of the cross must include Christ's obedience to the will of the Father. Rahner's theology of the cross places critical importance upon Jesus' faithful obedience to the will of the Father. Christ demonstrated this acceptance throughout his life and even unto the culmination of his life, which was death on the cross.

Explicit Theology of the Cross:

The Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* (Chapter 3 p95-101) is a call to imitate the life of Christ, with obedience to God being fundamentally important to this. Rahner stresses that while we cannot imitate the circumstances of Jesus' life, we can follow the inner orientation of his life and ministry, which was directed towards God. This is done by accepting the cross in our lives. We are called to follow the path of the Crucified Lord. Christ is not tempted by the material, finite nature of this world. Rather, he accepts the will of the Father as his sole direction in life. This is a call for us also to not place our faith in this sinful world but in the incomprehensible mystery of God that is beyond the world. This is a call to accept the foolishness of this sinful world with calm indifference. By detaching ourselves from this world, we can give ourselves to God as Jesus did in his life and on the cross.

This obedience means accepting the suffering of humanity but not falling into despair because of it. Christ accepts the chalice put before him in the Agony in the Garden (Chapter 3 p103-104) and forgets himself; putting the will of the Father before his own fears and temptations. It is through this acceptance that Jesus can face the weakness, abandonment and hell of Good Friday. (Chapter 3 p104-111) Even on the cross, Christ accepts his life and death and commends himself to the Father. Rahner highlights Christ's obedience to God on Holy Saturday. He submits to the emptiness of the dead on Holy Saturday in complete trust in the will of the Father. While Rahner's approach is not as unique as Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, Rahner does not neglect the day Christ

descended into the realm of the dead. Christ's obedience to the Father even in complete Godforsakenness is central to Rahner's position.

Implicit Theology of the Cross:

The obedience of Christ to the Father's will is an acceptance of death. By facing this consequence of sin, Christ does what we cannot and gives himself in total acceptance to the one he calls Abba. This acceptance transforms death into a personal act. (Chapter 4 p132-140) As Christ is without sin, he is not crippled by the sinful nature of humanity and does not turn away selfishly from God. His obedient death is for us, but it is still the death of a sinner. Christ's obedience is such that he can experience the final despair of dying in isolation from God. The faith Christ shows is beyond anything humanity could have achieved as Christ gives himself out of an acceptance that the Father's will is greater than anything we possess. (Chapter 4 p136-140)

This obedience of Christ is also highlighted in Rahner's approach to martyrdom. (Chapter 4 p144-148) To be an authentic witness to the faith is to be prepared to lay your life down for those you love, as Christ demonstrates in his acceptance of the Father's will. The influence of Ignatian indifference on Rahner's theology is seen here. The patient and calm facing of struggles in life is what Ignatius calls for. In accepting the sin and sorrow of the world, we place our trust in the unfathomable mystery of God. We realise that we are to pick up our cross and follow the way of Christ. In accepting the foolishness of the cross, we overcome the foolishness of the world. It is Christ's example of calm obedience that leads us on the path of salvation. It is through the Risen Christ we find that our obedience in God is met with grace and mercy.

Without Christ's obedience, the event of Good Friday would be an innocent man murdered against his will. In following the Crucified Lord and taking up our cross, we are called to follow the spirit of calm indifference to sin and place our faith in God. By following the example set by Christ, we can face the suffering and sorrows of this reality and hope in faith that God's love is greater than this sinful world.

**5.2.3 The cross cannot be adequately addressed without linking it to the resurrection.**

A theology of the cross cannot neglect the fundamental connection between Christ's death and resurrection. Without the resurrection, Jesus' life and ministry which culminates in his death on the cross cannot be acknowledged as being victorious. Through God's salvific will, the resurrection transforms the death of a sinner into new and eternal life in God. Without Jesus' death on the cross, resurrection is illusory idealism. We cannot be raised to new life unless we endure death. It is only through Jesus' unique death that we may be brought into this divine life.

Explicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner consistently stresses the unity of Christ's death on the cross and Christ's resurrection. These two events share an intrinsic relationship and cannot be seen in isolation from each other. (Chapter 3 p113-114) Rahner shares the perspective of Sobrino and Moltmann, that the cross simply cannot be understood or interpreted unless viewed in unison with the resurrection. Jesus is rescued from the emptiness of death and brought to new life in God, a new closeness that cannot be achieved on this side of death.

Jesus' life is made definitive and valid through the resurrection. For Rahner, the manner in which Jesus dies should not be recognised as more significant than the fact that he died. (Chapter 3 p116-120) The cross on its own cannot save us. God's salvific will transforms death on the cross into new life. The resurrection is that which makes Christ's life victorious. The ultimate cause of our salvation is not the cross itself. The cross is the revelation of God's salvific love, which makes possible our entering into the eternal life of God. Rahner's claim is that Christ's death must be explored in light of the resurrection, as it is this victorious fulfilment of Christ's life that reveals God's saving will. (Chapter 3 p111-114)

Rahner proposes that the Risen Lord is the source of the Holy Spirit in our world. The living water of the Spirit flows from the side of Jesus who has been crucified and exalted. (Chapter 3 p114-115) The blood of the Redeemer flows

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out with this water, which is shed in separation from the Father yet in absolute obedience to the Father's will. The Spirit dwells in the hearts of humanity and is made irrevocable and terminal through Jesus' exhalation into the life of God.

Despite some reasonable criticisms aimed at Rahner's lack of a pneumatological element in his Christology, the cross offers a resource. Through God's salvific will, the death and resurrection of Jesus make possible the Spirit entering into our hearts, from its source which is the pierced side of Christ on the cross.

### **Implicit Theology of the Cross:**

Rahner's theology never wavers from the intrinsic unity of death and resurrection. Rahner's theology of death only finds meaning when applied to Christ's death. (Chapter 4 p136-140) Death is the manifestation and consequence of sin and it is Christ's sinful death that is transformed into new and eternal life.

Rahner presents death as the definitive and final validation of what meaning our lives have. (Chapter 4 p132-133) But because of the penalty of sin, we cannot know what our destiny is at the moment of our death. Through venial sins and Original Sin, the decisions we make in our lives can be against God. We as sinners cannot save ourselves from this sinful disposition. Christ's death demonstrates how we can approach our own death. Christ's death is unique because it is out of absolute obedience to the Father's will and is carried out in love for us. Such an acceptance of death in faith to God is what we are called to follow as Christians. We follow Christ's example as we believe that God has raised Christ from death and that the resurrection is the irrevocable manifestation of God's salvific will. (Chapter 4 p132-140) Christ's death is victorious as it is inextricably linked to resurrection into God's eternal life.

In Rahner's earlier works, he was criticised for developing pan cosmic speculations on Christ's place in the world after death. John W. Williams argued that Rahner's speculations demonstrated an unscriptural and untraditional approach to the death of Jesus. (Chapter 3 p125-126 and Chapter 4 p132-136) Such philosophical speculation has also been one of the chief concerns of Balthasar about Rahner's work. (Chapter 2 p58-61) But as Peter C. Phan points

out, Rahner's later work moves away from such notions to Gilbert Greshake's hypothesis of death into resurrection. (Chapter 4 p134) This highlights Rahner's argument that Jesus' death and resurrection must be treated as two aspects of the one event of salvation.

Rahner's theology of the cross argues that death can only find meaning in light of Jesus' death. This is because the death of Jesus is a death into resurrection, and is both the cause and effect of the God's grace in the world.

#### **5.2.4 Jesus' death on the cross must be understood within the context of his life and ministry.**

A theology of the cross must recognise the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus in relation to Jesus' death. Jesus models absolute obedience to the Father's will throughout his life and preaches the love and mercy of God's reign in his ministry. Christ's life and mission of loving obedience and faith are crucial to our realisation of the cross as the culmination of Jesus' life. The revelation of God's salvific will must be understood within the totality of Jesus' life. The death on the cross is both the nadir and the zenith of this life and mission.

##### Explicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner recognises that it is both the life and death of Jesus that have soteriological significance. (Chapter 3 p116-120) Jesus's life is one of humility and obedience to God, which is spent professing the Kingdom of God that is to come. Rahner places great significance on the detachment from material goods that Jesus demonstrates in favour of placing total trust in God through his life and ministry. Rahner's approach to this is most clearly seen in the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* (Chapter 3 p95-101)

Rahner's treatment of this criterion is heavily influenced by his Ignatian background. We are called to follow Jesus' example, not by living the circumstances of his life but by following the inner direction of his life, which was intimately towards God. We too are called to follow the example of Jesus. We cannot imitate the circumstances of Jesus' life but we can model ourselves

on Jesus' total obedience to the will of the Father and the manner in which Jesus accepts his death.

Rahner explores how Jesus' life is coloured by his acceptance of sin in the world and that the life we each are gifted must be directed towards God. (Chapter 3 p88-93 & 95-101) Our lives as followers of Christ are to be orientated towards the cross of the Lord, which reveals God's saving love. Christ faces agony and abandonment in his life because of the sin of the world but never renounces his commitment to the chalice set before him. Even in suffering death on the cross, Christ is faithful to his Father's will. (Chapter 3 p103-110) Christ's life and ministry are underlined by this obedience to God, which culminates in his death on the cross. In following the Crucified Lord, we live our lives as Jesus did, forgetting our selfishness and sinfulness and trusting totally in God.

Implicit Theology of the Cross:

Jesus' life and ministry are an anticipation of death. For Rahner, it is only in death does our life achieve its final and irrevocable validity. (Chapter 4 p132-140) Jesus' life is made eternal in God's life through his death and resurrection. Christ's death is redemptive but his life and ministry are constituents of this death. Rahner's approach is that we are "beings unto death" and that our entire life is a part of our death. Christ's death also shares this characteristic as he died the death of the human. Christ's human existence, like ours is one of complete freedom. Jesus' obedient life culminates in his obedient death, where he accepts death as the final definitive moment and in freedom turns into a personal act.

Without emphasis on this obedient life and ministry, we could not know the value of Christ's death. The manner in which Jesus lived his life; accepting outcasts, detaching himself from material vices and preaching of a Kingdom free from social distinction or marginalisation provide a model for how we are to live our own lives. Jesus' refusal to accept violence as a solution to sin demonstrates that Jesus is faithful to the consequences of his mission, even to death on the cross.

Rahner argues that the totality of Christ's life is significant, criticising Anselm for neglecting aspects of Christ's life other than his Passion and death. (Chapter

4 p140-144) There must be merit recognised in Christ's life and ministry as they constitute aspects of the revelation of God's love and salvific will. Christ could only have died in solidarity with us if he lived in solidarity with us. Christ's life attains definitive and ultimate meaning through death and new life in God. This death could not have received its true meaning unless it was the result of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Rahner's work on martyrdom also highlights the significance of Jesus' life and ministry in his theology of the cross. (Chapter 4 p144-148) Christ's life is an acceptance of daily dying and death as the realisation of our lives. This relates back to Ignatian indifference; the calm and patient disposition of the person who trusts totally in the incomprehensible mystery of God and the rejection of sin as our final reality. The martyr follows this detachment from the finite reality of the world and gives themselves totally to Holy mystery. This does not mean that the martyr's death is equivalent to Christ's death as we cannot follow the circumstances of Jesus' death. Rather, the martyr's death is made possible through the death of Christ, which has revealed God's eternal triumph over sin and death. In this way, the martyr's life is made ultimately victorious as it is offered in total freedom to God. This death is only made possible through the cross of Christ which reveals God's salvific will.

### **5.2.5 The place of representative language used to discuss the event of the cross**

A theology of the cross must address the fact that Jesus dies "for us". The reality of our faith is that Jesus of Nazareth is crucified and is raised from the dead. God's will for humanity to be saved is made irrevocable in the world on the cross. Though there are varying interpretations as to whether Christ is our substitute or vicarious representative, a theology of the cross must deal with the reality that the Christ event is the moment where our salvation becomes possible.

