

Why the Cross?

In this book, Ligita Ryliškytė addresses what is arguably the most important and profound question in systematic theology: What does it mean for humankind to be saved by the cross? Offering a constructive account of the atonement that avoids pitting God's saving love against divine justice, she provides a biblically grounded and philosophically disciplined theology of the cross that responds to the exigencies of postmodern secular culture. Ryliškytė draws on Bernard J. F. Lonergan's development of the Augustinian–Thomist tradition to argue that the justice of the cross concerns the orderly communication and diffusion of divine friendship. It becomes efficacious in the dynamic order of the emergent universe through the transformation of evil into good out of love. Showing how inherited theological traditions can be transposed in new contexts, Ryliškytė's book reveals a Christology of fundamental significance for contemporary systematic theology, as well as the fields of theological ethics and Christian spirituality.

LIGITA RYLIŠKYTĖ, SJE, is a systematic theologian who aims to develop the inherited theological tradition in dialogue with contemporary cultures. A native of Lithuania and a religious sister, she is also a winner of the prize for the best dissertation of the year in the humanities at Boston College (2020).

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Why the Cross?

Divine Friendship and the Power of Justice



CAMBRIDGE
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Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-20276-3 — Why the Cross?

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Frontmatter

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CAMBRIDGE
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
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103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009202763

DOI: 10.1017/9781009202787

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Ryliškytė, Ligita, 1972- author.

TITLE: Why the cross? : divine friendship and the power of justice / Ligita Ryliškytė, Boston College, Massachusetts.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2023. | Series: Cit current issues in theology | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2022017663 (print) | LCCN 2022017664 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009202763 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009202800 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009202787 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Atonement. | Theology of the cross. | Jesus Christ—Crucifixion. | Lonergan, Bernard J. F.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BT265.3 .R95 2023 (print) | LCC BT265.3 (ebook) | DDC 296.3/2—dc23/eng/20220622

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022017663>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022017664>

ISBN 978-1-009-20276-3 Hardback

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Preface

What is the delivery system for resilience? . . . It's the community of unconditional love, representing the very "no matter whatness" of God.

Gregory Boyle, SJ¹

Reflecting on the cross seems to be in the blood of us Lithuanian Catholics. The famous Hill of Crosses near Šiauliai, the many crosses along our roads, and, finally, the religious symbol par excellence of our country, the wooden figure of Christ shortly before his crucifixion, *Rūpintojėlis* (The Worried Christ, or The One Who Cares) speak for themselves.² In the context of a prolonged historical suffering, these symbols express the merging of religious and national affectivity and imagination.

Hence, in a sense, this book can be seen as a fruit of a conscious, even if indirect, attempt to own my cultural heritage. Furthermore, it also has roots in my personal experience. To use a spatial metaphor of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, human development occurs in two distinct modes, from below upward and from above downward. Considered from below, it starts with understanding one's own personal experience. Considered from above, it integrates the

¹ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 86–87.

² For more on the image of Rūpintojėlis, see Ligita Ryliškytė, "Post-Gulag Christology: Contextual Considerations from a Lithuanian Perspective," *Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2015): 468–484.

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corporate history inasmuch as one “owes allegiance to one’s home, to one’s country, to one’s religion.”³ The two movements are interdependent: There is no movement from above that is not complemented by a movement from below, and vice versa. Correspondingly, this project came to be in the context of an experience that was both personal and communal.

First, it was an experience of growing up in an occupied country torn by Communist repressions. Living under a totalitarian regime, which, in Lonergan’s categories, might be considered a low point of a longer cycle of decline,⁴ taught us how easily the plundered becomes the plunderer and makes way for the flourishing of human vices in the name of justice. So-called justice, for instance, had been invoked when my father’s family was squeezed into animal wagons without any belongings or the food necessary for their travel and sent on the long journey to Siberia, nearly four thousand miles away. An “enemy of the people,” my father, was just five; when the survivors were allowed to return, he was sixteen.

However, I have also seen another kind of justice: a redemptive justice or the justice of the cross, as Lonergan calls it. This justice was about absorbing evil and transforming it into good. About persevering in love, gratitude, and wonder, no matter what. About choosing a difficult good. This kind of justice was operative when people rose to nonviolently resist the Communist regime in the so-called Singing Revolution of the Baltic countries. We stood together and sang, even against the Russian tanks on January 13, 1991. The tanks were not immediately stopped by the singing human wall. And yet the lives of the people whose crushed bodies literally

³ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, “Questionnaire on Philosophy: Response,” in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 352–383, here 361. Henceforth, volumes in the series Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan are abbreviated CWL, and the reference omits place and publisher.

