Introduction

> Why should the Most High stoop to things so lowly, the Almighty
> do a thing with such toil?
>
> St. Anselm[1]

In contemporary soteriological discourses, it is common to pit
God's saving love against divine justice, a move often accompanied
by a subtle downplay of the salvific significance of the cross. But is
this move really necessary? If not, how can we conceive of Christ's
cross as a manifestation of both divine love and divine justice? Can
the question that moves Christian faithful, artists, and scholars
alike – namely, Why the cross? – be answered without opposing
justice and love and without compromising the demands that each
places on us, individually and collectively? What does it mean to
live under the shadow of the cross or in the light of resurrection (the
two sides of the same reality) in a secular culture, which is increas-
ingly post-Christian but still owes its humanistic aspirations to
Christianity? Is Christ's summons to take one's cross and to become
an agent of hope still relevant in this culture?

   To answer these questions, this book reconsiders the very notion
of the justice of the cross. How is the justice of the cross just? By
drawing on Bernard J. F. Lonergan's development of the
Augustinian-Thomist tradition, it proposes that the justice of the
cross concerns the rightness of order, not transaction or retribution,

---

[1] Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and
G. R. Evans, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 274.

as some post-Anselmian accounts of atonement suggest. Pitting justice against love often relies on a transactional interpretation of the classical definition of justice as giving each one his or her due. However, if one acknowledges that, more fundamentally, justice is the rightness of order, justice and love are no longer mutually exclusive. Inasmuch as human agency is involved, justice concerns the rightness of the order of loving, such as the interpersonal order of friendship over enmity, forgiveness over revenge. Correspondingly, far from being punitive, the justice of the cross is grounded in the relational order of the Trinity and resists evil, not by force but by rightly ordered love. In Augustine's idiom, the cross manifests God's preference for "justice over power."[2] It is the transformation of evil into good, not paying in kind, that fittingly makes justice among sinners possible again, as it stops the self-sustaining cycles of moral corruption and violence.

The "why" of the cross, then, regards the fittingness, not necessity, of the divine solution to the problem of evil. It was fitting that a problem of a disordered love was answered, not by coercion or by divine intervention without human involvement, but by a re-ordering of human love through a gift of forgiveness and friendship with and in Christ. The cross, as this book argues, manifests the antecedent offer of divine friendship, which is communicated in an orderly manner, that is, in continuity with the created laws of nature and history and through secondary causes. This involves human cooperation in freely diffusing such a friendship to others, even to one's enemies. In line with the contemporary understanding of the emergent world order, then, the historical agency of Christ – including the consequent possibility of "engraced" human

---

[2] See St. Augustine, *trin.* 13.10.13–13.14.18, esp. 13.13.17. When citing Latin titles of Augustine's works here, I follow the *Augustinus-Lexicon* abbreviation system. In the main body of the text (but not in the footnotes), the initial reference will also give the work's complete Latin title.

agency – is conceived as shifting the odds of the dialectical processes in history.

As indicated by the "why" question in the title of this book, the current undertaking primarily seeks to illuminate the imperfect and analogical intelligibility – or fittingness – of the cross-event. This is done in response to the exigencies posed by post-modern secularism. In tandem with the recent experiences of deep social suffering due to the pandemic and political divisions, "a secular age" – a cultural context in which faith is no longer axiomatic[3] – raises new questions for Christian self-understanding and identity. What is our vocation in this time and culture? This book, as the foregoing suggests, proposes that a theology of the cross is central to answering such a question and offers an explanatory and historically minded account of redemption. This account goes to the heart of Christian discipleship, authenticity, and the very image of God we theologize from and think about, as it epitomizes the fittingness of redemption as the transformation of evil into good.

Thus, the quest for understanding faith mysteries, presupposed in my methodological approach, does not brush off the vagaries of human historical development; it seriously takes into account that not everything can be explained. Besides the intelligible, there is also that which absolutely exceeds human intelligence (God), as well as the lack of intelligibility and goodness, the surd of sin. Inasmuch as the cross regards the mystery of faith and of our iniquity, any explanatory account of redemption is imperfect; inasmuch as we understand this mystery through realities better known to us, such an explanatory account is analogical.[4] Furthermore, inasmuch as the question "Why the cross?" is inseparable from

---

[3] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

[4] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Redemption*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran, H. Daniel Monsour, and Jeremy D. Wilkins, CWL 9 (2018), 205 and 469–471.

