

Preface to the Paperback Edition

The theological foundation for Christian hope is the *raising* of the crucified Christ. Anyone who develops a ‘theology of hope’ from this centre will be inescapably reminded of the other side of that foundation: the *cross* of the risen Christ. So after publishing *Theology of Hope*, the logic of my theological approach led me to work more deeply on the remembrance of the crucified Christ. Hope without remembrance leads to illusion, just as, conversely, remembrance without hope can result in resignation.

Of course I had not planned this. I was led to the theology of the cross through reactions to *Theology of Hope* and, even more, through personal participation in the sufferings of those years. Wherever Christian hope makes people active and leads them into the ‘creative discipleship’ of Christ, the contradictions and confutations of the world are painfully experienced. ‘When freedom is near the chains begin to chafe’. One begins to suffer with the victims of injustice and violence. One puts oneself on the side of the persecuted and becomes persecuted oneself. In the years between 1968

and 1972 I discovered something of this both personally and politically. At that time the suffering of friends living under Stalinism in Eastern Europe and under military dictatorships in Latin America and South Korea moved me deeply. In 1970 I wrote,

As well as developing a political theology, I have resolved to think more intensively than I have done up to now about the meaning of the cross of Christ for theology, for the church and for society. In a civilization that glorifies success and happiness and is blind to the sufferings of others, people's eyes can be opened to the truth if they remember that at the centre of the Christian faith stands an unsuccessful, tormented Christ, dying in forsakenness. The recollection that God raised this crucified Christ and made him the hope of the world must lead the churches to break their alliances with the powerful and to enter into the solidarity of the humiliated.¹

The same thing now happened to me that had happened when I was writing *Theology of Hope*. The whole of theology was drawn as if by a magnifying glass into a single focus: *the cross*. I began to see things with the eyes of the Christ dying on the cross. I often used to sit for long periods of time meditating before the crucifix in the Martinskirche in Tübingen. For me the crucified Christ became more and more 'the foundation and criticism of Christian theology'. And for me that meant, whatever can stand before the face of the crucified Christ is true Christian theology. What cannot stand there must disappear. This is especially true of what we say about God. Christ died on the cross with a loud

1. *Umkehr zur Zukunft*, Munich 1970, 14.

cry, which Mark interprets with the words of the twenty-second psalm: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This cry of abandonment is either the end of every theology and every religion, or it is the beginning of a truly Christian theology—and that means a liberating theology. The criticism that emanates from Christ's cross exposes us theologians for what we are, like Job's friends. We want to produce an answer to the question about God with which Christ dies. But he dies with this open question. So a truly Christian theology has to make Jesus' experience of God on the cross the centre of all our ideas about God: that is its foundation.

I began with an interpretation of the *theologia crucis* of the young Luther. I saw that when God reveals himself to us godless men and women, who turn ourselves into proud and unhappy gods, he does not do so through power and glory. He reveals himself through suffering and cross, so he repudiates in us the arrogant man or woman and accepts the sinner in us. But then I turned the question around, and instead of asking just *what God means for us human beings* in the cross of Christ, I asked too *what this human cross of Christ means for God*. I found the answer in the idea of God's passion, which reveals itself in the passion of Christ. What is manifested in the cross is God's suffering of a passionate love for his lost creatures, a suffering prepared for sacrifice.

The idea of *the passion of the passionate God* contraverts the fundamental axiom of Aristotelian, philosophical theology, which was God's essential apathy. The impassibility of God

was an idea cherished by the Greek Fathers (with the exception of Origen) and by the mediaeval theologians. When I began to get beyond this axiom, I discovered links about which I had previously had no idea. My first discovery was the Jewish concept of the pathos of God, which Abraham Heschel found in the prophets; then my attention was drawn to rabbinic and kabbalistic ideas about God's Shekinah in the people of Israel, through which God becomes the companion-in-suffering of his persecuted people. I owe these insights to Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem.

But it was not merely the experiences of the years between 1968 and 1972 that led me to this theology of the cross. In addition, I experienced a very different 'dark night' in my soul, for the pictures of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and horror over the crimes in Auschwitz, had weighed on me and many other people of my generation ever since 1945. Much time passed before we could emerge from the silence that stops the mouths of people over whom the cloud of the victims hangs heavy. It was Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and Jewish theologians who opened our lips. *The Crucified God* was said to be a Christian 'theology after Auschwitz'. That is true, inasmuch as I perceived Golgotha in the shadow of Auschwitz, finding help here in 'Jewish theology after Auschwitz' and especially in Elie Wiesel. Ever since then, the question about God for me has been identical with the cry of the victims for justice and the hunger of the perpetrators for a way back from the path of death.

At the end of the war the theology of God's suffering had already been outlined by the Japanese theologian Kazoh

Kitamori² and by the theologian of the German resistance movement, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. ‘Only the suffering God can help’, wrote Bonhoeffer from his prison cell.³ It was only after I had written *The Crucified God* that I discovered the intense discussion about the passibility or impassibility of God that had been carried on in Anglican theology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but had been completely ignored by German theology.

I found the positive influence of my theology of the cross especially in the Christology of Jon Sobrino, who deepened and sharpened it for the Latin American context.⁴ I have learnt from his theology of the cross, which he not only taught but suffered. A few days ago I received a letter from Robert McAfee Brown, in which he told me the following moving story from San Salvador. On 16 November 1989, six well-known Jesuits, together with their housekeeper and her daughter, were brutally murdered in the university there. The rector of the university, Father Ignacio Ellacuria, was one of them. Jon Sobrino escaped the massacre only because he happened not to be in the country at the time. The letter continues, ‘When the killers were dragging some of the bodies back into the building, as they took one of the bodies into Jon’s room, they hit a bookcase and knocked a book on to the floor, which became drenched with the martyr’s blood. In the morning, when they picked up the book, they found that it was your *The Crucified God*’. This sign and symbol

2. *Theology of the Pain of God*, English translation, 1965.

3. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, English translation, 1977, 361.

4. See his *Christology at the Crossroads. A Latin American Approach*, Orbis 1978.

gives me a great deal to think about. What it says to me is that these martyrs are the seed of the resurrection of a new world. Like Archbishop Oscar Romero, they are the hope of the people: unforgettable, inextinguishable, irresistible.

The translation of *The Crucified God* into many languages brought me into the community of many struggling and suffering brothers and sisters. The book was read in Korean and South African prisons. People working in slums and hospitals wrote to me, as well as people who were themselves suffering under 'the dark night of the soul'. I came into contact with Catholic orders vowed to poverty and the mysticism of the cross, and with Mennonite congregations who are following the path of Jesus. I need not tell it all. What I should like to say is this: even more than *Theology of Hope*, this book brought me into a great company. I believe it is the company of people under the cross. Beneath the cross the boundaries of denominations and cultures collapse. The community of the sufferers and the seekers is an open, inviting community. It is about this community that I am thinking, now that this book appears again, for it is there that I am at home.

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Selected Literature

- P.F. Momose, *Kreuzestheologie. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Jürgen Moltmann. Mit einem Nachwort von Jürgen Moltmann* (Freiburg, 1978; Japanese edition in preparation).
- Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God. Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1985).
- Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
- Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering. An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989).