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Rahner and the Cross: What Kind of Atoning Story Does He Tell?

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Abstract

Classically, Christians have professed the saving efficacy of the cross. Does Karl Rahner? Recent commentary on *Foundations of Christian Faith* has described Rahner as conflating “atonement” generally with penal substitutionary theories of a changing God, as ruling out the redemptive significance of Christ’s death, and as denigrating the normativity of Scripture in order to do so. This article responds to these claims, unfolding Rahner’s soteriology and arguing that he advances a theology of the cross which affirms its saving efficacy, including in the last decade of his work.

In his soteriological writings, Karl Rahner consistently opposes penal versions of atonement theory (e.g. John Calvin) according to which God the Father pours out divine wrath on the crucified Son, who vicariously pays the penalty for human sin. According to Rahner, such theology inevitably distorts the loving character of God, who, he insists, was not placated or cajoled into willing human salvation. “Wherever we find primarily the idea of an angry God who, as it were, has to be conciliated by great effort on the part of Jesus, we have an ultimately unchristian, popular notion of redemption that is incorrect. . . . God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, and it was not because the Son gave himself that an angry God with great effort changed his mind about the world” (Rahner 1988 ET, p. 249). Especially later in his career, Rahner even advised caution about theories of satisfaction (e.g. Anselm of Canterbury),

since he judges that they could easily be misconstrued along the lines of propitiating God (Rahner 1979 ET, p. 208; Rahner 1970 ET, p. 430).¹

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Rahner's own constructive soteriological alternative may steer clear of divine propitiation, but it has garnered plenty of criticism of its own. Balthasar has broadly accused Rahner of failing to sufficiently account for Christ's salvific efficacy in general, while others have made more specific criticisms (Von Balthasar 1994 ET, pp. 273–84). According to Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "major Catholic theologians such as Schillebeeckx and Rahner fail – or refuse – to attribute any intrinsic salvific significance to the cross of Christ." After citing two passages from Schillebeeckx (but none from Rahner), Van Nieuwenhove continues, "emptying the death of Jesus of all salvific power contradicts the New Testament witness (including, in all likelihood, the way Jesus himself viewed his passion) and the ensuing tradition of Christian reflection on the cross." (Van Nieuwenhove 2005, pp. 277–78). More recently in his book *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation*, Khaled Anatolios has reiterated this criticism but in more detail and in conversation with Rahner's texts. Anatolios specifically alleges that while Rahner took New Testament witness about the salvific efficacy of the cross seriously and integrated it into his earlier theology, by the time he wrote *Foundations of Christian Faith* he had dismissed such an idea, thus standing as a prominent part of a wider theological trend of scuttling the idea of atonement (a term which Anatolios uses to signify the saving efficacy of Christ's suffering and death).

After reviewing this critique, I will argue that Anatolios grossly overstates his case and in fact mischaracterizes Rahner's intentions and theology in several respects. To do so, I will unfold

¹ Although we will consider the category of propitiation more below, Rahner's opposition to the idea concerns the notion of God being somehow swayed by sacrifice.

Rahner's own answer to the question of the cross's role in human salvation, paying special attention to *Foundations*.² My own exposition of his soteriology is grounded on Rahner's suggestion that Jesus first and foremost accomplishes salvation in his person – he *is* salvation – but not in a way that sidelines Jesus' actions. On the contrary, for Rahner, Christ's own free, human self-disposal occurs in a final and summative way on the cross, thus establishing Jesus as the site of the world's reconciliation with God.

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I. Rahner's Alleged Antipathy to Atonement

In his recent and important book *Deification Through the Cross*, Khaled Anatolios laments that Christians today are largely befuddled by the idea of “salvation,” despite the idea being (at least historically) central to Christianity. What is the objective content of the salvation announced in the Gospel? How, in a world so broken as ours, can Christians claim with joy that this world is “saved”? Before Anatolios tackles these questions themselves, he sets out in the book's introduction to account for why Christians struggle so much with these questions today (Anatolios 2020, p. 1).

One factor obscuring modern Christians' grasp of salvation, according to Anatolios, is a widespread reluctance to identify Jesus' suffering and death as salvific. Instead, many prefer to locate Jesus' saving efficacy on sites other than Golgotha, e.g. Jesus' ministry, proclamation of God's Reign, and/or resurrection. Anatolios supports his diagnosis by citing several figures who explicitly and boldly target the cross's saving efficacy (“atonement”), like Stephen Finlan and Delores Williams. But, according to his analysis, the movement of opposition to atonement comes in more “moderate” and “subtle” forms as well. Karl Rahner, he claims, is one such

² For a defense of Rahner's theology of the cross focused on Rahner's *Spiritual Exercises* (1965), see Malcolm 2005.

example, and he dedicates the better part of his “The Eclipse of Atonement” subsection to analyzing Rahner’s alleged rejection of atonement (pp. 2–7).

The central conclusion of this analysis is that although Rahner recognizes the salvific value of the cross earlier in his career (e.g. *On the Theology of Death*, 1958), he allegedly jettisons this idea in *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1976); to do so, Rahner employs (questionable) historical critical exegesis to distance the notion of an atoning death from Jesus himself and so minimize the importance of the New Testament’s undeniable testimony of the cross’s saving efficacy. In this way, Anatolios locates Rahner within a modern trajectory of antagonism toward the cross as atoning. It is worth exploring the particulars of this critical exposition of Rahner, allowing Anatolios to speak in his own words.

Before treating Rahner as a case study, Anatolios observes that antipathy toward the notion (or better, notions) of atonement is almost always linked to a rejection of penal substitutionary atonement. First, he explains, opponents of this penal theory worry that

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its story of placating a wrathful God is “irreconcilable with the characterization of God otherwise professed by Christians, . . . a loving and forgiving God who grants salvation freely from no other motive, and on no other grounds, than his own love and mercy” (p. 3). Second, such opponents extend their rejection of this specific, penal theory to the classical confession of the cross’s salvific efficacy more generally. Anatolios rightly notes that there are plenty of traditional theories of atonement, e.g. versions of sacrifice and satisfaction, that do not trade on the penal idea of propitiation, but which are nevertheless often assumed to operate on the same rationale and are likewise rejected.

