

The Eschatology of the Cross

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Eschatology has found new respect at the heart of theology in the course of the twentieth century. The cross of Christ as a source, subject and description of soteriological concentration has secured a central place in the work of theology in recent decades. More remarkable is the communion of soteriology and eschatology, yielding an emphasized eschatology of the cross, still fresh in contemporary theology. The development of this vision in theology is particularly instructive in the work of five renowned theologians: Moltmann, Kasper, Ratzinger, Küng and von Balthasar.

In 1960 Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote that eschatology is the “sign of the times” of contemporary theology.¹ That significance has strengthened in the passing of over thirty years. The work of many theologians demonstrates the truth of this and one of those most active in the breaking of the eschatological silence is the German theologian, Jürgen Moltmann.

Jürgen Moltmann

His eschatological thought is introduced by *Theology of Hope* (1963) and developed in *The Crucified God* (1973). The combination of eschatology and soteriology is a particular feature of his theology, evident also in many of his other works, including, *The Future of Creation* (1977). The eschatological effect of the cross of Christ is a fundamental theological interest of Moltmann. It continues and is sustained in his 1990 publication, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, which upholds the necessary union of cross and resurrection, inaugurating a new creation.

Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* is subtitled ‘On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology’. He stresses here that Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology therefore becomes the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah.² Following W. Kreck, he emphasises that Christian eschatology is at heart Christology in an eschatological perspective.³ Moltmann declares that the cross of Christ stands between the expectations of late Jewish apocalyptic and the Christian eschatology. He offers the significant conclusion: “Hence all Christian resurrection eschatology bears the mark of an *eschatologia crucis*.”⁴ He later adds that the eschatology of the future and

the theology of the cross are interwoven.⁵

Moltmann insists that it is not the eternity of heaven which is seen in the resurrection of Christ but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands.⁶ Thus, what is negative in the world is enlightened and Moltmann holds that the hope that is born of the cross and the resurrection does not suffer the negative contradictory and torturing aspects of the world to end in 'nothing'. Rather, it transforms them into terms of 'not yet'.⁷ He envisages that which the future is bringing as something which has become 'once for all', through the Christ-event of the raising of the one who was crucified, a possible object of confident hope.⁸ Finally, the theology of hope sees the task of the Christian Church addressed to a world of hopelessness and lost horizons, to disclose to it "the horizon of the future of the crucified Christ."⁹

In the estimation of John Macquarrie, writing in 1990, Moltmann's *The Crucified God* "would have a good claim to be regarded as possibly the most important theological book to be published in the second half of the twentieth century."¹⁰ True, Moltmann, in this study, may have overdone the 'abandonment' of Jesus by God. However, it is also true that the author here wishes to emphasise the intimacy between the Father and the Son. Indeed this book introduces a profound Trinitarian theology of the cross. At the beginning of *The Crucified God*, Moltmann states that the crucified Christ is at the centre of Christian faith and theology, noting that he alone can bring the freedom which changes the world.¹¹ He later observes that while the death of Jesus upon the cross is the centre of all Christian theology, it is not the only theme, but adds nevertheless that all Christian statements about history, about the Church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ.¹²

Moltmann considers the theological object which a return to the theology of the cross today requires. An abstract theology of the cross and of suffering is not the issue. The focus must rather be on a theology of the crucified Christ.¹³ Moreover, Moltmann suggests that St. Paul, in the light of the "sufferings of this present time" and the groaning of the enslaved creation and the experience of Israel, developed an eschatological Christology of the crucified Jesus.¹⁴ Accepting this outlook one can understand that Christianity points forward to the new age and new creation with the crucified Christ as the basis of the proclamation: "I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5), no longer a scandal and foolishness.¹⁵ The theology of the cross changes the general impression of the transitoriness of all things into the prospect of the hope and liberation of all things.¹⁶

Moltmann approves of Martin Kahler's view of the cross of Christ as the basis and standard of Christology.¹⁷ He approves of Bulmann's eschatological assessment that the abiding significance of the cross is that

it is the judgement of the world, the judgement and the deliverance of man.¹⁸ The commandment of the eschatological moment is the Christian call to follow Christ. As such, it is also a call to share his suffering and to stand beneath his cross.¹⁹