Throughout this work, it has been consistently argued that Rahner does indeed have a theology of the cross. However, that is not to say that Rahner's theology

of the cross is without problems. While Rahner does address this criterion, his *theologia crucis* is hampered by his refusal to integrate vicarious representation into his theology.

Explicit Theology of the Cross:

Eamonn Mulcahy argues that Rahner's theory of the cross is demonstrative. (Chapter 3 p116) It does not produce an effect such as satisfaction but actually reveals something. It points to God's salvific will which is manifested on the cross. (Chapter 3 p116-120)

Rahner does not downplay Christ's soteriological role in relation to the cross. Rahner proposes that the Christ-event possesses a quasi-sacramental causality. This means that on the cross, Jesus becomes the sacrament of God's salvific will. A sacrament is the effect and cause of what is being signified; so in relation to the cross, we can owe our salvation to both God's salvific will and Christ's death for us, as Wong points out. (Chapter 3 p116-120) Rahner does not propose that the cross has saved us because Christ has represented us vicariously and somehow God's mind has been changed. We are not reconciled to an angry God because Jesus died on the cross. Rather, because of God's salvific will, Jesus accepts death on the cross. (Chapter 3 p116-120)

Rahner stresses that Jesus dies in solidarity with us. He *takes away* the sins of the world but does not *take on* the sin of the world. (Chapter 3 p107-109) Christ experiences the death of the sinner despite being free of sin. His life and death serve as a model for Christians. However, Rahner does not propose that Christ's death is the same as ours. Christ was the only person whose death could redeem us through God's salvific will. Rahner stresses that no other death could be truly for us; Jesus died, wishing selflessly for our salvation, free of the pride and egotism of the sinner. No other person had such an intimate and radical orientation towards God, and no other person could have died such a death. (Chapter 4 p132-136)

Rahner never presents Jesus as acting as a vicarious substitute for us, the sinless one that bears our sins. Rather, by turning death into a personal act in

freedom and in trust in God, Jesus' represents the manner in which we too can attain eternal life in God.

Implicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner argues that the Eucharist is the celebration of Christ's sacrifice for us but also an invitation to share in the Passion and death of Jesus. (Chapter 4 p148-151) In Eucharist, we are immersed in a death, that through God's salvific will and Christ's sacrificial disposition, we have been eternally redeemed. This immersion is a partaking in the orientation of Jesus' life towards God. The Ignatian calling to be indifferent to the sin of the world and place our trust in God is realised in the Eucharist. In this way, we take up our cross and follow the Crucified Lord. But Rahner's theology of the cross is limited by his rejection of Christ vicariously representing us, and raises the question; how then can Jesus institute the Eucharistic words of his body and blood being given up "for us". (Chapter 4 p156-157)

Rahner bases much of his refusal to accept vicarious representation on misconceived fears over what western satisfaction theories suggest about the Christ-event. (Chapter 4 p140-144 & 157-158) Rahner fears that such interpretations lead to the notion of an angry, vengeful God whose "mind is changed" by the bloody sacrifice of a Son who takes on our sins. Rahner is so keen to protect the formula of Chalcedon that he sees as deficiently catered for in Anselm's satisfaction theory. But as has been demonstrated, Anselm is keen to stress that it is a sinful world that is reconciled to God, and not vice versa. (Chapter 4 p140-144)

Rahner's limitations in biblical exegesis contribute to this also, as he does not believe Christians can interpret the "*pro nobis*" as genuinely meaning to take on our sins in some kind of transactional manner. Balthasar's critique of Rahner's use of the term highlights Rahner's scriptural limitations (Chapter4 p156-157) which affect Rahner's theology of the cross in relation to this criterion.

Language such as "vicarious representation" and "vicarious expiation" is problematic for Rahner, in relation to this theology of freedom. Rahner is concerned that the subject's freedom is undermined if Christ takes on our sins

in our place. If we are culpable for our actions, then we cannot expect Christ to bear our sins in a way that lessens our responsibility as we choose to say "Yes" or "No" God in freedom. (Chapter 4 p158-159) If we are truly responsible for our actions, then we cannot expect Christ to bear our sins in a way that lessens our responsibility as we choose to say "Yes" or "No" God in freedom.