Denying the salvific efficacy of the cross raises at least two problems: how *does* Christ effect salvation, then, and what of the bevy of New Testament (especially Pauline) texts that affirm Christ's death as salvific? To the first, Anatolios notes that modern theologians frequently "transfer this causality to Christ's proclamation, in word and deed, of the kingdom of God," leaving his death as an unfortunate side effect of his steadfast determination to proclaim God's Reign (p. 3). To the second, Anatolios explains that theologians embarrassed by such texts minimize their importance in one way or another. The more cavalier readers simply "excise" texts which confess salvation through the cross (up to "39 percent of the NT"), a move so bold that Anatolios considers it to fall short of genuine "Christian theology" (p. 4). But more discreet theologians distinguish between Jesus' own self-understanding of his death (allegedly accessed through historical critical readings) and the "later" New Testament attestations of this death's redemptive value, with the latter's "late" status serving as a pretense to denigrate them. Anatolios identifies Rahner as one such theologian.

While Rahner admits that the New Testament proclaims Christ's death as saving, Anatolios alleges that

this admission does not so much stimulate Rahner to a creative grappling with these texts as provoke him to denigrate their normativity. On the surface, the way [Rahner] goes about this denigration is more sophisticated and subtle than the outright dismissal of "39 percent" of the New Testament. But, arguably, the essential procedure is not that much different. The sophistication comes about only in the method of dismissal, not in the fact of the dismissal. (p. 4)

On Anatolios's reading of *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner distances "the pre-resurrection Jesus" from the notion of "expiatory sacrifice" in order to utilize this gap "as warrant for simply dismissing such an interpretation" (p. 5; see also pp. 25–26).

Moreover, Anatolios alleges, Rahner not only "reject[s] . . . the conception of 'expiatory sacrifice,'" but he in fact "conflat[es] . . . all understandings of atonement within an implicit penal framework" (p. 4). Indeed, Rahner "exemplifies the pattern we have identified of implicitly identifying any conception of the salvific efficacy of Christ's suffering and death as 'penal.' Rahner presumes that the New Testament notion of 'expiatory sacrifice' is intelligible only in terms of putative ancient conceptions of 'propitiating the deity,'" i.e., of changing God's mind, a problematic idea according to which "the initiative of salvation does not come from God" and the believer's freedom is bypassed in a Father-Son transaction (p. 5). Anatolios concludes his critical evaluation of Rahner's soteriology in *Foundations* by stating:

Rahner's treatment does not leave any space for the possibility of an affirmation of the New Testament teaching on the 'redemptive significance of the death of Jesus' as bringing about 'a salvific relationship between God and man' that is not liable to the pitfalls he caricatures. He seems to rule out a priori a conception of the atonement in which God does not change his mind in reaction to the death of Jesus but rather enacts his unchangeable love in the face of human sin by ordaining Jesus's death on the cross as the means by which sin is overcome and humanity is offered a reconciliation with God that is received through each individual's freedom. (p. 6)

It bears repeating that Anatolios's criticism here concerns Rahner's writing in *Foundations*, specifically. He acknowledges that in Rahner's earlier work, specifically his *On the Theology of Death*, "Rahner has no trouble affirming that Christ's salvific death does objectively change the

situation between God and humanity, even if it does not change God's mind." However, *Foundations* marks "the transition from a tone of creative reinterpretation of the scriptural material to that of caricatured dismissal" (p. 7).

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II. Rahner on Redemption

"Caricature," as it turns out, is a fitting descriptor for Anatolios's own exposition of Rahner's soteriological account of Jesus Christ and atonement in *Foundations*. As a caricature, it bears a resemblance to some features. For instance, it is true that Rahner distinguishes between later New Testament ideas about the cross, like expiatory sacrifice, and the pre-resurrection Jesus' own understanding of his death. It is also true Rahner's writing about soteriological ideas, particularly (Anselmian) satisfaction theory, evolved from the 1950s to his writing of *Foundations* two decades later.

However, as a caricature, it also grossly exaggerates these elements in distorting and unrealistic ways. Rahner never appeals to the pre-Easter Jesus' own conception of his death as strategy for jettisoning expiatory sacrifice (*Sühneopfer*). As we will see, his theological qualm is not with expiation or atonement (*Sühne*), which he treats as a broad genus with both legitimate and illegitimate species, but with the specific idea of God-changing propitiation. Likewise, despite his increasing wariness of satisfaction theory over time, Rahner's own preferred, basic soteriological framework remains remarkably consistent throughout his career, including in *Foundations*: salvation is grounded in Jesus' saving person, *in* whom humans encounter God and whose actions (e.g. his words, his healings, his death) have a subservient redemptive role, namely, establishing and facilitating union with the saving locus that Jesus himself *is*.

Finally, in some ways Anatolios's treatment of Rahner's soteriology is unrecognizable when compared to the real thing, even by the standards of a caricature. Most notably, Rahner

does *not* rule out the ideas of (i.) Jesus' death being redemptive or of (ii.) non-propitiatory versions of atonement. On the contrary, in *Foundations* he explicitly advances these ideas and offers a creative framework for affirming them in a way that clearly specifies God as the *origin* (rather than the *object*) of Jesus' saving work. Let us examine Rahner's own writing on the subject, focusing on *Foundations* but having recourse to other writings (contemporary to *Foundations* as well as some earlier material) to situate his mature work.³

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a. Evaluating the Contentions

At this point a quick terminological note is necessary. Soteriology involves many terms which some theologians treat as synonyms and which for others have nuanced peculiarities which can carry enormous weight. This frustrating fact is true in English as well as in Rahner's own German language. Three such terms operative here are atonement, expiation, and propitiation, all of which have theological connections to the Greek (Septuagint and New Testament) term *hilasterion*, which in turn translates the Hebrew term, *KPR* (as in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement). Translations of Rahner's writings are not entirely consistent, but for the most part the English terms "atonement" and "expiation" tend to translate the German noun *Sühne* while "propitiation" and sometimes "reconciliation" are used for *Versöhnung*.

Why might these distinctions matter, theologically speaking? For Rahner's fellow (but English-speaking) Jesuit Gerald O'Collins, these terms are anything but interchangeable. In O'Collins's usage, *propitiation* signals a sacrificial action in which God is the object who is placated by human subjects (as in traditional Greek Pagan sacrifice), whereas *expiation* indicates

³ Although *Foundations* was published in German in 1976, much of its sixth chapter – including the sections analyzed here – were previously published four years earlier in *Christologie: Systematisch und exegetisch* (Rahner & Thüsing, 1972); see Fischer 2010.

a reverse process by which God acts to cleanse human objects (as in ancient Jewish ritual) (O'Collins, pp. 15–18).⁴ Let us turn to Rahner's own treatment of expiatory sacrifice and propitiation with the possibility of such distinctions in mind.