The theology of Easter hope must be changed into the theology of the cross if it is to set our feet on the ground of the reality of the death of Christ and our own death. Consequently, the eschatological power of the death of Christ is highlighted: "through his death the risen Christ introduces the coming reign of God into the godless present by means of representative suffering."²⁰ It is essential to the paschal mystery that the resurrection be presented as the resurrection of the crucified Christ. Set in the context of its eschatological value, Moltmann denotes the resurrection as the content of the significance of Christ's death on the cross 'for us', because the risen Christ is himself the crucified One. Thus, he died 'for us', to give us, 'the dead', a share in his new life of resurrection and in his future of eternal life.²¹ The accent is on Christ's death on the cross 'for us' that makes relevant his resurrection 'before us,'²² since the resurrection 'does not evacuate the cross' (1 Cor. 1:17), but fills it with eschatology and saving significance.²³ Only from Jesus who died on the cross does the resurrection hope extend to the living and the dead.²⁴

The cross illumines the trinitarian mystery through its eschatological effect. Because this death took place in the history between Father and Son on the cross on Golgotha, there proceeds from it the spirit of life, love and election to salvation.²⁵ Christian belief, when thinking in trinitarian terms, says that forsaken men are already taken up by Christ's forsakenness into participation in the trinitarian process of God's history. Thus, we live in God as participants in the eschatological life of God by virtue of the death of Christ.²⁶ Finally, in *The Crucified God*, Moltmann, drawing on the *Apocryphal Acts of St. Andrew*, claims that the cross is set up in the cosmos "in order to give future to that which is passing away, firmness to that which is unsteady, openness to that which is fixed, hope to the hopeless, and in this way to gather all that is and all that is no more into the new creation."²⁷

An eschatology of the cross similarly permeates *The Future of Creation* wherein Moltmann describes Christ's death on the cross as the centre and quintessence of his whole history for us, which, from its beginnings with his messianic sending will reach its completion with his eschatological glorification.²⁸ It is through the cross of the risen Christ alone that resurrection and eternal life are mediated as hope to those who sit in the shadow of the cross, under the power of sin and death.²⁹ One of Moltmann's most radical statements of *eschatologia crucis* must surely be the following:

The anticipation of the coming kingdom of God has taken place in history in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. That means that *the coming kingdom of God is not to be found anywhere on earth, except in the cross on Golgotha*. The divine future confronts us, not in dreams of the future but in the face of the crucified Jesus. In the crucified Jesus the risen Christ is present on earth — present and seeable and tellable. But if God himself is near in the risen one, then the crucified Jesus is the face and the revelation of the coming God.³⁰

Justification, achieved in the event of the cross, is expressed as the anticipation of man's new future rather than the adoption of his lost origin.³¹ The event of justification provides access for the God-forsaken into the liberty of his kingdom.³² The criterion for the interpretation of Easter is the full perception of Jesus' cross.³³ The raising of the crucified Jesus reveals a *nova creatio* for everyone. He, the One who has overcome death, is life and eternal bliss.³⁴ God's actions in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection lead ultimately, through the justification of the sinner, to the universal lordship of God, to God's own glorification in the new creation.³⁵

Walter Kasper

In *Jesus the Christ* (1974), Walter Kasper presents an interpretation of the cross in terms of a soteriology inextricably bound to eschatology.

Acknowledging the New Testament view of Jesus' death as the saving act of God and Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice,³⁶ Kasper observes that the very early layers of the post-Easter tradition interpreted the death of Jesus as saving and expiatory 'for us' and 'for many'.³⁷ Moreover, as crucified and risen, Jesus Christ is salvation in his living personality.³⁸ At the deepest level, Jesus' death is God's eschatological saving deed. In this self-offering of the Son of Man is the eschatological event in which God acted decisively and definitively.³⁹ Understanding the Kingdom of God as the essence of salvation and accepting that Jesus thought of his death in relation to his message of the coming of the Kingdom of God, it is concluded that the eschatological interpretation of Jesus' death implies a soteriological interpretation.⁴⁰

Kasper notices a "straight line" from Jesus' eschatological message of the *basileia*, the Kingdom, to the mystery of the Passion.⁴¹ The death of Jesus is connected with the coming of the *basileia*.⁴² It is viewed as the source of life, the coming in love of the Kingdom of God. The cross spells out the coming of God's eschatological rule, the motivating interest of Jesus.⁴³ Since the Risen is the Crucified and the Crucified is the Risen, the cross, the sign of shame and of death, becomes the sign of glory and of life.⁴⁴ It follows that passages dealing with the Last Supper

should convey a very evident eschatological perspective, as Kasper recognizes.⁴⁵ He argues that the message of the Kingdom as a message of the world-transforming love of God for the poor and outcast is radicalized in the cross.⁴⁶

