

lively an apprehension of God's amiableness as he has of the beauty of some things earthly. Though he can talk as well and as rationally as most about the gloriousness of God, yet he loves him not half so well as most about things. And what is the reason? . . . It must be because there is a certain knowledge of God's excellency that he has not. . . . The knowledge of a thing is not in proportion to the extensiveness of our notions, or number of circumstances known, only; but it consists chiefly in the intensiveness of the idea.⁴⁴

Indeed so. Like all the divine attributes, the notion of aseity remains a notion until it becomes a matter of "intensive" apprehension. Not the least sign that all is well with dogmatics (and its practitioners) is that it is aware of the need to resist the enticements of natural divinity. Such resistance is a matter of reason disciplined by attention to the instruction of the word and by prayer, and this is why the chief act of theological existence is the petition "Give me understanding according to thy word!"

44. Jonathan Edwards, "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1723-1729* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 75-76.

7

 God and the Cross

HENRI A. BLOCHER

[W]e speak the wisdom of God in mystery, the hidden wisdom . . . which none of the princes of this age has known, for, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. . . . To us, God has revealed it through the Spirit.

1 Cor. 2:7-8, 10

God, the cross: associating Deity, the Blessed Potentate who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:15-16), and that horrendous mode of execution, the *mors turpissima crucis*, "the most shameful death by crucifixion"—what a monstrous combination! And yet it is the hallmark of the original gospel. God and the gallows on which Jesus was nailed are the two foci of the message, and the ancient church showed the spiritual mettle to maintain the combination despite scorn, disgust, and taunts (remember the *graffito* of the Domus Gelotiana, "Alexamenos is worshiping [*sebei*] his god," a crucified one with the head of an ass!).¹ ✓

At once a phrase resonates in our ears: *the crucified God*. It echoes very ancient ways of speaking; Tertullian affirmed that Christians believe in

1. To be seen, we are told, in the former Kircherian Museum of the Collegio Romano; reproduced as a full-page picture in Annie Jaubert, *Les premiers chrétiens* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), 118.

a God who was crucified and died.² The fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople II in 553) anathemized whoever "would not confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified as to the flesh [or in the flesh, *sarki*], is true God, Lord of Glory and One of the Holy Trinity" (canon 10).³ But what is the precise thought-content of such proclamations and confessions? What do they entail for the doctrine of God, the subject of "theology proper"?

A few decades ago the phrase and the theme of the "crucified God" were raised to unprecedented prominence by several influential theologians who made it the key to a renovated doctrine of God. Best-known among them were Jürgen Moltmann,⁴ probably the most "ecumenical" of all theologians in the third part of the twentieth century, and Eberhard Jüngel, whom many consider the most rigorous and profound thinker—and who claimed he had been the first to introduce the new perspective.⁵ They appealed to Luther's taste for the alliance of words and, more generally, to his "theology of the cross"; apart from their indebtedness to Hegel, they showed the influence of some accents of Karl Barth (to say the least) and of the most daring thoughts in Bonhoeffer's letters from prison, *Widerstand und Ergebung* ("Resisting and Yielding").

The interval of time may facilitate a more balanced appraisal of their theses (or at least one unswayed by quick reactions and excessive passion). The present study, while prompted by the wide reception of Moltmann's and Jüngel's proposals, will, under the guidance of the normative interpretation of Holy Scripture, explore the implications of Jesus Christ's crucifixion for an evangelical theology of the divine attributes and Trinity. It will consider first the issue of method and principle (in the sense of the *principium cognoscendi*, the principle of knowledge) whereby we should draw the main propositions of our doctrine of God from the Calvary event. It will then apply what may appear as the sounder procedure to the following questions:

2. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* II.16 (*mortuus*), 27 (*crucifixus*).

3. Bauckham has noticed that Jürgen Moltmann mistakenly wrote that the proposition had been rejected, whereas it was affirmed. See Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of *The Crucified God*," in *The Power and the Weakness of God*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 109 (where n. 15 points to another inaccuracy in Paul S. Fiddes's statement of the matter).

4. Mainly in Jürgen Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1972); translation, *The Crucified God*, trans. John Bowden and R. A. Wilson (London: SCM, 1974).

5. Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundations of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 220n65; translation of *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1977), 298–99.

If God was capable of the cross, what does it teach us about God? What aspects of his being (attributes) did God prominently reveal through the cross of Christ?

Deriving Theology from the Cross?

The Crucified God

In a way, the new "crucified God" theologies were born of a renewed sense of the violent incompatibility between the centrality of the cross (the focal point of the Christian *kērygma*) and the classical view of God as the "Blessed Potentate." Their champions felt that traditional interpretations had managed to tame this incompatibility by losing sight of the horror of the cross for God.