This particular position is consistent with Rahner's overall theology of the cross. The cross does not effect a change such as satisfaction or expiation. We can be redeemed through the cross of Christ but the cross in itself is not the cause of our redemption and salvation; rather it is the consequence of God's salvific will. It is not a case that Jesus had to take on our sins and change an angry God's mind. Rather, because of God's salvific will, salvation is made possible through Jesus' death in solidarity with sinful humanity.

#### **5.2.6 A theology of the cross must address the problem of suffering**

The last century has been unquestionably stained by enormous suffering. This has included two World Wars, the systematic genocide of the Holocaust and nuclear armament. This has raised the question as to how we can believe in a God that permits such suffering in the world. In light of this, it is now more essential than ever that a theology of the cross addresses the problem of suffering.

While Rahner, Balthasar and Moltmann may disagree on the nature of God's suffering, they can agree that Jesus does suffer death and abandonment at Calvary. (Chapter 2 p66-75) On the cross, the Word incarnate experiences the suffering of sinful humanity. Through God's salvific will, Christ surrenders himself in love for us and suffers the futility and weakness of the sinner's death. It is only on the cross that we can see the revelation of sin and the still greater love of God, which conquers all suffering.

Explicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner explores not only the suffering of Christ on the cross, but also how we as Christians must turn to the cross in the sufferings experienced in our lives. (Chapter 3 p95-102) Taking up the cross is to suffer the poverty and foolishness of this finite reality. Jesus' own life and ministry were characterised by a renunciation of material wealth and placing of faith in God. "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" (Matthew 16:24). Rahner stress that to follow the Crucified Lord is to take the path of poverty, toil and scandal. (Chapter 3 p97) Suffering is not the constituent of what makes one a true follower of Christ. It is faith in God, despite suffering in our lives that makes possible our salvation. This is revealed on the cross of Christ, which is the culmination of Jesus' life. (Chapter 3 p101)

Rahner does not by any means undermine the suffering of the Crucified Christ in his theology. Rahner's profound Ignatian spirituality greatly influences his approach to suffering and its place in the world. The follower of Ignatius should not treat suffering as the basis of existence in our world. This finite reality is characterised by the poisonous existence of sin, which is revealed on the cross. We can die with faith in God and not allow sin to be our definitive characteristic. This is made possible by following Christ's journey; his life, death and his acceptance and obedience to the will of the Father.

Rahner's exploration of the Passion of the Christ in the Third Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* demonstrates his commitment to the reality of Christ's suffering. (Chapter 3 p102-111) Rahner explores the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ suffers the dread of what lies before him. He experiences the nature of sin and because he is sinless, does not retaliate in violence and hatred. He identifies in love with those who hate him, and suffers the reality of sin in the world. (Chapter 3 p103-107)

On the cross, Christ suffers death as a consequence of sin, despite being sinless. He experiences the intense physical suffering of one who is brutally, tortured and murdered. But, more significantly, he experiences the spiritual suffering of

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being abandoned by God and experiencing the fate of the sinner. (Chapter 3 p103-110) Rahner stresses that this suffering is not "bitter", in that Jesus resents or hates God for allowing him to be crucified. Neither is Jesus' death a relief from his physical suffering. Christ's acceptance of suffering and death is a reflection of his unique closeness to God and his obedience to the Father's will. (Chapter 3 p107)

On the broader question of why do we suffer, Rahner's intense Ignatian faith is revealed. (Chapter 3 p108) Jesus faced the uncertainty of death as we do because he was fully human. Yet, he placed absolute trust in the incomprehensible mystery of God. We cannot ever know the wisdom of God as it is so distinctly other to us. Like Jesus who died on the cross, we can only put our faith in the abyss of God's mystery. We suffer because God is God, and we are simply unable to explore or come to any conclusion greater than that. By giving ourselves to God totally as Christ did, we can accept our limitations as humans and believe that God's power and wisdom is greater than ours will ever be. (Chapter 3 p108)