In the section of *Foundations* treated by Anatolios, Rahner observes that the New Testament clearly regards the death of Jesus as causing our salvation. How does it do so, he asks? “[A]mong other ways,” Rahner remarks, is “that of a sacrifice of his blood” which some in “the New Testament milieu” (notably, not the New Testament *itself!*) interpreted as “the idea of propitiating the divinity [*Versöhnung der Gottheit*].” He then proceeds to criticize propitiatory sacrifice on two counts, first because it “offers little help to us today” in our own milieu, and also because there is no clear connection between this idea and Jesus' own experience of death (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 282).

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Taking up the first point, Rahner launches into a broader warning about “the general idea of sacrifice,” arguing that correct intelligible articulations of sacrifice are “not easy,” especially if we (rightly) insist that “God's mind cannot be ‘changed,’ that in salvation all the initiatives proceed from God himself (and the New Testament is aware of this too), and finally that all real salvation can only be understood as taking place in the exercise of each individual's freedom” (p. 282). Nevertheless, he considers several characteristics which could mark one such “correct” account of sacrifice (the details of which resemble Anselm's satisfaction theory),⁵ noting that

⁴ Atonement, O'Collins explains, classically meant a reconciliation – “at-one-ment” – of two previously estranged parties, God and humanity, though over the centuries it came to more narrowly emphasize the costly means by which this restoration occurs (p. 11).

⁵ Rahner states that if these characteristics (namely, that the sacrifice is “a free act of obedience on Jesus' part,” that God makes this act of obedience possible through “God's own free initiative” and thus “gives the world the possibility of making satisfaction,” and that the resulting grace is the condition for “appropriating God's salvation freely”) are met, “then one has probably said what's correct” [*so hat man wohl Richtiges gesagt*] (p. 283, translation slightly adjusted).

such a nuanced account “has not only explained the notion of an expiatory sacrifice [*Sühneopfer*],” but “has also criticized it.” Elaborating, he returns to the troubled idea of propitiation [*Versöhnung*], insisting that on a correct account of sacrifice, God’s love is not the consequence of some propitiating act – indeed, the only way to use this terminology (which Rahner seems to do with tongue-in-cheek repetition of the term) is to speak of God as a self-propitiating propitiator.⁶ Rahner’s overarching point is that, soteriologically speaking, God is best seen as an originator rather than an object. Rahner closes this paragraph by reiterating that a correct (satisfaction-esque) account of sacrifice must also account for “the connection (and this is not doubt that there is one) between the death of Christ as God’s grace and our freedom as liberated by grace” with more precision, since this connection would allow a better understanding of “the salvific efficacy of Jesus’ death for us” (p. 283). Notably, he never denies the cross as saving, nor does he rule out sacrifice – difficult as it may be to articulate correctly – as impossible.⁷

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Taking up the second point, Rahner notes that whether the pre-resurrection Jesus understood his own death as an expiatory sacrifice (*Sühneopfer*) remains a disputed historical question, one that he judged ought to be left open earlier in *Foundations*.⁸ Moreover, he remarks,

⁶ For the sake of rendering the same German term consistently, I have used “propitiation” to translate all instances of *Versöhnung* here. The translator of *Foundations*, William Dych, has switched from “propitiation” to “reconciliation”: “For in this [correct] explanation it is precisely a God who loves the sinner originally and without reasons who is the cause of his reconciliation. Hence God is reconciled as one reconciled by himself” (p. 283). The original German reads, “Denn in dieser Erklärung wird ein gerade den Sunder ursprünglich und grundlos liebender Gott die Ursache seiner Versöhnung, also als ein von sich selbst her Versöhnter versöhnt” (*Grundkurs des Glaubens* p. 277).

⁷ The difficulty Rahner anticipates seems to be more practical than theological in nature. That is, Rahner worries about the intelligibility of “sacrifice” language in his day, laden as it is with propitiatory and even mythological connotations. See the rhetorical questioning along these lines in “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” p. 175, as well as his reflection on terminology in “Faith as Courage” p. 214.

⁸ “The pre-resurrection Jesus went to meet his death freely and, on the level of his explicit consciousness, deemed it at least the fate of a prophet. In his eyes this fate did not disavow his message or himself Rather this fate

even if Jesus did understand his death as a *Sühneopfer*, “it is still not clear what exactly this is supposed to mean” (p. 283).

At this point, it is worth revisiting two of Anatolios’s criticisms, each of which corresponds to these two points. First, does Rahner “reject” expiatory sacrifice by conflating it – and all accounts of atonement – with penal theories of God-changing propitiation? Rahner certainly has no time for soteriological theories of changing God’s mind, but the passages above demand a negative answer. In them, Rahner treats *Sühne* (expiation, atonement) as broad term, something like a genus, while God-changing propitiation remains for him a narrower, problematic species – something like *Sühne* gone awry. After all, Rahner admits that correct (albeit difficult) accounts of *Sühneopfer* are possible, so long as this notion is “not only explained” but “also criticized.” And the weight of such criticism, for Rahner, falls on ruling out changes in God’s mind. We will consider additional textual evidence for *Sühne* as a broader category of atonement below, but regardless, it is clear from his consideration of “correct” satisfaction-esque accounts that Rahner does not reject expiatory sacrifice out of hand, ripe as he may consider it to be for misconstrual along propitiatory lines.

Anatolios also criticizes Rahner for distancing Jesus’ own understanding of his death from expiatory sacrifice, which he suggests can be regarded as a later New Testament theory. Why does Rahner do so? Is it in fact a pretense to “denigrate” and “dismiss” those New Testament texts as lacking normativity? Such a reading seems, at best,

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remained hidden in the intention of God which Jesus new to be a forgiving closeness to the world If one maintains this as a minimal historical assertion, we can leave open here the historical question whether the pre-resurrection Jesus himself already interpreted his death explicitly as an ‘expiatory sacrifice’ [*Sühneopfer*] for the world” (p. 254).

an exaggeration. It certainly sits uncomfortably with Rahner's stated intentions just pages earlier in *Foundations*. Discussing the method of uncovering early christological strata, he aspires less toward distancing himself from scriptural (and conciliar) norms, and more toward their integration: "To inquire in this way back behind the explicit New Testament Christology does not mean that in doing so we may not also allow ourselves to be guided by this developed Christology. One gets to know the blossom from the root *and vice versa*." Continuing, he remarks, "For the circle between original experience and interpretation is not to be eliminated, but is to be recaptured as intelligibly as possible" (pp. 265, 266).