How did it happen? As early as Justin Martyr, the cross had become a symbol of victory, the *tropaion* made with the weapons of the defeated foe on the very battlefield (a similar shape and the proclamation of the Crucified as the *Christus Victor* facilitated this glorious reinterpretation).⁶ One could lose sight of the shame so unworthy of the supreme Ruler. At the same time, theology was able to render the divine nature immune from any real involvement in the event. Patripassianism, the opinion that the Father had suffered on Good Friday (*Pater passus est*), the extreme consequence of a modalistic view of the Trinity, became the scarecrow. Among the orthodox it would be hard to deny an important strain of subordinationism: (inasmuch as the Son was assigned a lower rank than the Father, the Son's suffering was kept at a safe distance from absolute Deity (a logic that led to Arianism).) A Nestorian-like division between Christ's two natures was a tool used to the same end: if Jesus's humanity is only joined to the Logos in a loose, merely "moral" manner, this humanity may appear as the subject of an ordeal from which the Logos himself escapes. Thus the consequences of the cross were not drawn for the Christian view of God, who remained the Most High, immutable, impassible, the Omnipotent One who enjoys the fullness of being in beatific aloofness.

From several angles, among "crucified God" theologians, this classical view was considered no longer acceptable. It was typical, they charged, of a *theologia gloriae*—Luther's phrase—the expression of a hunger for power and dominion which was also manifest, all too manifest, in church politics.⁷ It was borrowed from Greek metaphysics—and so not really

6. A fine account is given by Flemming Fleinert-Jensen, *Das Kreuz und die Einheit der Kirche: Skizzen zu einer Kreuzestheologie in ökumenischer Perspektive* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1994), 50–51.

7. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 206 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 280), discerns in it the deification of power. Moltmann's political concerns are well known indeed;

biblical—and part of the onto-theological tradition now out of date (at least for those impressed by Heidegger).⁸ It was a dogma of natural theology, which made it suspect to Barthians. It was, following Bonhoeffer's most damaging critique, a god of the heathen, a resource-figure for us to exploit, the convenient counterpart of our wishes and anxieties.

The "crucified God" theologies claimed to be *radically* Christian, since the very notion of God was re-formed in accordance with the central proclamation of the gospel. But they were also more modern, not only in their assurance of having freed themselves from the fetters of older generations (nineteen centuries) but, above all, in their ability to dialogue with the contemporary world. Moltmann explained that he was moved to concentrate on the theology of the cross by the painful disappointments of the late sixties: the Prague Spring was suppressed, the civil-rights movement came to an end, the progressive momentum of Vatican II and the Uppsala World Council of Churches assembly was checked or lost.⁹ Jüngel's project has been to break through the deadlock of theism and atheism, as his subtitle indicates, by going beyond them both. For the "God" to which atheists (as supremely represented by Nietzsche) object is the classical God of Greek metaphysics, not the "crucified God."¹⁰

Two motives have been especially conspicuous in the success of "crucified God" theologies. First, as they involve God himself in utmost suffering, they provide a new theodicy (the "theology after Auschwitz line"),¹¹ they exalt solidarity (one of the few values that still shine, even brighter than ever, in our common firmament), and they can point to the most striking contrast between the classical view (God impassible) and the

his aversion to power and hierarchy in human societies is a constant motivation of his work.

8. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 203 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 275).

9. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 2; cf. 318 on forwarding the dialogue with socialist movements.

10. Jüngel does not word this thesis so bluntly, probably because he self-consciously eschews any appearance of apologetics (cf. *God as the Mystery of the World*, 253n15, "It is not a concern of Christian talk about God to present an apology [defense] over against atheism"). He deals *ex professo* with the "thinkability" of God in our cultural situation. But setting the theology of the cross as an answer to atheism may be discerned as a burden of *God as the Mystery of the World*; cf. 43–44, 57–63 (on Bonhoeffer, whom Jüngel venerates), 97–100, 156–57. On our relationship to the historical situation, he says that we should not yield to the tyranny of the spirit of the age but we cannot abstract ourselves from the history of thought (200–202 [*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 270–71]). Moltmann also criticizes both traditional theism and atheism from the vantage point of his theology of the cross (*The Crucified God*, 249–52; cf. 223–25 on Max Horkheimer's theses).

11. On the theological import of the Shoah, see the sober and courageous study by John J. Johnson, "Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of God and Evil?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 52/1 (2001): 117–28.

language of Scripture (with the divine *pathos*, as A. Heschel called it). Second, they bind God's being with history, and an emphasis on history is both biblical and modern. Statements by Moltmann go so far as to suggest that the Trinity is *constituted* by the event of the cross, the Trinity understood as the "history of God";¹² and even Jüngel, despite his greater caution and reverence for tradition, appears to lean toward the same side.¹³ Other statements, however, especially in the case of Moltmann in works published after *The Crucified God*, seem to revert to a more traditional preexistence of the Three.¹⁴ Due caution advises me to say that the more extreme interpretation is not established beyond all possible ambiguity

12. A "complete reshaping" of trinitarian theology is called for in which "the nature of God would have to be the human history of Christ and not a divine 'nature' separate from man" (Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 239); "The persons constitute themselves" in the event of Golgotha (245); "The unity of the dialectical history of Father and Son and Spirit in the cross of Golgotha, full of tension as it is, can be described, so to speak retrospectively, as 'God.' . . . In that case, 'God' is not another nature or a heavenly person or a moral authority, but in fact an 'event'" (247); "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" (249 [cf. 255]).

13. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 328 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 449): "As this history, he is God, and in fact, this history of love is 'God himself'"; "God is the one and living God in that he as the loving Father gives up his beloved Son and thus turns to those others, those people who are marked by death, and draws the death of these people into his eternal life"; 329 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 450): "The identification of God with the crucified Jesus requires the differentiation of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit!" Jüngel repeatedly rejects the disjunction between the "immanent" and the "economic" Trinity (e.g., 369–70). (All italics are Jüngel's.)

14. In the essay "L'absolu et l'historique dans la doctrine de la Trinité," trans. F. Thévenaz and J.-P. Thévenaz, in *Hegel et la théologie contemporaine*, ed. Louis Rumpf et al. (Neuchâtel, Switz., and Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1977), presented at a conference in Switzerland, Moltmann affirmed that "starting from the Trinity in Jesus' mission one goes back to the Trinity of origin in God himself, in order to grasp Jesus' history as revelation of the divine life" (193). The Trinity is no longer constituted by the cross, but being open from the origin, the Trinity experiences history and change—that is, something new happens to God (201). At this point, then, Moltmann still understands the Trinity as the "Trinitarian history of God" (191). In Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1981), the shift is obvious to the "social Trinity," which I feel to be a different scheme (tritheistic temptations are combined with a conspicuous concern to honor tradition, with an original, eternal Trinity), though Moltmann did not recant his more Hegelian one. In Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1991; New York: Crossroad, 1992), 81–85, Moltmann, who again criticizes Rahner and Barth, stresses the starting point in salvation-history but does not clarify the relationship with antecedent eternity. Eberhard Jüngel, *Das Evangelium von der Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen als Zentrum des christlichen Glaubens: Eine theologische Studie in ökumenischer Absicht* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 69, speaks of God's "threefold personal existence," "not first in relationship with his creature, but already in relationship with himself," and uses orthodox formulations (he quotes from the *Fides Damasi*); other statements are, however, more problematic.

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(I shall come back to the point). Perhaps the link shall be found between the "history of Jesus" and the essential Trinity in the "eternalization" of the event. One thing is clear, however: in the work of the "crucified God" theologians, history counts for God's own *definition*.

Evaluation

The effort to align one's theology, in the stricter sense, with the implications of the message of the cross, the central message of the New Testament, is, as such, praiseworthy indeed. The biblical sense of truth rules out a real contradiction: if a view of God makes it impossible for him to be in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto himself, it cannot be entertained. The mystery of God is no cloak for the absurd—it is foolishness *for those who perish!* But for the redeemed, at least when they reach a sufficient degree of maturity (1 Cor. 2:6, *en tois teleiois*; cf. 14:20), it is truly wisdom with the connotations of coherence that go with that notion. Therefore the theologian rightly aims at some perceptible harmony between the doctrine of God and the *kerygma* of the cross.

Other strong points of "crucified God" theologies include the warning about the influence of pagan Greek philosophy on Christian theology and the recognition of God's *pathos* ("passion"), that entails *sympatheia* ("compassion"); if "impassibility" is to be "saved," it will be through a concept different from the usual (mis)conception.

The distance from the language of Scripture, however, even on these points is also striking, as Adrio König and others observed.¹⁵ (Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the theopaschite overtones so typical of Moltmann and Jüngel.) The latter has to admit that Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:4 "appears to be inconsistent" if one adopts the "crucified God" perspective.¹⁶ The crude spatial metaphor (which these writers seem to take quite literally!) of God incorporating within himself death, suffering, and nothingness is utterly absent from the biblical testimony. Apart from the "magic" (*Zauberkraft*, Hegel's own word) of Hegel's negative, it gives us no assurance of any victory over adverse realities: victory is merely affirmed, in no way accounted for.¹⁷ Karl Rahner protested that the God of Moltmann and his peers is unable

15. Adrio König, "Le Dieu crucifié?" *Hokhma* 17 (1981): 73-95, here 85. König relies, in several of his criticisms, on similar estimates by Dutch theologians Hendrik Berkhof and H. H. Miskotte (84, 88, 91, 94). He shows how Jüngel mishandles a passage such as Rom. 1:4 ("Je trouve spécieux cet usage de Rm 1,4") (86-87).

16. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 39 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 50). Jüngel, however, thinks he can explain the apostle's thought otherwise.

17. König, "Le Dieu crucifié?" 93-94. The meaning of Christ's resurrection is obscured (86-88), and the *nil* made into something (94).

to comfort us in our trials; the immutable and impassible God (rightly understood), he is able.¹⁸

After all, there is much biblical evidence testifying to the immutable "Blessed Potentate"! Apart from Malachi 3:6, which comes immediately to mind and may not be the strongest proof, James 1:16-17 is a finely self-consciously elaborated theologoumenon that contrasts the Lord's immutability with the variations of all creatures, including the luminaries that pagans divinized. And beyond particular texts (these and others), there are the sovereign proclamations 'ānī hū', "I—HE," in Deuteronomy 32:39 and, in the Septuagint, *egō eimi*, "I AM," five times in Isaiah 41-48, and the praise throughout Scripture of stability, endurance, and firmness forever. The key metaphor is that of the rock.