### Implicit Theology of the Cross:

Rahner reflects on suffering consistently in his implicit theology of the cross. His reflections on our death and Christ's death highlight that death is suffered as a consequence of sin. It is Christ's death on the cross that reveals God's salvific love which overcomes such sin and suffering. (Chapter 4 p132-140) Rahner's strong Ignatian influence is seen here as well, particularly in the way that the martyr bears witness to Christ by laying down his or her life. (Chapter 4 p144-148) Rahner also demonstrates the significance of the Eucharist as our participation in the suffering and death of the Crucified Lord. (Chapter 4 p148-152) Finally, Rahner's meditations on the Sacred Heart reveal his contemplation on sufferings of Christ as representative of the depths of his love for us. (Chapter 4 p160-163)

Rahner critiques Anselm for implying that death is not the pivotal constituent of our redemption. (Chapter 4 p140-144) For Rahner, it is *that* Jesus died, and *not* how he died that is most important. Jesus' acceptance of death means that

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despite his sufferings, his trust in God does not waver. He accepts the will of the Father and transforms death into the final, irrevocable validation before God. This voluntary acceptance of death reflects Rahner's Ignatian background. (Chapter 4 p136-137) Rahner argues that we are beings-unto-death and each day is a death. (Chapter 4 p132) By maintaining a cool indifference to the finite reality of this world, we are enabled to direct our orientation totally towards God, as Christ modelled for us. Anticipating and accepting our death means that we can live our lives in freedom as we do not incarcerate ourselves in finite reality, away from God. This renunciation of our sinful lives means that we can take up our cross and follow the path of the Crucified Lord. (Chapter 4 p136-140)

Martyrdom is the most radical example of self-surrendering love and faith in God that we can demonstrate. The freedom to be able to give oneself away highlights a truly Ignatian spirituality; forgetting our sinful selves and falling into the mystery of God in absolute faith. (Chapter 4 p146-148) Rahner's theology of martyrdom highlights a principle of his theology of the cross; we should never focus on suffering, but rather place our faith in God whose grace overcomes it. Alfred Delp's martyrdom and his approach to accepting death signify the strong Ignatian element that is also found in Rahner's work. Those who accuse Rahner of underplaying the problem of suffering should find Rahner's Ignatian spirituality a useful resource in how Rahner demonstrates faith despite suffering. (Chapter 4 p144-148)

Rahner stresses that the Eucharist is an opportunity to enter into the Passion of the Lord. (Chapter 4 p148-151) The sacrament offers us the grace to enter into a voluntary acceptance of suffering in self-surrendering love, as Christ did. By partaking in the Eucharist, we become more attuned to Christ's suffering. In receiving Christ in the Eucharist, we call to mind his death and we are called to accept our own deaths. It is only through Christ's death that we accept his death and his cross which is exalted by God in the resurrection. (Chapter 4 p149-151)

The Eucharist also nourishes us spiritually and gives us the grace to face the suffering experienced in our lives. (Chapter 4 p151-152) In receiving Christ, we

receive his life as his death is the culmination of his life. Rahner stresses that the Eucharist should call us to love Jesus in his crucifixion and to prepare ourselves for the readiness and faith to follow God's will in our lives, even in our sufferings. (Chapter 4 p152)

Rahner's writings on the Sacred Heart signify Rahner's contemplation of Jesus who suffered out of love. (Chapter 4 p160-163) The Sacred Heart reveals both Christ's love and also his obedience to the Father's will, even in the face of suffering, death and abandonment. These contemplations on sufferings are not some sadistic partaking in suffering but are an effort to realise the depths of God's love for us. This interaction with Christ's suffering serves to remind us that the only answer to suffering in the world is that God is God. The mystery of the Sacred Heart will always be beyond us, as are the depths of the love of the Word for us. (Chapter 4 p161)

We must call to mind Rahner's own incredibly optimistic remarks about suffering and humanity. (Chapter 2 p73) Rahner's entire approach to suffering in his theology of the cross is not based on apathy or ignorance of suffering in the world. Rather, Rahner lives the profoundly Ignatian faith he writes about; as Christ demonstrated on the cross, we must try to trust totally in God's love and salvific will which is always greater than the reality of suffering.