But if the integrity of such a flower, circle, etc. is Rahner's ideal, then why appeal to a distance at all, as we saw him do above? The answer, as Rahner explains earlier in *Foundations*, is to reconfigure the place of Scripture's idea of expiatory sacrifice. In other words, it is not about "dismissing" it but rather positioning it properly vis-à-vis other soteriological ideas.

Rahner explains:

[I]n the first place, by freely accepting the fate of death Jesus surrenders himself precisely to the unforeseen and incalculable possibilities of his existence; and secondly, Jesus maintains in death his unique claim of an identity between his message and his person in the hope that in this death he will be vindicated by God with regard to his claim. But this means that his death is an atonement [*Sühne*] for the sins of the world and was adequately consummated as such. This presupposes that the Pauline doctrine of redemption is understood as a legitimate [*berechtigte*] but secondary interpretation of the fact that in the death and resurrection of Jesus God's salvific will reaches its historical manifestation as victorious and irreversible, and thereby is itself definitively present in the world. Hence this presupposes, in other words, that this 'expiatory sacrifice' [*Sühneopfer*] itself is

interpreted in a theologically correct [*richtig*] way and is not misinterpreted as “changing the mind” of an angry God. (p. 255)

This remarkable passage presents a slew of problems for Anatolios’s exposition. First, Rahner explicitly affirms – contra Anatolios – that Jesus’ death atones for the sins of the world. We will explore in more detail *how* he imagines such an atonement to function shortly. And, of course, such constructive soteriological efforts are fair game for

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criticism. But to claim that Rahner refuses even to engage in such creative efforts and that he rules out atonement *a priori* is wildly unfair.

Moreover, we see once again that Rahner does not reject “expiatory sacrifice” as inevitably collapsing into God-changing propitiation. On the contrary, treating *Sühneopfer* as a broad genus, Rahner insists that expiatory sacrifice be interpreted in a theologically correct, non-propitiatory way. Finally, Rahner makes clear that he’s not aiming to dismiss NT (here, Pauline) texts supporting expiatory sacrifice. His aim is to properly situate such language about the cross in a “secondary,” derivative theological position. Admittedly, it is fair to question what impact such a “secondary” position has on the texts’ normativity.⁹ Even so, Rahner’s work here is a far cry from tacitly burying portions of Scripture in an effort to deny the saving efficacy of Christ’s death. Rahner’s point is that while it is “correct” and “legitimate” to speak of the cross as

⁹ Rahner’s language about “not absolutely dispensable” later in *Foundations* especially raises fair questions about normativity. There, he writes that “the ‘late’ soteriology in the New Testament when correctly understood [*richtig verstanden!*] is a legitimate [*berechtigete*], but nevertheless somewhat secondary and derivative expression of the salvific significance of the death of Jesus. This is so because it works with concepts which are applied extrinsically as a possible but not absolutely indispensable interpretation of the original experience of this salvific significance” (p. 284).

salvific, indeed as expiatory, it is best to do so in light of a more fundamental Christological-soteriological insight.¹⁰

b. How does the Cross Save for Rahner?

So if expiatory sacrifice is to occupy a secondary place in Rahner's theology of the cross, what insight occupies the *primary* spot? More generally,

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what does Rahner mean when he says that the cross atones for human sin, that on it Jesus saves humanity? Articulations of Rahner's soteriology usually focus on his theory of *das Realsymbol*, which is entirely appropriate and accurate to do.¹¹ Indeed, Rahner himself specifically analyzes the cross in *realsymbolisch* terms in an article, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation" (1975), published just a year before *Foundations*.¹² Rather than retread this familiar course, I would like here to highlight parts of Rahner's writing that chart a complementary path through that same territory.¹³ This path avoids some of the tricky terrain of his technical *Symbol*

¹⁰ Compare Rahner one year earlier in "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," where he criticizes something like "moral influence" theory as insufficient "since, according to Paul's notion of the saving effect of the cross, the death of Jesus is set within the category of sacrifice," rather than simply "convinc[ing] us of the love and forgiveness of God." Rahner continues, "However we may here with caution assert that the Pauline ideas of 'sacrifice', 'ransom', 'reconciliation through blood' do not reflect the original understanding of the saving significance of the Cross of Jesus for all men; they are legitimate ideas but they are secondary notions which must be explained in the light of the primary and original data and are aimed to bring home the significance of Christ's death for our salvation. In other cultures and historical periods such ideas do not so easily achieve this goal, even if we do not mean to imply by this that, for us today for example, these models of thought should be entirely rejected" (p. 211).

¹¹ For Rahner's systematic treatment of *das Realsymbol*, see his article "The Theology of the Symbol." For secondary treatments of Rahner's soteriology from this angle, see Wong 1984, Edwards 1986, and Peterson 2017.

¹² His core proposal about the cross in that article states: "We may assert the following: the cross (together with the resurrection of Jesus) has a primary sacramental causality for the salvation of all men, in so far as it mediates salvation to man by means of salvific grace which is universally operative in the world. It is the sign of this grace and of its victorious and irreversible activity in the world. The effectiveness of the cross is based on the fact that it is the primary sacramental sign of grace" (p. 212).

¹³ I borrow this "paths" language from Rahner himself, who prefaced the *realsymbolisch* proposal just described by stating, "To resolve this dilemma one may pursue a number of paths. Here we will choose one which discloses the causality of Jesus' death we are seeking with a concept which is familiar in a different theological context and has been extensively investigated..." (p. 212).

language and its accompanying causality, which, while likewise providing Rahner with tools for successfully affirming the cross's salvific efficacy, is nuanced and is itself open to being misconstrued.