Though interpreters of Luther may differ, I surmise that the Reformer's orientation in his theology of the cross (a phrase which he used only *once* after 1520, in extant writings) does not match Moltmann's and Jüngel's.¹⁹ Luther maintained the "classic" God, as the *Deus nudus*, the "naked God" of creation and of the law. The paradoxical revelation of God *sub specie contraria* (in contrary appearance), in weakness and death, does not imply the integration of the negative in God but characterizes his action in the world, the other *regiment* or realm; God's action is hidden, the object of faith, but it is powerful in itself. God's power reaches its goal in *human weakness*, so that Luther's theology of the cross generates praise of God's *Alleinwirksamkeit*²⁰ and a call to patient suffering for Christ's disciples here below (the political consequences being quite different from those drawn by Moltmann from his theology of the cross!).²¹

A positive valuation of history and a constant stress on the doctrine of the Trinity are welcome indeed. I have expressed elsewhere my suspicion that the "classic" notion of divine eternity (the Platonic pure present, *nunc aeternum*, "eternal now") may undermine the consistency of his-

18. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, eds., *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, translation ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 126-27. Rahner candidly exclaims (126) ("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.") The passage is reproduced in Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 122, with an answer by Moltmann (written after Rahner's death), 123-24.

19. I am indebted to Fleinert-Jensen's fine chapter on Luther's *theologia crucis* in *Das Kreuz und die Einheit der Kirche*, 19-31.

20. Interpreters debate whether Luther affirmed God's *Alleinwirksamkeit* (God alone is active, is the only Agent in an absolute sense, thus ruling out any form of synergism) or the less extreme *Allwirksamkeit* (God works in all things and is the Agent whose activity encompasses everything—i.e., the universe).

21. Moltmann is aware of the difference between Luther's and his own views. According to Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 72, Luther, in a way, missed the mark in that he did not elaborate a philosophy of the cross or a social critique based on the cross.

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torical succession that is so decisive in biblical perspective. That God as Trinity may be said to be "our God in advance" and intratrinitarian relations be considered the foundation and archetype for creation²² is a precious traditional insight.²³

I confess serious misgivings, however, with the way these assets are used by "crucified God" champions. The most serious problem relates to the deity of the Son. Even in Jüngel's case (he is more subtle and ambiguous than Moltmann),²⁴ the probable interpretation is that Jesus is made the second of the Trinity *as man*, as the man (crucified) with whom God identifies himself, thus defining himself as love, thus differentiating himself as Trinity. Since this event acquires an eternal character, Jüngel can still speak of the eternal Son.²⁵ This is radically opposed to

22. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 347, 384 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 475, 526), with Jesus Christ the archetype, "original image," of creation. Also Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 106, says that "God's being-for-himself makes itself known to us as a being which grounds and makes possible God's being-for-us," and he writes of "reiteration."

23. Thomas Aquinas expresses the thought several times, especially in his early *Scriptum super Libros Sententiarum [magistri Petri Lombardi]*, as quoted and commented upon by Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria College, 2003), 53–70, and *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aren Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 215–16, 239, 343–47.

24. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 239, 247, 255, shows that Moltmann agrees with Hegel on this aspect of the meaning of the Trinity: it introduces the human in God and thus provides the ground for *theopoiēsis*, "divinization." Romans 1:4 is understood in an adoptionistic way (177), and the construction based on Jesus's cry of dereliction (145–53) moves from the perfect faithfulness of the man Jesus to his God to the thesis that, in forsaking Jesus, God has divided himself against himself—the source of the trinitarian distinction.

25. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 37 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 47): God's decision not to be God without man is "the sense of the New Testament statements about the preexistence of the Son of God identified with Jesus"; p. 77 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 102): words of praise for Hegel's interpretation of the incarnation; p. 288 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 394): "The mystery of the God who identifies with the man Jesus is the increase of similarity and nearness between God and man which is *more than mere identity* and which reveals the *concrete difference* between God and man in its surpassing mere identical being. It is *only in this sense* that the Easter confession may be risked, the confession that Jesus Christ is true God and true man" (italics added in the last sentence); the following pages interpret Jesus as the "parable of God"; p. 327 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 447), on the antichrists in 1 John: "Whoever denies the identification of God with the man Jesus cannot be *of God*, which identification expresses itself in that this man merits to be called the *Son of God*. For in this identification, the being of God realizes itself as love"; p. 366 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 498): God's self-distinction occurs for the sake of God's identification with Jesus, according to Goethe's dictum *Nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse* ("No one [can be] against God except God himself," also quoted, p. 119 and p. 346). Jüngel, 329n30 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 450), does not imply a restoration of the Chalcedonian duality of natures but rather offers its radical reinterpretation (also see 367n54).

the truth of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon, which was faithfully defined under the guidance, under the blessed constraints, of the biblical testimony. For all his emphasis on the *communicatio idiomatum*, "communication of properties," Luther explained that "God in his own nature cannot die" and was only able to die through his union with the human creature.²⁶ Luther remained in full accord with Tertullian²⁷ and Constantinople II, which stressed that the "Lord of Glory," true God, was crucified in the flesh (see also the careful wording of Rom. 9:5, that the Christ, who is God above all, blessed for ever, belongs to the race of Israel "as regards the flesh," *to kata sarka*). Direct consequences for the divine nature are not easy to draw from Jesus's sufferings.²⁸