### **5.3 Summary:**

Rahner's theology of the cross examines the reality of sin and its dangers for humanity. Christ's obedience to the Father's will and his acceptance of death reach their culmination on the cross. The cross is the revelation of sin but also of God's salvific will which conquers death and sin forever.

Rahner's theology of the cross stresses Christ's obedience to the Father's will, which is manifested in Jesus' acceptance of weakness, death and abandonment. In total freedom, he trusts in the Father despite the agony of his cross. We are called to imitate this inner direction of Christ's life; to orientate ourselves

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towards God in complete self-surrender and to place our faith in God's incomprehensible mystery.

Rahner consistently affirms that Christ's death on the cross can only be understood through the prism of the resurrection. Christ's freely accepted death is glorified through God's salvific will. Without the resurrection, we could not be saved as Christ's exhalation into God's life makes possible our own salvation.

Rahner highlights that Jesus' life reaches both its nadir and apex on the cross. Rahner's theology of the cross is influenced by his theology of death. In death we are made finally and ultimately valid before God. Jesus' life and ministry are made irrevocably final and definitive in his death. In living a life of obedience and acceptance of death, our deaths too can be transformed into new life in God.

Rahner's theology of the cross is limited by his refusal to acknowledge Christ's vicarious representation of us sinners. Rahner has been criticised for missing the context of Anselm's satisfaction theory, as Rahner argues that Anselm presents an angry God who needs to be reconciled to God. As has been cited, this is not the case. Rahner has wrongly interpreted Anselm as promoting the idea that God demanded satisfaction from humanity for sin, rather than God willing humanity to be reconciled to Him. Rahner's theology of the cross must face Balthasar's criticism, that it is difficult to understand how precisely Jesus' death can be for us if he does not take our place. A possible answer is Rahner's argument that no other death could be for us in such profound love, but it is unclear as to how satisfactory an answer one may find this.

Rahner's theology of the cross does address the problem of suffering. It is arguably a snapshot of Rahner's own profound Ignatian faith. Christ does suffer, both physically and spiritually on the cross. He is obviously tortured and murdered, but he also experienced the reality of the sinner; abandonment from the Father. Yet, the suffering is not in itself salvific. Jesus dies in total acceptance of his fate. He trusts so totally in God that not even death on the cross can turn him away from his fate. Rahner's theology of the cross takes this loving obedience as central to approaching the Christ-event. We are called to follow this path of acceptance of the Father's will. The cross demonstrates Rahner's

sincere faith in the mystery of God; that suffering is always less than God's will of salvation for us.

#### **5.4 Conclusion:**

The guiding questions of this work were:

- (i) What is a theology of the cross, and in the context of contemporary theology, what criteria can be judged as essential to any theology of the cross? (Chapter 1)
- (ii) What implicit factors existed in critiques of Rahner's theology of the cross, and were they fair and accurate? (Chapter 2)
- (iii) Has Rahner an explicit theology of the cross? (Chapter 3)
- (iv) Has Rahner an implicit theology of the cross? (Chapter 4)
- (v) Would Rahner's theology of the cross meet the criteria chosen from the first question? (Chapter 5)

These questions were raised, stemming from the awareness that Balthasar has always vehemently decreed that Rahner lacks a theology of the cross.

In Chapter 1, following an exploration of the theologies of the cross offered by five significant theologians, criteria for a theology of the cross were developed. The approaches of Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jürgen Moltmann and Jon Sobrino offered clear and distinctive understandings of what the cross represented. While these theologies differed significantly from each other at times, certain key elements were consistent in each of their works. This chapter did not set out to devise what constituted *the* prescribed and definitive theology of the cross. Such an approach would be to misunderstand the very nature of theology. All theology is in itself constrained by human limitation and so no theology of the cross is perfect. The criteria outlined were developed within the context of theologies of the cross from contemporaries of Rahner.