The elevated significance with which the cross is imbued in the theology of Kasper determines his approach to the resurrection. He remarks that the resurrection-act of God does not take place in a 'higher history' far away beyond the history of men, but right beside the crucified and buried One.⁴⁷ The resurrection cannot be regarded as purely an event of faith since its historical term is found in the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. The continuity and identity between the crucified and risen Jesus is based solely upon God's faithfulness to his bond and his creative providence. Therefore, the unique event of the resurrection of Jesus signals that in history a new era has dawned.⁴⁸ Kasper, who recognises the source of the Kingdom of God in the death of Jesus, here points to the resurrection as the revelation and realization of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

The God of Jesus Christ (1982), brings out some radical implications of the message of the cross. Kasper insists that Kahler's description of the Gospel as "passion narratives with extended introductions" must be taken seriously.⁴⁹ This lifts the cross from being regarded as simply the consequence of the earthly ministry of Jesus and acknowledges it to be the very goal of the incarnation. All else is ordered to the cross, which, far from being an adventitious happening, is the very meaning and purpose of the Christ-event.

Since the incarnation of God reaches its true meaning and purpose on the cross, Kasper maintains that the entire Christ-event must be understood in terms of the cross. Through the *kenosis* of the cross, God's self-renouncing love is most radically made manifest: "The cross is the utmost that is possible to God in his self-surrendering love; it is 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'; it is the unsurpassable self-definition of God."⁵⁰ It would be erroneous to identify the self-renunciation or emptying of God with divine self-abandonment or self de-divinization of God. The cross is rather the revelation of the divine God who by the very unfathomableness of his forgiving love, proves that he is not a man, but God. Kasper also presents the love of God revealed on the cross as the expression of God's unconditional fidelity to his promise. Therein lies the profound eschatological truth and hope: the beginning of salvation unto life eternal springing from the cross of God's love in the dying of Christ.

Joseph Ratzinger

As with Moltmann and Kasper, the cross of the Kingdom is fundamental in the eschatological thought of Joseph Ratzinger. His *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (1977) is a major contribution to the eschatological debate. In the study of Ratzinger, in the light of the now risen and glorified Lord, the cross seems to emerge as the sacrament of eschatology. He suggests that modern scientific thought illumines the view that the entire message of Jesus had been eschatological.⁵¹ Peterson's depiction of the cross as the symbol of eschatological faith is cited.⁵²

The Kingdom of God is presented as an event and not a 'place'. Jesus, by his work, his word and by his passion, truncates the dominion of estrangement which weighs upon man, thereby liberating him. The dominion of God is thus inaugurated and Jesus is the Kingdom of God because it is through him that God works in the world.⁵³

It is a truth, both moving and exciting for Ratzinger, that the victory of Yahweh occurs through the cross in extreme humiliation. This cross is the extreme radicalization of the filial gesture of Christ. The divinity of man is born of the obedience upon the cross. Man can become 'God', not by self-proclamation, but by becoming a 'son'. The Kingdom of God is born of the filial gesture of Jesus.⁵⁴

From the cross of death Jesus descends into *Sheol*. Yet it is God himself who is taken into *Sheol* with this descent. Death is defeated and ceases to be the kingdom of the cruel distance from God. In Christ, God himself has entered into the land of death and has transformed the place of non-communication into a location of his presence. Ratzinger explains that this does not signify an exaltation of death: God has cancelled and defeated death by taking himself in Christ into the kingdom of death. With the cross announcing the liberation of man, death is placed at the centre of the proclamation of the faith. However, Ratzinger proceeds to reflect on this death in terms of its depth of love.⁵⁵ He later repeats the significance of the descent into *Sheol* and adds that God thus creates life from death, in the midst of death. Christ is become the tree of life from which man receives the bread of immortality.⁵⁶ The Lord's going to prepare a place in the house of his Father occurs upon the cross.⁵⁷ God, who suffers and dies, overcomes evil, hatred and sin, not in a speculative Good Friday; it is absolutely real.⁵⁸ It may thus be concluded that from descent into the abyss emerges the ascent of eschatology.