3

numerous ethically challenging questions, it is existentially relevant. Some of the challenging questions, which acknowledge the possibility that the meaning of the cross can be distorted, include: What is redemptive about Christ's suffering? Is God really like an abusive parent, as some post-Anselmian accounts have it? If not, what kind of a systematic theological framework can support the argument to the contrary?

It might come as a surprise to the reader that the latter question here is answered by reclaiming the Latin classical soteriology of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, especially as developed by their theological heir, Bernard J. F. Lonergan. For some, the contribution of these classical giants is outrightly suspicious, as it was used and misused to justify oppressive images of God. Though it cannot be denied that the classical voices need to be critically interrogated as they are transposed into the modern perspectives, Christian theology also owes a great deal to them. Hence, instead of focusing on how the classical accounts might be proved wrong, more generous hermeneutics applied in this work asks: How can classical soteriological accounts, such as Augustine's, Anselm's, and Aquinas', be transposed into the context of historical-mindedness so that their relevance might be reclaimed? Such hermeneutics of recovery are needed if one is serious about the methodological exigency of not writing off but augmenting the old with the new. In the eyes of my major interlocutor, Lonergan, Leo XIII's mandate *vetera novis augere et perficere* is of key importance for a theology that aspires to fully live in the present time and thus is informed by the past and takes responsibility for the future.[5] Such a theology is capable of mediating between the Gospel and contemporary culture

---

[5] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWL 2 (1997), 222; "Isomorphism of Thomist and Scientific Thought," in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWL 4 (1988), 141. Lonergan further explains this mandate in terms of a "not numerous center, big enough to be at home in both the old and the new." See "Dimensions of Meaning," ibid., 245.

but does not lose its philosophical grounding.[6] As explored in this book, Lonergan insists that the achievement of this mediation hinges on having an adequate stance on meaning in history, which he provides by developing a philosophy of self-appropriation.[7] This philosophy, as we will see, grounds Lonergan's critical metaphysics – an integral heuristic structure that attends to what is to be known.

In the footsteps of Lonergan, this work seeks philosophical foundations that are not dismissive of metaphysics. But the metaphysics evoked here is, as it were, "hermeneutically chastened." Here "hermeneutically" serves as metonymy for historically minded and empirical dimensions of the methodological approach used in this work, while "metaphysics" indicates my esteem for the Augustinian-Thomist tradition, as transposed by Lonergan's critical metaphysics. Critical metaphysics is empirically grounded in the immanent norms of the dynamic structure of knowing.[8] Thus, it does not admit the subject-object split or ahistorical dogmatism. Rather, it aligns with the modern turn to subject and history and is open to theology's multifaceted engagement with hermeneutics and social theories that, in the post–Vatican II era, reconfigured the whole field of Catholic theology, previously dominated by the Scholastic method.

Since, in theology, Athens can never be divorced from Jerusalem, my methodological approach also involves attentiveness to the

---

[6] See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Christology Today: Methodological Reflections," in *A Third Collection*, ed. John D. Dadosky and Robert M. Doran, CWL 16 (2017), 70–93; "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical Mindedness," in *A Second Collection*, ed. John D. Dadosky and Robert M. Doran, CWL 13 (2016), 3–10; "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon," in CWL 17, 391–408.

[7] Lonergan argues that self-appropriation, viz., knowing oneself as a knower, lover, and doer, grounds a unification and organization of other departments of knowledge, which is the proper task of philosophy. Consequently, cognitional theory, or philosophy of self-appropriation, is the first philosophy. See *Insight*, 4–5.