The trailhead for this path occurs a bit later in *Foundations* where Rahner calls for a new soteriological trajectory, explicitly setting out a program he has built toward throughout the work. This program calls for two intimately linked shifts. The first shift is away from excessive individualism and toward a robust sense of mutual interdependence, or as he calls it elsewhere, “intercommunicative existence” and life in a “single field of unlimited solidarity” (Rahner 1972 ET, *passim*; 1988b ET, p. 268). Gesturing toward this idea a bit earlier in *Foundations*, he writes that “human history is a *single* history, and that the destiny of one person has significance for others” (p. 283, emphasis original). Elsewhere, he calls this one-to-many relationship *Repräsentation* (Rahner & Vorgrimler 1965 ET, pp. 404–05). This idea suffuses Pauline thought but is underappreciated today. Consider, for instance, the first and second Adams’ impact upon other humans

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(Rom 5:12-6:11; 1Cor 15:21-22), membership in Christ’s body (1Cor 6:14-20; 12:12-27) and more general “in Christ” language (2Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20; Eph 1-2).

The second shift builds on the first and concerns the relationship between Jesus’ person and work. On an individualist framework, the impact of one person on another can be best articulated in what a person *does* for another, perhaps in their place [*Stellvertretung*]. Accordingly, applied soteriologically, Jesus’ impact thus comes primarily by way *acting*, though one might stipulate that he requires a divine nature in order for the act to be sufficiently valuable (as in Anselm). On such an act-centered account, Jesus’ *being* plays a subservient role as the

condition for the possibility of the primary salvific work (e.g. making satisfaction). Rahner calls for flipping this paradigm on its head as he describes the two shifts together.

Perhaps because of western individualism, the idea of an “assumption” of the *whole* human race *in* the individual human reality of Jesus is rather foreign to their way of thinking. Within this horizon of understanding, then, the hypostatic union is the constitution of a person who *performs* redemptive activity, provided that his actions are moral and that his accomplishment is accepted by God as representative [*stellvertretend*] for the human race. But he does not mean in his very *being* salvation, redeemer and satisfaction. But from the perspective of scriptural statements and of our own understanding today, it would be desirable to have a formulation of the Christological dogma which indicated and gave immediate expression to the *salvific* event which Jesus Christ himself *is*, and which did this prior to explicit and special soteriological statements. (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 293, emphasis original)

The benefits of this shift toward Christ *being* salvation, it is worth pointing out, include better integrating “scriptural statements” (e.g. the aforementioned Pauline ideas).

What does Rahner mean by Christ *being* salvation? Importantly, he is not advocating for so-called “natural” or “physical” redemption. According to this theory, the Word’s assumption of a human nature (Greek: *physis*) is the sole salvific moment of Christ’s story, since by incarnating, God infuses divine life automatically into the whole of humanity, eradicating sin, death, and alienation from God in the process. Addressing this idea that “redemption was achieved through

the incarnation alone,” Rahner acknowledges that it contains some soteriological truth – the incarnation *is* salvific and *does* have implications for the rest of creation, interdependent as it is. However, physical redemption is ultimately soteriologically insufficient because of what it leaves out – in particular, the salvific efficacy of the cross. Writing within a year of publishing *Foundations*, Rahner explains,

Certainly these considerations have positive meaning and validity and they should therefore be included in a theology of the cross and its significance for salvation. But if the cross of Christ, his death and resurrection, are regarded as a saving event affecting all men, then even the notion of a universal communion of race and history shared by the Logos is not sufficient by itself. The death and resurrection of Jesus must possess universal importance in themselves for salvation and cannot merely be regarded as isolated events, of no significance in themselves, in a life which only has universal relevance for salvation in being the life of the eternal Logos. (Rahner 1979 ET, pp. 210–11)¹⁴

Accordingly, by calling for the priority of Christ’s *person* as salvific, Rahner by no means excludes the saving value of the cross. In fact, he explicitly insists on recognizing it as such. In other words, by proposing a soteriology which is person-centered, he does not call for it to be act-exclusive. Rather, he proposes the inverse of a procedure like Anselm’s, in which Christ’s hypostatic union plays a necessary but subservient role by making his saving act possible. For

¹⁴ Rahner supplements this critical evaluation of physical redemption in *Foundations*, where he takes issue with its automatic character as jeopardizing our free acceptance of salvation: “It must be the real irreversibility of the process towards this fulfillment in such a way that the future of each individual is left open, although, because of the new closeness of God’s kingdom which comes only with Jesus, each individual stands before an offer of God which transcends an ambivalent situation of freedom on God’s part” (p. 299).

Rahner, Christ's acts (e.g. death on the cross), while necessary, are at the service of facilitating our union with his saving person, which is the locus of divine-human reconciliation.

Rahner describes Jesus Christ as constituting this saving locus by attending to both of Christ's natures and analyzing his activity in each, from above and below. On the one hand, looking at God's activity from above, Jesus "*is* salvation and does not merely teach and promise it" since he stands as "God's real offer of himself to [hu]mankind, an offer which is irreversible" (Rahner 2007 ET, pp. 298–99). That is, Jesus is saving precisely because salvation means God's gracious presence¹⁵ and Jesus *is* God's

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victorious,¹⁶ authentic,¹⁷ and unreserved self-communication to the world.¹⁸ On the other hand, and this point is critical for understanding Rahner's theology of the cross, Rahner's Jesus is not simply a passive receptacle of God's presence.¹⁹ As fully human, Jesus also saves as the New Adam, the one who (from below) unreservedly wills to accept God's self-offer (from above): "this offer is and can be final only if it prevails victoriously, and hence exists as accepted at least

¹⁵ "Salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace" (Rahner 1979 ET, p. 200). Also, "God's offer of himself, in which God communicates himself absolutely to the whole of mankind, is by definition man's salvation" (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 143).

¹⁶ "[T]here is present in him a new and unsurpassable closeness of God which on its part will prevail victoriously and is inseparable from him" (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 279).

¹⁷ "[T]he humanity of Christ is not to be considered as something in which God dresses up and masquerades – a mere signal of which he makes use, so that something audible can be uttered about the Logos by means of this signal. The humanity is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself, so that when God, expressing himself, exteriorizes himself, that very thing appears which we call the humanity of the Logos" (Rahner 1966 ET, p. 239).

¹⁸ Jesus' life and message are "definitive not because God now ceases arbitrarily to say anything further, although he could have said more, and not because he 'concludes' revelation, although he could have continued it had he just wanted to. It is the final word of God that is present in Jesus because there is nothing to say beyond it, because God has really and in a strict sense offered *himself* in Jesus" (Rahner 2007 ET p. 280, emphasis original).