The second major difficulty relates to God's independence from the world if his being is *defined* by a worldly occurrence. Moltmann is ready to let the old concern go, to soften the emphasis on God's freedom in creation, to make some room for the idea of "emanation" and promote "pantheism."²⁹ Jüngel, as Barth also had done, struggles to salvage the freedom and ontological independence of God.³⁰ The question remains whether he *can*. Hegel's shadow hovering over the enterprise does not leave much hope of a satisfactory solution. (I candidly confess that orthodox theology has no easy solution to offer, either: God's decree being eternal, its freedom, as opposed to the necessity of the divine essence, is hard to conceive: from all eternity, the divine decision was made irrevocable; since it is coeternal with God's essence, can it be meaningfully distinguished from it? Scripture, however, constrains us to maintain the distinction, without which any notion of divine "willing" is emptied of content; we reach the edge of our weak powers of understanding, and

26. Martin Luther, *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen*, Weimar Ausgabe 50 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1914), 590, as quoted by Fleinert-Jensen, *Das Kreuz und die Einheit der Kirche*, 23n12.

27. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 64–65 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 85), n. 27 (n. 26 castigates Moltmann's error), correctly perceives Tertullian's position.

28. Even John Stott yielded to Moltmann's influence in a way that called for the fine critique by Donald Cobb, "Les deux natures du Christ au Calvaire," *Hokhma* 67 (1998): 19–44.

29. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Gifford Lectures, 1984–1985 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 80–103, esp. 82: "If we start from the Creator himself, the self-communication of his goodness in love to his creation is not a matter of his free will. It is the self-evident operation of his eternal nature"; p. 89: the difference between Creator and creature, without which creation cannot be thought, is "embraced and comprehended by the greater truth . . . that God is all in all"; pp. 303–4, 312–13, 317–20 relativize Old Testament traditions and maintain pantheism.

30. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 37 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 47); idem, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, e.g., 99.

we bow down obediently before the mystery—which remains mystery even in revelation.)

The third difficulty attaches to the relationship between ontology and history (with roots in Barth). (If God's *being* is constituted or defined by the event in time, this supreme glorification of history is also its destruction.) By doing ontological service, the event is transmuted into ontology itself: eternal, it no longer "happens."³¹ The news of the cross becomes an eternal Idea (e.g., of deity as love). The nemesis is that ontology historicized breeds an ontologized history, which loses the true character of history. The true character of history demands the duality.³²

Akin to the last difficulty, the *principium* question arises: can we derive a proper knowledge of God himself from the event considered as the exclusive locus of revelation? Undoubtedly, a person's actions can be most revealing regarding the person's character and even inner life, but not without a grid and framework of interpretation, not without some prior information available. The mere sight of what happened, the brute factual datum, is not enough; at best we are left with plausible hypotheses. Undoubtedly, the cross reveals God in truth—if we receive the God-given interpretation (1 Cor. 2:13!) together with the factual report. The need is most acute because inferences that might have plausibility in the case of fellow creatures are not certainly applicable to God. It is acute because the event is usually taken to involve both God and man; from the event itself (alone), it is impossible to decide what should be ascribed to God and what to the man. Theologians of the "crucified God" overlook the difficulty, since they make use of the God-given (biblical) interpretation, but they refuse to acknowledge its revelatory status, its intrinsic word-of-God nature and quality, and they adopt a critical stance over it. They thus forfeit the right to use it for theological decision and cannot escape frustrating arbitrariness.

I would plead that only a word spoken by God himself allows us to speak (as we confess, *homologoumen*, what he has said) of God himself. (Whatever we draw from the event remains bound to the event, and we have no authority to claim that it is valid apart from it.) The only "God," then, that can be conceived is "correlative" of some worldly reality (to use Cornelius Van Til's term). Only if God himself testifies about himself may we go beyond. That Jüngel (after Barth) remains a prisoner

31. Such was the complaint of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie* (Cologne: J. Hegner, 1951), 380, as quoted by Henri Bouillard, *Karl Barth* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1957), 2/1:102.

32. Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1986), 60, makes a similar point (against historicism): "When history is made the categorical matrix for all meaning and value, it cannot then be taken seriously as history."

of the correlation appears from his rejection of the *logos asarkos* as "abstract",³³ so must it be for his method, drawn from or out of (*abstrahere*) the event.

A theology of the cross, yes—but as interpreted under the guidance of all the Scriptures, the abiding word of God written!

God Capable of the Cross

With the issues of method and principle somewhat clarified (some controversial elaboration could not be avoided), I may sketch in more succinct form what profit in the knowledge of God we can gain from consideration of the cross—as biblically interpreted. Several passages explicitly refer to the demonstration of divine attributes in and through the event (e.g., divine righteousness, Rom. 3:25–26; love, Rom. 5:8), and I shall follow this path, but another line of inquiry also seems legitimate and nearer to the "crucified God" discussions: how was God *capable* of acquiring his church *by his own blood* (Acts 20:28)—perhaps the nearest biblical equivalent to the statement "God was crucified"?