Ratzinger described his *Behold the Pierced One*, which appeared in English in 1986, as 'an approach to spiritual Christology'. In this work, the eschatological effect of the cross of Christ is again highlighted. Reminiscent of *Eschatology*, death, said to be by its very nature the end, the destruction of every communication, is, in Ratzinger's terms, changed

by Jesus into an act of self-communication, which, signifying the triumph of love over death, is man's redemption.⁵⁹

The person who has seen the Lamb-Christ on the cross, says Ratzinger, knows that God *has* provided. "But this sight of the Lamb—the crucified Christ—is in fact our glimpse of heaven, of what God has eternally provided for us. In this Lamb we actually do glimpse heaven."⁶⁰ The Book of Revelation's vision of heaven expresses what we see by Easter faith: the Lamb who was slain lives. To look at the Lamb is to see heaven opened.⁶¹ Easter faith points to the future fullness of the joy of the redeemed, to the fulfilment of the words of the departing Jesus, who, parting from us, is the coming Jesus: "your sorrow will turn into joy" (Jn.16:20).⁶²

Hans Küng

Given the theological ferment of recent decades, Hans Küng might be regarded as unlikely to echo the doctrinal outlook of Joseph Ratzinger. However, when it comes to reflections on the meaning of the cross, Küng's appreciation of the eschatological power of the Crucified is in harmony with that of Ratzinger. This may be seen in *Eternal Life?* (1982).

In this work Küng views the concept of 'consummation' from the standpoint of the Crucified and Risen. It is described as a dialectical movement of thought: as life, justice, freedom, love, salvation. It is a life which absorbs us with our entire history wherein permanency and stability overcome provisionality and mortality. It is "a true, imperishable life in that God who proved himself in the Crucified as the living life-bestowing God: an eternal life."⁶³ It is a love already experienced, though imperfectly, in this life, an infinite love since it is wholly and entirely filled by the God whose love, in Jesus, has proved to be stronger even than death. It is a salvation, already known in this life but in a fragile and fragmentary manner, which ultimately becomes a final salvation seizing man in all his body-soul dimensions in the light of the resurrection of the dead Christ.

That eternal life, given even now, had similarly made its thematic mark in Küng's *The Church*, published in 1967. Detailed here is God's assurance of eternal life in the *present*, through his Spirit working in the risen Christ, since the resurrection of the crucified Christ means a final victory over death. Then, beyond the present, through the same life-giving Spirit who is the power of future life, God will give to the believer eternal life in the *future*. The Spirit of the risen Lord ushers the last days, already begun, into consummation. Of such is the life and the hope of the *ecclesia* of the eschatological people of God.⁶⁴

Back to *Eternal Life?*: Christians, according to Küng, must never be led by preliminary joys to a forgetfulness of the present time, the cross, or

the Crucified, which is portrayed as “the great distinctive Christian feature as compared to all other hopes of immortality and ideologies of eternity.”⁶⁵ In this frequently frustrated life, what matters, while following the justified and the crucified Christ, is to work out of hope for an eternal life and in commitment for the betterment of the world with the crucified Jesus as our standard.

Belief in the One raised up to new life is indispensable for those who hope for life eternal. Küng observes that the Christian believes primarily not in a past fact of the resurrection, but “in” the Risen One himself who is no other than the Crucified. Since without the cross there can be no resurrection, the cross and resurrection are thus in a continual mutual relationship.

The cross is “surmountable” only in the light of the resurrection, but the resurrection can be lived only in the shadow of the cross. The resurrection-faith thus points back constantly to him who was not spared the long road by way of cross, death and tomb.⁶⁶

The risen life, for which man hopes, emerges clearly in Küng’s view as an eschatological gift necessarily founded in the cross of Christ; We learn the value of the cross in the resurrection, “Easter is not a feast of immortality, of a postulate of practical reason: it is a feast of Christ, of the crucified Christ now glorified.”⁶⁷ In Christian terms, our future is part of the rule of the Lord Jesus, but this rule remains that of the Crucified, even at Easter.⁶⁸

Earlier, in *On Being A Christian*, this same ‘rule’ had claimed Küng’s reflection. Referring to the *sign of disgrace* that appeared as a *sign of victory*, he notes that it was only in the course of time that the cross came to be recognised as the very centre and sum of Christian faith and life.⁶⁹ Furthermore, if the cross possesses eschatological power, it thereby conveys a responsibility to Christians, indeed a moral imperative, in the present and for this world. For Küng, ‘the cross’ is a doctrine of power which must be applied to Christian life and service — in this world. For the glory to come, Christians wait in hope . . . and work in charity:

The core of the Christian message, vigorously defended by Paul against its deniers, is no other than the Crucified, who is not dead and gone for the Christian community, but living now and into the future. The risen Christ rules only to serve the crucified. Easter does not cancel the cross. Easter confirms the cross, not indeed by approving its offensiveness, but by making the offensiveness good and meaningful. The resurrection message therefore may not for a moment obscure the message of the cross. The cross is not merely a “transit station” on the way to glory, nor merely the way to the prize,

nor merely one "salvation fact" in addition to others. It is the permanent signature of the living Christ. What would this Christ look like if he were not the Crucified? The exalted Jesus is rightly depicted always with the stigmata of the earthly. Easter is rightly understood only if the burden and strain of Good Friday are not forgotten. It is only by this means that the idea of eternal life will be something more than a mere consolation for the cross of the present time, the suffering of the individual and the problems of society . . .⁷⁰

Hans Urs von Balthasar

The 'word of the cross' is a vital concept in von Balthasar's theology. He declares, influenced by Stauffer, that it is not possible to have a theology which is not intrinsically marked and structured by the 'word of the cross'.⁷¹ The intra-trinitarian love of God makes sense of the entire paschal mystery. The possibility of the extreme *kenosis* of Christ within the eternal love of God and embraced by God, radically overcomes opposition between *theologia crucis* and *theologia gloriae*.⁷² He draws on Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics IV/1* to stress that a *theologia gloriae*, as the glorification of that which Jesus Christ in his resurrection received for us, would be bereft of sense if it were not also understood to contain in itself at all times a *theologia crucis*, which is the glorification of that which Christ accomplished as the one crucified for us. Praise of the passion and death of Christ necessitates the inclusion of the *theologia gloriae*, the praise of Him who rose for us from the dead.⁷³ Easter glory resides even in the passion and death of Christ.

Von Balthasar adopts the approach which accords with that of Barth and Blank whom he quotes: the cross exists definitively and irrevocably prior to glory. There is no exaltation without the previous crucifixion. The glory of Jesus is properly comprehended only when it is appreciated as the glory of the Crucified manifested in the resurrection. In the cross, therefore, God Himself decided for the salvation of the world, objectively and independently.⁷⁴ This heightens the significance of the eschatological affirmation of Jesus that, elevated on the cross, he would draw all to himself.

Discussing the opening of the sepulchres after the crucifixion, signifying the opening of Sheol in the face of this death, von Balthasar asserts that this is, above all, a grand vision of the true eschatological event inaugurated with the death of Jesus, not yet horizontally poised towards the future world, but directed vertically from time to the eternity of the 'holy city', the 'heavenly Jerusalem'.⁷⁵ He further intimates that the unexpected apocalyptic element allows a glimpse of the identity, beyond time, between death on the cross and the last day, between the centre of time and the end of time.

Von Balthasar considers the traditional *theologoumenon* of the origin of the Church in the cross, the new creation of the new Eve from the side of the new Adam on the cross.⁷⁶ He proceeds to propose that to become Christian means to arrive at the cross.⁷⁷ The cross of the Son is the revelation of the love of the Father. The dreadful eruption of this love on the cross finds its interior fulfilment through the effusion of his Spirit in the hearts of people.⁷⁸ In this theological approach then, as with the other theologians considered here, it is clear that life in the Kingdom of God is understood to be life from the cross.

Writing in *Communio*, von Balthasar referred to the superiority of eternal life resulting from the surmounting of Christ's apparently final death.⁷⁹ He lists a number of theological presuppositions which must be taken into account in order to approach appreciation of this truth. An impressive concluding passage reveals the eschatological life of the cross in the risen and glorified Lord. There von Balthasar attempts to describe to what extent death is "swallowed up by life's victory." Death has made its appearance in the destructive power of sin as the greatest enemy of life and love. The death of Christ broke into this with its function of self-giving love.

The enmity expressed in the act of killing is destroyed, but the act of dying remains as the dying of one who loves, and it is co-glorified into the life of the Risen Christ, not as some remaining "shadow" (in the sense of Carl Jung) but as a form in which the living love can manifest itself "up to the end" (John 13:1) . . . He takes along his mode of being dead as part of his past and thus enduringly affecting him into his eternal life.⁸⁰

The living lamb of the Apocalypse stands therefore as the "victor", while appearing "as if slain". From this arises the claim of the glorified Lord who announces his life for all eternity even though he was dead, and his possession of the keys of death and of the underworld (Rev. 1:18). He thereby shows that he possesses death in himself as something he has gone through and overcome through the self-giving of love, and this in the fullness of life.