¹⁹ Rahner warns against such mythological, Monophysite distortions of classical Christology: "The humanity of Jesus is thought unreflexively to be the livery which God donned and in which he discloses himself and at the same time hides himself. What is still left and accepted of the humanity understood as the livery and body of God appears as pure accommodation and condescension on God's part for our benefit" (2007 ET p. 290).

and in the first instance in this man” (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 284).²⁰ This person-centered idea of Jesus as the salvific nexus point of (i.) God’s humanward Self-offer and (ii.) humanity’s Godward response of “Yes” is a prominent leitmotif throughout *Foundations*. Indicating this direction earlier, Rahner writes that “in Jesus Christ, the God who communicates himself and the man who accepts God’s self-communication become irrevocably one, and the history of revelation and salvation of the whole human race reaches its goal,” provided, of course, that we freely accept this goal as our own (p. 169).²¹

So where does the cross fit into Rahner’s preferred person-centered soteriological trajectory? To put it succinctly, Jesus’ death is his final and most difficult “Yes” to God, a Godward “Yes” that sums up and finalizes his entire human life as the New Adam. A quick look at Rahner’s theologies of human freedom and death more generally help to unpack this idea.

Rahner understands our free actions not simply as functions of a pre-established identity, but a matter of self-disposal, an ongoing decision [*Entscheidung*] which shapes who we are, particularly in relation to God.²² Rahner uses the term “death” – which can, but need not necessarily, coincide with one’s biological demise – to indicate the “event that gathers together the whole personal act of man’s life in to the one consummation,” consolidating our “Yes”s and “No”s to God into either one or the other in a final “fundamental option” (1983b ET, pp. 229, 253).²³ As Rahner puts it in *Foundations*, “through death there comes to be the final and

²⁰ See also “It must also at the same time be the *free* acceptance of God’s offer of himself” (ibid. p. 299, emphasis original).

²¹ The important, subjective dimension of Rahner’s theory of redemption involves his nuanced ideas of supernatural existential and *das Realsymbol* (see Peterson 2017 pp. 91–95); due to space limitations, they stand beyond the scope of this essay, which focuses on Rahner’s treatment of “redemptio objectiva” (Rahner 1979 ET, p. 207).

²² As Peter Fritz puts it, freedom “is the means by which a person ‘orders himself as a whole in obtaining his finality before God’” (2019 p. 8). Here Fritz quotes (and translates) from Rahner’s essay, “Theology of Freedom,” p. 186.

²³ There can be no ultimate “maybe” or “perhaps” here. As Fritz has argued, Rahner draws on Ignatius in styling one’s ultimate choice as between Christ and Lucifer (2019 pp. 10, 166–75.)

definitive validity of man's existence which has been achieved and has come to maturity in freedom" (p. 272).

In Jesus' case, Golgotha stands as the site of his death in this theological sense – his final and definitive "Yes" to God "which recapitulates and culminates his life" (Rahner 2007 ET, p. 284). Anticipating this point, Rahner has argued that Jesus understood himself as mediating God's proximity and Reign not only in his message but in his *person* (p. 254). Accordingly, Jesus' impending execution becomes all the more enshrouded in dark implications and the prospect of utter failure. But Rahner returns repeatedly to Christ's final words in Luke, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:46), as Christ's response to this darkness of sin, a final "Yes" of confidence in God's vindication, which ultimately comes in the resurrection (1971a ET pp. 138–39; 1992 ET p. 60; 1969b ET p. 124). Rahner sums up,

If God wills and brings forth a man who . . . is God's final, irrevocable and unsurpassable word and offer to mankind, and . . . if this offer is and can be final only if it prevails victoriously and hence exists as accepted . . . through the single history of the single and entire life of this man, a history which becomes final and definitive through death . . . *then* we can and must say that this eschatological word and offer of God . . . has been actualized in the life of Jesus and is historically present for us, and reaches fulfillment in his free acceptance of his death. . . . The pure initiative of God's salvific will establishes the life of Jesus which reaches fulfillment in his death. (2007 ET pp. 283–84, emphasis original).

The cross thus stands as the unsurpassable culmination of the "from above" and "from below" dynamic described above. Here, God's humanward Self-offer coincides perfectly (indeed,

hypostatically) with an unequivocally affirmative reply. Thus, the cross has salvific value for Rahner, but in a derivative, person-centered way: Jesus' death establishes – with finality and defiantly in the face of darkness and sin – his person as the locus where God's complete Self-offer and humanity's unreserved acceptance irrevocably meet. And our own participation in this new humanity, mediated – not *just* in a discrete act but eternally – by Jesus himself, grants us a share in divine life.²⁴

At this point, we can see more clearly Rahner's rationale for assigning scriptural texts about expiation and sacrifice a "secondary"

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and "derivative" importance. His motivation is not to "dismiss" or "denigrate" either them (after all, he affirms them as "legitimate") or the salvific value of Jesus' death more generally (which he explicitly and repeatedly confesses and defends), but to properly situate them within the person-centered framework that he also sees operating in the New Testament. Jesus' death stands at the service of salvifically establishing his saving *person*, rather than his remarkable identity simply standing as a starting point for his accomplishment of salvation as an *act*. Accordingly, for Rahner, expressions about the cross's saving efficacy are best made when orienting Jesus' death toward facilitating our union with him as our saving locus, and there are various legitimate ways to do so.²⁵

²⁴ "Jesus, the Man, not merely *was* at one time of decisive importance for our salvation, i.e. for the real finding of the absolute God, by his historical and now past acts of the Cross, etc., but – as the one who became man and has remained a creature – he is *now* and for all eternity the *permanent openness* of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life; he is, therefore, even in his humanity the created reality for us which stands in the act of our religion in such a way that, without this act towards his humanity and through it . . . the basic religious act towards God could never reach its goal" (Rahner 1967 ET p. 44, emphasis original).

²⁵ "If the death of Jesus is understood in this way, then perhaps it becomes clear that its soteriological significance when correctly understood [*diese richtig verstanden!*] is already implied in the experience of the resurrection of Jesus, and moreover that the 'late' soteriology in the New Testament when correctly understood [*richtig verstanden!*] is a legitimate [*berechtigte*], but nevertheless somewhat secondary and derivative expression of the salvific significance of the death of Jesus. This is so because it works with concepts which are applied extrinsically

Moreover, Rahner is not the first theologian to explain the cross's saving role within a person-centered paradigm. As I have argued elsewhere, one of Rahner's great theological influences, Thomas Aquinas, likewise situates ideas like sacrifice and satisfaction theory in an auxiliary, decentralized soteriological role, and Rahner's own affinity for person-centered thinking goes back to his fascination with the Church Fathers early in his career (Peterson 2016 pp. 891–94; 2015).²⁶

c. Did Rahner Change?