Chapter 2 examined the implicit factors within Balthasar's own criticism of Rahner's supposed lack of a theology of the cross in *Cordula Oder der Ernstfall*.

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Beneath this criticism were a range of factors that influenced Balthasar's critique. These included Balthasar's own background, his polemical style, his own relationship with Rahner, his concerns on the direction of the Church and his reservations over Rahner's philosophical influences. There was also a clear parallel noted between the Balthasar- Rahner critique and the similar situation that existed between Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Moltmann's criticism of Rahner's argument that God could not suffer was evaluated. Rahner's responses to both critiques are that both Moltmann and Balthasar's theologies are gnostic. There is no scriptural or traditional notion of God being subject to suffering. Rahner's central concern is to protect the *communicatio idiomatum* and he does not see this as being central to either Balthasar or Moltmann's theology.

Chapter 3 examined Rahner's explicit theology of the cross. Along with a number of significant primary sources, this chapter was structured around Rahner's exploration of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which revealed the profound influence Rahner's Ignatian spirituality has on his theology. The First Week was an exploration of sin, judgement and hell and what these meant for the person who strives to renounce their old life and follow the Crucified Lord. The Second Week dealt with imitating the inner direction of Christ's life which was obedience to the Father's will and an accepting anticipation of death. The Third Week examined the Passion of the Lord and explored the suffering, weakness and abandonment Christ accepted on the cross. Finally, the Fourth Week examined the resurrection of Christ into the eternal life of the Father, enabling us to be saved if we follow the way of Jesus.

Perceived limitations in Rahner's explicit theology of the cross were also explored, including Rahner's subsuming of the cross into God's salvific will. Rahner's theology of the cross does not present the cross as being salvific in itself. The cross reveals God's salvific will which has overcome sin and death. It is because of God's will for us to be saved that there is a cross, rather than the cross changing God in some way. Rahner's application of quasi-sacramental causality to the cross means that we are able to owe our salvation simultaneously to God's salvific will and to Christ who redeems us. This is

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possible because a sacrament is at once the cause and consequence of what it signifies. Other critiques included confusion over the role of Mary in our redemption, Rahner's speculative approach to the death of Christ and in particular, the lack of a pneumatological element in Rahner's theology of the cross. A more explicit exploration of the role of Holy Spirit in the Christ-event would be a definite complement to Rahner's theology of the cross.

Chapter 4 was an exploration of Rahner's implicit theology of the cross. This was clearly seen in Rahner's theology of death, theology of martyrdom, theology of Eucharist and in meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Rahner's emphasis on Jesus' death being salvific highlights the manner in which the Crucified Lord accepts his death and turns it into a personal act. By accepting death, he is able to give himself away in love to the Father in a way that we cannot. No other death could have been in solidarity with us and also radically for us. In martyrdom, Rahner reveals his Ignatian background, highlighting that we are to accept our lives as an anticipation of death and place our trust completely in God. In doing so, we can be true witnesses to Christ. In the Eucharist, we are called to share in Jesus' life and death. In receiving the Eucharist, we consume Christ's suffering and are brought into closer relationship with God. Other sacraments, such as Penance and Baptism could also be useful resources in exploring Rahner's theology of the cross through further research. In the meditations on the Sacred Heart, we reflect on the profound love of Jesus, who sheds his blood on the cross for us. We call to mind Jesus' suffering on the cross, but also the depths of God's love for us which defeats sin and death in the Christ-event. Rahner's implicit theology of the cross is limited by Rahner's refusal to allow vicarious representation into his exploration. Without Christ in some way bearing our sins, it does raise the question as to how can Christ's death be truly for us. On this point, Balthasar would possibly be a useful complement to Rahner.

Chapter 5 has applied the criteria from Chapter 1 to Rahner's theology of the cross. Aside from the criticisms mentioned, it is clear that Rahner does indeed have a theology of the cross, both explicit and implicit. Balthasar's critique of Rahner could itself be critiqued. Balthasar's statement that "Rahner lacks a

theology of the cross” should be redacted to “Rahner lacks *Balthasar's* theology of the cross.”

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