The attempt to answer this question entails inferring from actuality to possibility, a procedure, I grant, fraught with danger. The major role the category of the "possible," in relationship with a hypostasized nothingness (*das Nichts*), plays in Jüngel's theology is worth a warning. Aristotle's category, the mongrel semireality (*to mē on*) between being and nonbeing worthy of the names,³⁴ smacks of mythology and seems to be alien to Scripture. At the same time, the theme of divine *power* is prominent indeed. (Perhaps Karl Barth's distinction between *potestas*, the rightful power of God, and indefinite *potentia*, of which Barth suggests we should be rather suspicious,³⁵ points to the sounder approach.) Since God himself teaches us that he *can* do what he does, we are free,

33. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 78 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 103).

34. One remembers that the Greek language offers two particles for negation: one generally weaker (*mē*) and one stronger (*ou/ouklouch*). When the participle "being" is weakly negated, with *mē*, the phrase may be used for the idea of the "possible" as an intermediate category, that which does not exist actually (not being) and yet is not nothing. Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 243, eloquently explains: "We have thus found something that does not deserve to be called being, on which that title can be bestowed only in a secondary and improper sense, as an alms, so to speak, but which nevertheless is real. It is what philosophers term *potency* or *potentiality*."

35. Karl Barth, *Réalité de l'homme nouveau: Trois conférences suivies d'entretiens* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1964), 95. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 50, comments on this theme in Barth (quoting from Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957], II/1:40, 49, 61–62) that God's ability is actually present as *Macht*, not as Aristotelian *dynamis* on contrasted with *energeia on*.

under biblical control, to ask about the traits that made the cross possible for God.

God cannot die in his own (divine) nature. This conviction, which, as we saw, was maintained in Luther's theology of the cross and which Hegel overthrew, has a strong scriptural backing. This we maintain against the (really Hegelian) theologies of the "crucified God." It is not only the original statement of Habakkuk 1:12a, *lō' tāmūt*, "Thou diest not" (observing the *tiqqūn sōpērīm*)³⁶ and the clear implication of 1 Timothy 6:13-15; it should certainly, in the vision of the Bible, be understood as entailed by the title of the living God, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who has life in himself, I AM. For such a God, to die would be tantamount to denying himself, a forbidden thought (2 Tim. 2:13).

In order to die, God had to take on another nature without losing his own; therefore he must be capable of doing so. The New Testament and church doctrine of the incarnation follows this logic, which Anselm developed in his *Cur Deus homo* (*Why God Became Man*). It implies a union, without change and confusion, of the two natures, divine and human. If deity had been lost (as in the kenotic heresy), the one who died would no longer have been God; if humanity had been divinized, he could not have died. Contrary to widespread opinions, the New Testament already reflects the thought of the actual duality within the union. The argument of Hebrews 1-2 is built on this basis. Paul intimates the same in several passages, including Philippians 2:5-11, which does not say that Christ put off his *morphē theou* ("form of God"; the present participle *hyparchōn*, which just precedes the statement of his self-divesting and means "being" in the "form [i.e., nature or condition or mode of existence] of God," rather suggests the permanence of the divine "form," which, then, must coexist with that of serving humanity); Romans 1:3-4; Romans 9:5, already mentioned; Colossians 1:15-20 with its two panels, Christ as the divine Wisdom of Proverbs 8:22-31 in verses 15-17 (the Mediator of the first creation) and as the New Adam in verses 18-20; and Colossians 2:9. The prologue of the Fourth Gospel forcefully expresses the idea: though he was made flesh, the *logos* remains *monogenēs theos*, "God only-begotten" (John 1:18).³⁷

The union of two created natures would not be possible without mixture; two sets of properties (*quidditates*) of the same ontological rank

36. A note which ancient scribes left in a margin indicating that they changed the text to avoid something incongruous in synagogue reading; it was not a fraud, not even a pious fraud, since they warn about the change.

37. Many scholars today criticize the traditional rendering of *monogenēs*, "only-begotten," *unigenitus*, arguing that it does not derive from *gennaō*, "beget." This is true of its etymology; in usage, however, it is very often linked with the genealogical relationship, and in the New Testament it is used only for the Son (we never read of a *monogenēs* brother).

would produce another set (one nature). Only the Creator, in his unique relationship with his creature, can protect the duality.

The mystery (we can hardly probe the "how") implies Rahner's proposal on divine immutability: God able to change in another. It also implies the original creation scheme: the world totally dependent on God's will and power and yet distinct from God; God the only *archē* of the world and yet distinct and independent from it. For dualism, with the world alien to God, the incarnation is either impossible or involves an alienation of God; not so in biblical, creational perspective, for God comes to his own. For monism, the incarnation cannot be free, and ultimately the duality of natures is resorbed.