Anatolios closes his treatment of Rahner by suggesting that Rahner's soteriology underwent a great change from his *On the Theology of Death* (1958) to *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1976), particularly when it comes to recognizing Jesus' death as atoning. As we have seen, contra Anatolios, Rahner explicitly affirms the cross's saving efficacy in *Foundations*, but the broader question remains: How do his soteriological writings compare between these two periods? A thorough answer would require an article (or more!) of its own, one involving prolonged engagement with Rahner's *On the Theology of Death* (as Anatolios rightly indicates). However, the question is worth considering in an abbreviated way by looking at the concise entries in Rahner's roughly contemporary *Theological Dictionary* (1961), which make for a useful point of comparison. Here, we can see that Rahner's soteriology certainly evolves, though not nearly as markedly as Anatolios suggests. In fact, his core person-centered paradigm stands as a stable fixture.

as a possible but not absolutely indispensable interpretation of the original experience of this salvific significance, which is simply this: we are saved because this man who is one of us has been saved by God, and God has thereby made his salvific will present in the world historically, really and irrevocably. On this point too there follows for the New Testament and for later theology, as its history shows, the possibility in principle of a variety of legitimate models for soteriology" (2007 ET p. 284).

²⁶ Regarding his esteem for Thomas Aquinas: in an interview late in his life Rahner remarked, "If young theologians can no longer begin with this Thomistic heritage, that's a bad sign – not for Thomas, but for present-day theologians" (1990 ET p. 48).

By examining entries like “Redemption,” “Sacrifice,” “Salvation,” and “Satisfaction, Theories of,” we can see that Rahner is much more

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comfortable with sacrificial language in his *Theological Dictionary* than in *Foundations*. In his later work, we saw that while he affirmed legitimate and correct usages of ideas like *Sühneopfer* and satisfaction, he surrounded such statements by lengthy warnings against popular (penal and propitiatory) distortions. Writing 15 years earlier, these sorts of terms appear without constantly being couched in warnings and qualifications (though such caution is not entirely absent).²⁷ The term *Versöhnung* (propitiation, reconciliation) makes several such appearances toward the end of the “Redemption” entry.

Even more striking is his attitude toward “satisfaction.” As we saw in *Foundations*, Rahner carefully affirms that a satisfactory sacrifice can be articulated correctly, though he seems more interested in warning about ways it can go awry. Writing on “Redemption” in 1961, he strikes a very different tone, stating that “it can *and must* be said that by redemption God forgives the world’s sin because Christ has made satisfaction in our stead and for us by his death on the cross . . . and has atoned to God” (Rahner & Vorgrimler 1965 ET p. 397, emphasis added).²⁸ Finally, the *Dictionary* is peppered with parenthetical references to Scripture and Denzinger, though this difference may be a matter of genre vis-à-vis *Foundations*.

²⁷ One mild warning does appear in the “Satisfaction, Theories of” entry as a quick parenthetical disapproval of penal takes on the theory. “This theory of satisfaction (like the theory of *sacrifice) again has various nuances in scholastic theology, according as particular stress is laid on the idea of vicarious representation [*Stellvertretung*] (identification of Christ with sinful humanity), sin as a personal insult to God (D 2318), the significance of the act of the dignity of the agent; and especially according to whether the idea of a ‘punishment of Christ’ in place of sinners is introduced or (rightly) rejected, the suffering actually involved in Christ’s satisfaction is considered essential to it or incidental, and the cross therefore regarded as an expression of God’s holiness and justice or only of his merciful love – which again leads on to a profounder theology of death in general” (Rahner & Vorgrimler 1965 ET p. 424).

²⁸ The surrounding material reads, “This reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] with man [sic], initiated and granted by God, applies to all men (2 Cor 5:18f.; see also Col 1:21f.; Jn 3:16) and is antecedent to the always personal acceptance of this atonement [*Versöhnung*] or redemption in *faith God willed the human life of his Son to be a total

Despite his evolving wariness about misuse of these traditional soteriological categories, Rahner's overall theology of salvation demonstrates a remarkable consistency. Lines in his "Redemption" entry bear a striking resemblance to material in *Foundations*:

Jesus' being (as the union of God's life and human existence) and activity (as the acceptance, in loving obedience, of human existence characterized by sin: Rom 5:12-21; see also 1Cor 15:45ff.) taken together *are* the historically real, eschatologically victorious bestowal on the world of God's self-communication, despite, and in, the world's sinfulness . . . Thus the presence of God's redemptive forgiveness, efficacious throughout history, has found its all-sustaining sense and centre, its definitive culmination, in Jesus Christ. (p. 396, emphasis original)

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As in *Foundations*, and contra physical redemption, Jesus' being and acts are affirmed together. Moreover, the salvific value of the latter is articulated in Pauline terms of Jesus' establishing himself as the New Adam, giving it a person-centered orientation.

This orientation is even clearer in his "Satisfaction, Theories of" entry. There, after noting soteriology's multifaceted character, he proceeds by prioritizing Jesus' being as salvific, just as he calls for 15 years later. And his introduction of Jesus' saving acts ("Then..."), including sacrifice, lends them a clearly secondary, auxiliary character.