Von Balthasar cautions that this is not to be taken in the sense of a Hegelian dialectic according to which the negative appears as an intrinsic element of eternal life. "It is, after all, a matter of his 'power' that he delivers himself up to the powerlessness of passion and death; or, in order to do away with all ambiguity, 'the powerlessness of God's love is stronger than men' (1 Cor. 1:25)."⁸¹

The great love of God was given its most profound expression between the crucifixion and the resurrection in the descent into hell. For

von Balthasar that was the most ultimate experience of the self-emptying of Christ and the finality of the *kenosis* was attained by the Christ of Holy Saturday, thereby providing the supreme expression of the inner-Trinitarian love. The One raised at Easter is the Crucified but especially he is the One who descended into Hell 'for us'.⁸²

Commenting on von Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*, Michael Waldstein of Harvard Divinity School notes that the cross of Jesus, far from being a vindictive venting of divine wrath on an innocent victim, should be seen in every respect as the appearing of the glory of God's love in this world (Herrlichkeit, III 2,2, pp.192-193).⁸³ The central thesis of *The Glory of the Lord* is declared to be the cross as the final expression of God's glory in the world. The cross reveals God's majesty as a majesty of gratuitous, self-abandoning love, expressed in the mission of Jesus, in the completeness, even recklessness, with which God gives himself for the salvation of the world. The darkest corners of creation are penetrated by God's light through God's most effective outpouring of himself in complete weakness. The 'hour' of Jesus comprises both death and glorification. The deeper eschatological power of the cross is evident from the understanding that the cross is not only the expression and realization of God's love of the world, since the mission of the Son is primarily a function of the love of the Father in which he wishes to let all the redeemed creation take its place in the Son. Moreover, according to Waldstein, interpreting von Balthasar, the ultimate mystery which is manifested and made present in the cross of Christ is the Trinity, the fact that God is eternal and absolute love. The glory of God's triune love is expressed in the form (Gestalt) of Jesus. In Jesus, the whole is recapitulated: an earthly form becomes the vessel of God's glory.⁸⁴

Von Balthasar's own words, towards the end of his life's earthly time, proclaim profoundly the theodramatic truth of the cross and the eschatological hope that it eternalizes as Life and in Love:

God then, has no need to 'change' when he makes a reality of the wonders of his charity, wonders which include the Incarnation and, more particularly, the Passion of Christ, and before him, the dramatic history of God with Israel and, no doubt, with humanity as a whole. All the contingent 'abasements' of God in the economy of salvation are forever included and outstripped in the eternal event of Love. And so what, in the temporal economy, appears as the (most real) suffering of the Cross is only the manifestation of the (Trinitarian) Eucharist of the Son: he will be forever the slain Lamb, on the throne of the Father's glory, and his Eucharist — the Body shared out, the Blood poured forth — will never be abolished, since the Eucharist it is which must gather all creation into his body. What the Father has given, he will never take back.⁸⁵

Conclusion

The eschatological interpretations of the cross of Christ in Moltmann, Kasper, Ratzinger, Küng and von Balthasar, while they may differ in some details of approach and in certain nuances of application to Christian life, clearly share the essential ground. The ultimate foundation is the Paschal Christ. Renewal in theology frequently has ancient roots and hallowed sources. It is so with theology of the cross.

The term, *theologia crucis*, may have received popularity from Protestant origins, but the actual theology of the cross features highly in the old world of patristic and medieval doctrine and spiritual teaching. The modern renewal of interest and interpretation benefits from the long and living tradition about Jesus of Nazareth and his life-giving cross. Thus, the theology of the cross is the story and meaning of the journey to the cross of the Incarnate Word, Jesus the Christ, a journey into death, through the cross, but through it and above it into risen glory. It is a divine work, with the divine force of the movement from earthly degradation to heavenly elevation. That sacred transition has given to the world, life from the cross — the life of the cross.