The distinction between person and nature becomes foundational. If the two natures are united without merging, a third term appears to be required. This insight enabled orthodoxy in the fifth century to move beyond the disastrous opposition of Nestorian and monophysite Christologies, and so the distinct concept of the "person" emerged. Wolfhart Pannenberg, among others, has keenly perceived the Christian origin of this concept, which moderns tend to consider a self-evident datum.³⁸ The two natures are united in the person, or hypostasis, of the Son, which we must distinguish from deity as such (the essence). ✓

Conceptual elaboration had to wait for a later stage, but we can argue that the New Testament already presupposes the distinction between nature and person inasmuch as it refers to the two natures (even in conscious thematization) and *never* suggests the presence of two persons in Christ, whose "I" is one. The one who dissolves (*Iyei*) Jesus Christ is of the antichrist (the fascinating reading of some witnesses in 1 John 4:3). } ✓

The unity of the person is the foundation of the *communicatio idiomatum* in the classical sense (from which Luther departed), which Scripture freely practices, most clearly in Acts 20:28 and 1 Corinthians 2:8, and which validates the phrase "the crucified God."

Persons in the Godhead can be viewed only as subsisting relations. The distinction between person and nature also arises when Jesus Christ and his Father appear as two persons and the same deity (which can exist only once in monotheism) is ascribed to both; a plurality in the one Godhead is revealed. Presumably, it would be hard to conceive of a distinction between person and deity with one divine person only, but Scripture makes it clear that this is not the case. There are several

38. W. Pannenberg, e.g., thus introduces his article "Person" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt Galling et al., 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1961), 5:230: "Was man heute mit dem Wort [erson] bezeichnet, dürfte der Menschheit erst durch das Christentum erschlossen worden sein. Die Antike unterschied noch nicht P[erson] von (geistiger) Individualität (so *hypostasis*; lat. *persona* bezeichnet die Maske, dann die Rolle eines Schauspielers, von da aus auch soziale Rolle und Charakter)."

persons of the one God, and the language of the "crucified God" must be explained as dealing with God the Son, whom God the Father has sent that he may take on human flesh and die in his flesh, in the weakness proper to human flesh (2 Cor. 13:4).

The oneness of the true God (*ehād*, Deut. 6:4) leaves only one option for persons sharing in absolute unity: they can distinguish from one another as *relations*. This insight of the Cappadocian fathers, Augustine, and the whole Catholic and Protestant tradition agrees with whatever hints may be found in Scripture on this subject. The data that compel us to distinguish between Father and Son (as God) are concerned with, and reveal, their mutual relations (most abundantly in the Fourth Gospel). God is capable of the cross as the God of trinitarian and christological orthodoxy.

God Revealed by Means of the Cross

In the central event of the cross, biblically considered, all of God's attributes—which are one—shine forth in one way or other. Since however, Scripture, by its own use, validates the thought of their diversity (*in ratione, cum fundamento in re*),³⁹ we may focus on some of them.

The cross and sovereign singularity. Scripture often proclaims that the cross, the apparent failure of God, was the outworking of his sovereign purpose (as early as Acts 2:23 and 4:27–28). The theme of fulfilled prophecy and the necessity that it be fulfilled highlight this aspect of the cross. The most extensive presentations of God's plan put the cross in central position (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:20; Rev. 5:6, and almost countless other texts). In the cross, God displayed the hidden determination of his wisdom in mystery (1 Cor. 2:7–8).

One aspect deserves to be singled out—*singularity*. God chose one small place in the whole universe, one day among myriads of possible days, to reconcile the world unto himself: *there and then*. This has been called "the scandal of particularity" (already for the incarnation), for it irritates the universalizing habits of reason and produces a dissonance in the present interreligious concert. Yet it is the brightest illustration of

39. This formula summarizes a middle solution (such as Aquinas's) in medieval debates: divine attributes are distinct for our intellectual apprehension, and validly so because the diversity is grounded in the reality of the divine being, though in this reality they are inseparable descriptions of the one essence of deity. This rules out, on the left, falsely humble agnosticism (the attributes are diverse for us but not in God, which means that our God-talk and that of the Bible are devoid of all true knowledge) and, on the right, the naive opinion (sometimes found in sophisticated garb) that our thought univocally corresponds to God's reality (forgetting God's transcendence and the limitations of our thought, 1 Cor. 13:12).

the sovereign freedom of a God who can choose any place and any time because he is not bound by cosmic regularities. He is the noncorrelative God. Such is the logic of Exodus 19:5: "Out of all the nations, you will be my special possession, because the whole earth is mine" (the particle used, *kî*, may very seldom bear an adversative meaning, but its usual one is causal, "for," "because," and I argue that it is appropriate here; accordingly, the Septuagint renders *gar* and the Vulgate has *enim*).

The cross and overflowing righteousness. Romans 3:25–26 insists on the demonstration (*endeixis*) of God's righteousness in the event of Calvary, and the prevalence of judicial language in the apostolic preaching of the cross (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19–21) justifies an emphasis on this attribute or dimension of God's relationship with humankind.

In the light of convincing scholarly statements, I reach the conclusion that the root meaning of "righteousness," "justice" in the Bible is conformity to a norm, with an irreducible retributive element, and that the *dikaiosynē* exhibited on the cross according to Romans 3 is the satisfaction of the demands of retributive justice. Through the sacrificial substitution of the Redeemer for those who had deserved to die—through Christ's death on the cross—God shows himself righteous (inflicting the retribution of sins) and the justifier (acquitter) of the guilty who benefit from Christ's intervention.⁴⁰ This understanding best accounts for the range of biblical texts.