[8] As such, this metaphysics is derivative and open-ended: it is preceded by cognitional theory and epistemology and succeeded by existential ethics. See Lonergan, "Questionnaire on Philosophy," 357–358; cf. "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon," 393–394.

scriptural support for the centrality of the cross in Christian soteri-
ology. For the sake of grounding this project in Scripture, the work
examines some recent biblical scholarship on St. Paul's soteriology.
St. Paul is chosen not simply because his letters constitute the
earliest stratum of the Christian Bible or because Augustine signifi-
cantly relied on Paul. Even more so, St. Paul is a valuable source
because, with the help of his Jewish theological education, he
provides our earliest evidence of grasping theological meanings
posed by the cross at a reflective level and recognizes them even
when others failed to do so.[9]

This book, then, aims to contribute to the development of a
contemporary systematic theology of the cross that is ready to meet
the exigencies of a secular age, is rooted in Scripture and tradition,
and commits itself to the explicitly critical philosophy that must
underwrite a sound theology on the level of our time, to use
Lonergan's idiom.[10] The underlying methodology of this book
warrants that the challenges posed by our "world come of age"
are met by a theology that also has come of age, a theology that
"confronts its own history, distinguishes the stages in its own
development, [and] evaluates the authenticity or inauthenticity of
its initiatives."[11] This is achieved, primarily, by critically appropri-
ating some key historical variations on the theme of the "justice of
the cross." Following a widespread line of patristic soteriology, St.
Augustine maintains that the cross of Christ responds to the fun-
damental problem of evil in a way that communicates and enacts
God's preference for "justice over power." This book selectively
traces and makes explicit key transpositions of this soteriological
notion from Augustine (via Anselm) to Aquinas to Lonergan.

---

[9] Cf. 1 Cor 1–4 where St. Paul exposes the Corinthians' missteps in undermining the
wisdom of the cross.

[10] See Frederick E. Crowe and Michael Vertin, *Lonergan and the Level of Our Time*
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3–4.

[11] Lonergan, "Philosophy and the Religious Phenomenon," 406.

In response to the exigencies posed by secular culture, the results of this "teleological" re-reading of the earlier stages in the light of later developments then is re-contextualized in relation to Christian historical agency. Correspondingly, the justice of the cross (conceived in terms of the transformation of evil into good) is examined as the possibility of justice among sinners (conceived in terms of the dynamic human good of order).

To help navigate the itineraries traveled in the following pages, permit me to provide some tentative definitions of justice pertinent to this work. Taking justice as the "rightness of order" that "brings a multiplicity of things together into a unity and whole,"[12] Lonergan integrates the contributions of his predecessors by retrieving from Anselm, via Aquinas, a tacit distinction between two moral orders through which the failure of human freedom is reintegrated in the single order of divine justice, wisely and lovingly willed and chosen by God. Building upon Lonergan's insight, these two orders might be named retributive and redemptive justice.[13]

Retributive justice primarily regards an involuntary requital according to merits or deserts. Thus, this kind of justice might be conceived as a justice that is conducted in the context of coercive or controlling power, that is, as the "justice of the judge": it chiefly concerns a compensation imposed by or on behalf of the person against whom the offense was committed. In a most common form, then, retributive justice is the justice of legal trials and orders a punishment for a crime. Transactional justice – a justice as *quid pro quo* and *do ut des* – is another mode of this commutative and thus "horizontal" kind of justice.

Redemptive justice, meanwhile, primarily means conciliatory and restorative justice. Redemptive justice is a kind of "vertical" justice:

---

[12] Lonergan, *Redemption*, 349.

[13] For instance, see Lonergan, *Redemption*, 527. As examined later, the two orders of retributive and redemptive justice correspond to Anselm's and Aquinas' punishment (involuntary compensation) and satisfaction (voluntary compensation).

it concerns giving and receiving forgiveness, which, if accepted, yields reconciliation and the healing, interpersonal, gratuitous, and transformative restoration of right order.[14] In contrast to retributive justice, which inflicts a penalty on the wrongdoer, redemptive justice accepts an apology for wrongdoing, and thus is founded upon voluntary participation. It nevertheless retains a note of the acceptance of a privation (suffering), which, in itself, is not willed. Redemptive justice, then, does not rely on a coercive "power over" – it is not the justice that believes in "might makes right." However, neither is redemptive justice powerless, if by that one means the absence of force that gives rise to, transforms, and sustains every breath of life, every desire, every spark of *enérgeia* in the created universe. Far from this, such a justice is a very manifestation of the divine *agape*-power that re-orders one's loving and thus empowers one's commitment to truth and goodness.[15]

In light of these tentative distinctions, the justice of the cross is redemptive justice. The cross manifests an orderly communication of divine friendship to sinners, which, as the constructive part of this work argues, decisively shifts the world's finality and is historically realized through the emergent *agape* network. This network is the higher integration of the human good of order with, in, and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The justice of the cross, hence, manifests that a fitting remedy to the problem of a disordered love is a re-ordering and (re-)ordered love, not coercive power.