Clearly, it is not simply the dying of a man that we celebrate. Death in itself is not life-giving. The 'cross' becomes a theology only because this Jesus who was crucified, rose again from the dead. The Lord of the Christians is both crucified and risen. Whereas the crucifixion is fundamental, it is the *risen crucified* Christ who gives us our theology of the cross. We can speak of life from the cross because we acknowledge and direct our faith to the cross raised on high, that is, the cross exalted through resurrection and beyond, exalted into glory. We are presented then with the glorious cross, of the exalted Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The death and resurrection of Christ are not to be dissociated, are neither identical nor separate. According to Christian Schütz, both these central Christological events indicate the eschatological nature of Christology which treats of them. The cross and the glory of Christ become the origin of the eschatological event and the point of reference for all manner of eschatological thought and act.⁶⁶ Schütz seeks to express the contemporary truth of cross and resurrection: the risen Lord has not 'at one time been the Crucified; rather, he remains for ever the crucified One. A correct acceptance of cross and resurrection together, will neutralize, he believes, every possibility of understanding the resurrection and the *eschaton* in such terms that mask or eliminate outright the phenomenon of the cross.'⁶⁷

The life from the cross is life in grace with its orientation towards glory. It is eschatological life. The Christian understanding of humanity finds expression in eschatology which considers man "as a being who

exists from out of his present 'now' towards his future."⁸⁸ The great hope of the human race waits for the happy culmination of the entire history of salvation through the powerful grace of God. This is the knowledge of faith and hope since, as professed by Karl Rahner, as a foundation of Christian faith and hope, "we are living in the eschaton of Jesus Christ, the God-man who was crucified for us and who has risen for us and who remains forever."⁸⁹ However, as we look for the city which is to come while we live in the non-abiding city of this world, surely it is a comfort in faith and a consolation in hope that the exalted cross of Christ lives on and breathes life through the sending and presence of the Holy Spirit of God.

- 1 Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *I novissimi nella teologia contemporanea* (Brescia 1967) 31.
- 2 Cf. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London 1967) 16.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 83.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 164.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 197.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 229.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 338.
- 10 J. Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London and Philadelphia 1990) 321.
- 11 Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London 1977) 1.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 204.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 107.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 218.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 185.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 186.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 183.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 246.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 255.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 219.
- 28 Cf. J. Moltmann *The Future of Creation* (London 1979) 81.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 39; cf. also, 22.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 53 (*Italics added*).
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- 33 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 166.
- 36 Cf. W. Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (London 1976) 114.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 207.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 167.

- 40 Ibid., 120.
 41 Ibid., 116.
 42 Ibid., 118.
 43 Ibid., 119.
 44 Ibid., 197.
 45 Ibid., 117.
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 47 Ibid., 147.
 48 Ibid.
 49 W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York 1984) 189.
 50 Ibid., 194
 51 J. Ratzinger, *Escatologia* (1979) 26.
 52 Ibid., 31.
 53 Ibid., 55.
 54 Ibid., 82.
 55 Ibid., 108–109.
 56 Ibid., 168–169.
 57 Ibid., 214.
 58 Ibid., 226.
 59 Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One* (San Francisco 1986) 25.
 60 Ibid., 118.
 61 Ibid., 120.
 62 Ibid., 121.
 63 H. Küng, *Eternal Life?* (London 1984) 273.
 64 Cf. H. Küng, *The Church* (London 1968) 167–168.
 65 H. Küng, *Eternal Life?*, 274.
 66 Ibid., 147.
 67 Ibid., 143.
 68 Ibid., 275.
 69 H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London 1977) 397.
 70 Ibid., 400.
 71 H. U. von Balthasar, “Mysterium Paschale”, in *Mysterium Salutis* 6 (Brescia 1971) 208.
 72 Ibid., 234–235.
 73 Ibid., 235.
 74 Ibid., 270–271.
 75 Ibid., 275.
 76 Ibid., 279.
 77 Ibid., 283.
 78 Ibid., 288.
 79 Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, “Death is swallowed up by Life”, *Communio* 14 (1987) 49.
 80 Ibid., 54.
 81 Ibid.
 82 Cf. A. Nichols’ Introduction to his English translation of *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh 1990) 7.
 83 Cf. M. Waldstein, “An Introduction to von Balthasar’s *The Glory of the Lord*”, *Communio* 14 (1987) 31.
 84 Cf. *ibid* 30–33.
 85 H.U. von Balthasar in his Preface to the 1990 English *Mysterium Paschale*, ix.
 86 Cf. C. Schütz, “Fondazione generale dell’escatologia”, *Mysterium Salutis* 11 (Brescia 1978) 136 and 128.
 87 Ibid., 161.
 88 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London 1978) 431.
 89 Ibid., 435.