This is not to deny, however, the restorative facet of biblical righteousness/justice, which brings it very near to salvation, *šālôm*, and deliverance in many contexts. Justification through the blood of the cross is reconciliation and pacification (Col. 1:20), bringing back whoever takes refuge in Christ through faith in his name in conformity with the supreme norm of reality, in harmony with God's ordering of things (with cosmic extension, especially as the object of hope; cf. James 1:18, where the regenerate are the *aparchē* ["firstfruits"] of all creatures, and Rom. 8).

40. On the notion of righteousness, I found most helpful Mark A. Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/140 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 415–42. Likewise, on Rom. 3, Simon G. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/181 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 147–84; the whole volume is relevant to the present topic, especially the contributions of Douglas J. Moo, "Israel and the Law in Romans 5–11: Interaction with the New Perspective," 185–216; and Moisés Silva, "Faith versus Works of Law in Galatians," 217–48; one can see my own remarks on righteousness in Henri Blocher, "Justification of the Ungodly (*sola fide*): Theological Reflections," 473–82.

Retribution and restoration are not mutually exclusive; the good news is the retribution, and the basis of restoration is in the person of the head and substitute. (It would be attractive to draw from Isa. 10:22 the image of the "overflow" of righteousness for this restoration effect, but exegetically the overflow seems to characterize judgment in that verse; the Septuagint loses the image, and Paul quotes in Rom. 9:27-28 from the Septuagint.)

The cross and unsurpassed love. Whether explicitly (Rom. 5:8) or more implicitly (John 3:16, though 1 John 4:10 shows that the gift and sending of the Son are orientated toward his sacrificial death), Scripture abundantly testifies to the tie that binds the cross and God's love for us. It was the *telos* of the love of God the Son for his own (John 13:1), a love greater than which cannot be conceived (John 15:13). It must be stressed that in strict orthodoxy the person of God the Son suffered and died; he did so through the possibilities of his human nature, but he was the subject to whom action and passion are ascribed.⁴¹ Since the Father and the Son are one God with only one will (the will of Matt. 26:39, 42 is Jesus's human will), the love shown by Christ's self-giving on the cross cannot be severed from the Father's.

Moltmann stresses that for his theology of the cross, "God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love."⁴² Jüngel even more impressively concentrates his interpretation of the cross—his theology of the cross—on love, and he claims that it entails the incorporation of death, suffering, and nothingness in God's being. Though his formulas may be breathtaking and rapturous in their condensed beauty—one is always impressed when a man speaks about love as if he knew what it is—their dialectical cast may be just a little too facile.⁴³ Perhaps the deepest methodological critique one could raise about Jüngel's achievement is that it rests on the anthropomorphic projection onto God of an analysis—an exceedingly brilliant one—of human love.⁴⁴

41. To use Scholastic terms (precious accuracy!) the nature is only *principium quo*, that by which a person is what that person is; the person is the *principium quod*, the being who is (nominative case). Calvin grasped and expressed this rule of christological thinking and speaking (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.14.3).

42. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227; cf. 253-54, where he is conscious of the Hegelian stamp on his thesis.

43. König, "Le Dieu crucifié?" 94, mentions H. Berkhof's critique of Jüngel's phenomenology of love. König is not happy with Jüngel's definition of love as "the union of death and life for the sake of life" (*God as the Mystery of the World*, 299, 320); love is said to be the unity of power and weakness (206); the name of "this peculiar dialectic of being and nonbeing, of life and death," is love (220); it is fulfilled as selflessness and self-relatedness (298; cf. 322, 369), gift and loss.

44. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 315 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 431), boldly states that what we say of God's love "may not contradict what people experience

principium quo: that by which a person is what that person is. (The nature)

principium quod: The being who is. (The person)

What we may observe, lost in wonder, is that the presence of evil and death has been used by God's wisdom in mystery as the occasion of the greatest love, love greater than which cannot be thought. This does not explain (and therefore excuse, to some degree) evil; it reveals the fullness of God's victory over evil—not by might, not by mere power (as if evil were a creature with a quantum of power), but by love and righteousness.

In order to know God in accordance with the "theology of the cross," Luther affirmed in his twentieth thesis of the Heidelberg Disputation that one must behold the *posteriora Dei*, God's "back" or "back parts," which are seen after he has passed. This condition, laid down in Exodus 33:23, Luther interpreted as the requirement that theology be based on Christology, on the passage among us (beheld by faith) of the Incarnate and Crucified God—whereas natural or speculative theologies try to look God in his face.⁴⁵ Indeed, we begin to know God's love and righteousness, and his sovereignty, when we consider how he passed, in the person of Christ, through the death of the cross.

as love"; cf. 330 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 542-43): "love is God" is "an allowable statement," as Karl Barth also granted. Moltmann also projects onto God what he sees valid at the human level and forcefully expresses: "Love makes life so lively and death so deadly. Conversely, it also makes life so deadly and death lively" (*The Crucified God*, 253); "Love is revealed in hatred and peace in conflict" (18).

45. Quoted by Fleinert-Jensen, *Das Kreuz und die Einheit der Kirche*, 20, and Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 34n51 (*Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, 42). Augustine already had meditated on the verse and identified God's "back, back parts," or *posteriora*, with Christ in his *De Trinitate* II.xvii.28.