My argument is developed in ten chapters that comprise three major steps. I begin with two "contextual" chapters (Chapters 1 and 2)

---

[14] Of note, contemporary theology moves toward an understanding of the justice of the cross as redemptive but lacks a rigorous philosophical framework to justify such a move. See, for instance, Derek Flood, *Healing the Gospel: A Radical Vision for Grace, Justice, and the Cross* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

[15] Distinguishing "power-over" from "*agape*-power" in this work is deliberate. As Sarah Coakley notes, it is nearly impossible to define power as such. See *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), xv and 5.

that set the scene for what follows, as I argue that a critical (but not exclusive) component of a theological response to secular culture is a renewed theology of the cross. In the second, "historical" step (Chapters 3–6), I trace the genetic development from Augustine to Anselm to Aquinas, as regards the notion of the justice of the cross. In the last step, my three "systematic" chapters (Chapters 7–10) offer a historically minded systematic account of the theology of the cross that draws on Lonergan's transposition of Augustine's and Aquinas' contributions. This "teleological" re-reading of Lonergan's work culminates in making explicit and constructively engaging the social, historical, and cosmic significance of the *lex crucis*.

By drawing on the analyses of secularity by Charles Taylor, Michael Buckley, Nicholas Boyle, and Lonergan, Chapter 1 explains the rationale of my project. It is argued that modern moral order promotes a universal benevolence that is separated from its provenance in the Christian *agape*-love, and as such is incapable of living out its own highest aspirations. Therefore, an adequate theological response to secular culture needs to reclaim the meaning of *agape*. This meaning, as the chapter's heuristic criteria for a theological response to secularity outline, is further determined by engaging the notions of justice, Christ's work, conversion, and the explanatory power of theology. Against the claims of the secularization thesis that religion must retreat before reason, theology has to be both historically minded and explanatory.

Chapter 2 takes up the question of an adequate theological response to secular culture by proposing that, if *agape* is not to be separated from its Christian roots and from the related concerns about justice and conversion, the exigencies of secularity call for a revitalized theology of the cross. After considering some alternative avenues, it is argued that the heuristic criteria constructed earlier are suitably fulfilled by drawing on the until recently relatively unknown soteriology of Lonergan. Written in Latin before The Second Vatican Council, his treatises on redemption, in some sense,

remain an "unfinished symphony."[16] However, as interpreted in and through its development here, Lonergan's soteriology carries a significant potential to address the challenges posed by the secularized environment. The chapter then introduces Lonergan's Law of the Cross. The argument for the significance of developing a theology of the cross is further supported by drawing on Paul's soteriology, which obliquely anticipates Augustine's soteriological motif "justice over power" and its historical transpositions. The chapter concludes with clarifying the notion of transpositions and with outlining the genetic development from Augustine through Anselm and Aquinas to Lonergan, as traced throughout the book.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine Augustine's understanding of the justice of the cross. Chapter 3 primarily focuses on *De Trinitate*'s contention that God preferred to redeem the world by subordinating power to justice. According to Augustine, it was just for the devil's prideful "might makes right" to be subverted by the humble mediator's "right makes might" because the problem of a disordered love is fittingly answered, not by coercion, but by (re-)ordered and (re-)ordering love, Christ's *caritas ordinata and ordinans*. Justice, for Augustine, is never separated from charity, and charity is properly known in unity with and assimilation to Christ. In light of his contribution, atonement is not so much about atoning for sins as it is about "attunement" of human desires to God's desire, as manifested in Christ's self-giving in love and, by grace, made possible through human "at-one-ment" with, in, and through Christ.

Chapter 4 further advances the interpretation of the justice of the cross in Augustine by drawing on his other major theological treatise, *De Ciuitate Dei*, the work roughly contemporaneous with the later parts of *De Trinitate*. In particular, the chapter demonstrates how Augustine's theological reflection on the two cities

---

[16] See Frederick E. Crowe, *Christ and History: The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 13.