The theology of *redemption must be as multi-dimensional as this supreme act of the God-Man necessarily is. Consequently it must (in a "physical" aspect of soteriology) see

surrender of loving obedience in the deprivation of *death (Jn 10:17f.; Mk 10:45; Heb) and thereby granted the one humanity in its solidarity a propitiatory sacrifice (sacrifice of atonement) [(*Versöhnungs-*)*Opfer*] (Phil 2:5-11). To this extent it can and must be said that by redemption God forgives the world's sin because Christ has made satisfaction in our stead and for us by his death on the cross . . . and has atoned [*Versöhnt*] to God, especially since even the free acceptance of this atonement [*Versöhnung*] by the individual human being is again God's doing" (pp. 396-97.)

the Incarnation itself as God's supreme, historical, irrevocable self-communication to the world, which already involves the realization of God's universal *salvific will for the world, *Christocentrism, and the supernatural destiny of all creation. *Then* this theology can regard Christ's act (living, and dying on the cross, in a personal history that is absolutely one) – which from the beginning was willed, accepted, effected by the Logos as his own history, the consummation of the human nature he has assumed – as 'obedience' in the scriptural sense (Phil 2:6-11 etc.) unto exinanition (*Kenosis), and as 'sacrifice' (1Cor 5:7; Eph 5:2; Heb *passim*; D 122, 286).²⁹

As the entry continues, he raises the theme of interconnectedness (echoed 15 years later in his lament of "Western individualism") and again styles Jesus' saving activity with a person-centered valence. "His very being (in risen glory) signifies the irresistible beginning of the redemption of the world, for as the being of the Son (and brother) of man (Rom 8:29) it is and remains part of God's one world and therefore cannot leave the rest of that world to a quite separate fate. Christ's act can be regarded as the endurance of the tyranny of the forces of this world that enslave us (sin, law, death, time etc.) which are overcome because it is the Son who experiences them (Gal 4:3-7; Rom 6:6ff; 8:19-23, 38f. etc.)" (p. 424).

This final line expresses a dimension of Rahner's theology of the cross featured more prominently in his earlier writings. Overlapping in some ways with Balthasar's famous theology of Christ's descent into

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²⁹ "Satisfaction, Theories of" p. 423 (emphasis added; translation slightly adjusted to render "*in einem 'physischen' Aspekt der Soteriologie*" more literally).

hell, Rahner, operating as always out of his person-centered paradigm, at times applies Gregory of Nazianzen's famous dictum ("What has not been assumed has not been redeemed")³⁰ to death itself, arguing that even this condition has been taken up and filled with life by the Son (e.g. 1971b ET).³¹

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Rahner's attitude toward "later" New Testament soteriology in *Foundations* consistently echoes points already evident in his description of "Pauline Theology" back in 1961, which he affirms is

an essential and permanent part of the NT and therefore of Christianity. But however great its importance as a source and norm of faith, it remains the consistent development (conditioned by Paul's personality and circumstances) of what the historical Jesus said of himself and his work. For difficult or impossible as it may be to distinguish historically . . . between Jesus' original statements about himself and his mission and . . . (sound) [richtigen] theological interpretation . . . , still it cannot be denied that Jesus knew . . . that he brought absolute salvation, that his person and work are the salvation and redemption of all, that his resurrection proved he was the beginning of the supreme salvation for the world. Pauline theology enlarges on this theme . . . [as] the theologian reflecting on a fact that has been handed down to him – Jesus, his cross, his resurrection. (Rahner & Vorgrimler 1965 ET pp. 341–42)

Here, as in *Foundations*, Rahner distinguishes between Jesus' own self-understanding (articulated in person-centered terms echoed in *Foundations*) and later Pauline developments. Notably, he does so while simultaneously insisting on the latter's permanence and normativity.

³⁰ Rahner explicitly cites this Nazianzen soteriological rationale in 1964 ET p. 42.

³¹ Daniel Pekarske summarizes this article: "There is no depth to which death can drag us that has not already been experienced and redeemed by Christ's victory over death" (2002 p. 219).

Conclusion

As we have seen, Karl Rahner's mature work includes an unequivocal affirmation of the cross's saving, atoning efficacy.³² Though Rahner expresses concern about the ways that some classical soteriological categories (e.g. satisfaction theory and sacrifice) can be erroneously deployed to render God an angry object of atonement rather than its loving origin, he never dismisses these categories themselves. As he does so often in his theology, Rahner looks at them in the light of other freshly prioritized parts of the Christian tradition to reconfigure their place in our understanding.

In this case, Rahner prioritizes Christ's fully divine, fully human self as the soteriological nexus point of our reconciliation – our at-one-ment – with God. Such reconfiguration fails, Rahner insists, if Christ's death falls by the wayside.³³ But for Rahner's own theology, the cross is the decisive, summative moment in which the New Adam recapitulated a life of faithfulness with his sin-shattering "Yes" to God, establishing himself as the locus where God's Self-offer and perfect human acceptance of it meet – as the Savior who *is* our salvation, our *redemptio objectiva*. Our own subjective participation in this saving reality, as members of Christ's body, is another critically important dimension of Rahner's soteriology (though not the subject of this essay).

Rahner's theologies of the cross, salvation, and his Christology more generally – as found in *Foundations* or elsewhere – are, like those of any other theologian, not beyond criticism.

³² "[T]he death and resurrection of Jesus, taken together, *do possess* soteriological significance. We take this to be the teaching of Scripture and the Church and there is sufficient evidence to connect its content with the reality of the pre-Easter Jesus. Here the only question to be asked is how the connection between the death of Jesus and the salvation of all men can be imagined" (1979 ET p. 210, emphasis original).

³³ Recall Rahner's critiques of "physical" and "moral" theories of atonement in 1979 ET pp. 210–12.

Legitimate concerns have been raised, for instance, about the lack of drama in Rahner's story of salvation,³⁴ as well as Rahner's underappreciation for the Jewishness of Jesus.³⁵ A critic could even fault Rahner for pushing their favored New Testament texts out of the theological limelight or not granting sin sufficient weight, so long as they take the full extent of his work seriously. But whatever shortcomings may mark Karl Rahner's soteriology, they are balanced by insights that render it a landmark theological contribution which continues to garner commentary and stimulate conversation some four decades after his death. That conversation should recognize that Rahner *does* advance a theology of the cross in his later work, one which explicitly affirms Jesus' death as carrying great (indeed necessary) salvific weight.

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³⁴ For example, George Vass builds on Balthasar's critiques along these lines in his *A Pattern of Doctrines 2: The Atonement and Mankind's Salvation*, pp. 17–22. Though Vass overcorrects by calling for a soteriology according to which God the Father changes (from wrath to mercy) upon facing the cross, his more general point about Rahner's undramatic theory of "engracement" ought to be taken seriously. Drama need not be intra-trinitarian and involve changing divine Persons – there is plenty of drama between God's will, human sin, and loss, both in biblical history and the particular story of Jesus.

³⁵ See Henrix 2011 pp. 119, 142. Henrix focuses on an exchange between Karl Rahner and Pinchas Lapide in their *Encountering Jesus – Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue*, especially at pp. 51–52.

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