⁴ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, CWL 3 (1992), 252–261, esp. at 256–257.

PREFACE

absorbed the evil of the military madness were not wasted. Their sacrifice, somehow, made a difference: A few weeks later, other countries started recognizing Lithuania's independence, and Russia gradually withdrew its army from our land.

The two opposed experiences of the abuse of power in the name of justice and of the power of transformative justice converge with many other experiences. To name a few: of being shaped by the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius and by Eucharistic spirituality as a Sister of the Eucharistic Jesus; of living through a transition from an atheistic society “by force” to a secular society “by choice”; of a theological formation and teaching at Boston College that encouraged me to live up to the best implications of theology as “faith seeking understanding.”

All of these experiences, shaped “from below” and “from above,” point toward the present endeavor: in the context of a contemporary secular culture, an attempt to offer an imperfect explanatory account of the mystery of the cross, the “no matter whatness of God.”

Acknowledgments

Gratitude is one of the greatest gifts, a way to knowing how much we are loved by God. Giving thanks to some, at the same time, risks undermining the contribution of many others. My own spiritual and intellectual formation, without which this work would have never seen daylight, is indebted to a multitude of people on both sides of the Atlantic. Not being able to name them all here, I will still try to enlist the most significant contributors and benefactors.

First, I would like to thank my family and my community, the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus. It was my parents and grandparents who first taught me that I should not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul – the undercurrent to this book – and the courageous witness of my community that helped me to grow in faith, hope, and love, which alone makes true courage possible. Likewise, without the love and support I received from my mother, my sister Neringa Sudavičienė, and her wonderful family, I could not have undertaken the arduous work of completing this project. There are also friends and colleagues, and all those to whom I ministered in the past, including my students, who taught me a great deal about the cross.

Second, I would like to thank Dr. Jeremy D. Wilkins, whose wisdom greatly informed my intellectual growth. I am much indebted to the many stimulating conversations we had while I was still working on the topic of the justice of the cross as his doctoral student; I am grateful for his insight and friendship. I would like also to thank my other colleagues and mentors at Boston College who supported this work in many outstanding

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ways. I thank Dr. Dominic F. Doyle who always gave generous and insightful feedback on the previous drafts of this work, especially with regard to the interaction of culture and theology and St. Thomas's contribution. Likewise, my gratitude goes to Dr. Frederick G. Lawrence for his kindness, encouragement, and help with meeting intellectual challenges and revising this work, as well as to Dr. Patrick H. Byrne, who offered valuable insights on Lonergan's emergent probability. I am also grateful to Dr. M. Shawn Copeland and Dr. Richard R. Gaillardetz. Early on they inspired me to choose the path of a theologian and taught me to trust myself, refine my thinking, and aim high.

I would also like to thank Dr. PHEME PERKINS for her expert guidance in biblical studies and for her constructive suggestions on how this work could be improved. For my knowledge of St. Paul, I am also much indebted to Dr. Thomas Stegman, SJ. Furthermore, the current project greatly benefited from the feedback I received from Dr. Douglas Finn and Dr. J. Patout Burns, both instrumental in my learning about St. Augustine's soteriology, and from Dr. Brian Robinette, who fostered my understanding of a secular age. Likewise, I am grateful to Dr. Lisa S. Cahill for helping me to clarify the ethical issues that classical soteriologies might raise in a modern context. I also owe gratitude to Dr. Catherine Cornille and Dr. Brian Daley, SJ, for giving me an opportunity to learn more about atonement in the excellent conferences they organized, respectively, at Boston College and Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. Among those who supported this work in various ways also are my first doctoral advisor, Dr. Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM, and the wonderful community of Lonergan scholars both at the Lonergan Institute at Boston College and across the world, especially Dr. Neil Ormerod. I also deeply appreciate the editorial support and encouragement of Dr. David Fergusson, as well as the valuable assistance of everyone involved in the publication of this book by Cambridge University Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, I cannot go without thanking my Jesuit friends and mentors Fr. Joseph McHugh, SJ, Fr. William Barry, SJ (who already rests in God), Fr. Peter Folan, SJ, and – in a very special way – Fr. Kenneth Hughes, SJ, who generously helped with editing this work. Their accompaniment, help, spiritual wisdom, and friendship were of tremendous importance for my ongoing discernment of God’s nudging in the direction of committing my time to theological research and writing. I hope this work contributes in some way (albeit miniscule) to the greater glory of God!