

The Contemporaneity of the *Cur Deus homo*

Fr. Guy Mansini, OSB

Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology

The theologies of the cross of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar have been most influential in the last forty years. For Rahner, the cross announces a transcendently available grace and forgiveness and in that way makes it available, but does not otherwise change anything. For Balthasar, the cross is no mere announcement but changes the largest things. In fact, it changes God, since before the foundation of the world God has so had to modify the Trinitarian relations that the work of the cross can destroy sin by way of actualizing the Son's eternal and immanent obedience to his Father. The path between these extreme positions is that of Saint Anselm. The cross is indeed an event; it changes things. However, it does not change God, but changes the created moral world. The charity of Christ in his obedience to his Father, a charity than which no greater can be conceived, outweighs all the evil of all human sin. According as we are in Christ, God sees in us what he sees and loves in his Son. That is the core of Anselmian "satisfaction."

The *Cur Deus homo*—*Why God Became Man*—is one of the great texts of western theology. Every great text is always contemporaneous—that's what it means to call it great. But I think there is reason to think of the *Cur Deus homo* as especially important today as I hope to explain.

Saint Anselm tackles two issues at once in his treatise, both the motive of the incarnation of the Son of God and the mechanism of his redemption of the human race. I am concerned tonight more exclusively with that second thing: how the cross works to save us. Touching the cross, Cardinal Newman reminds us, is touching the heart of Christianity. Here he is in his great sermon, "The Cross of Christ the Measure of the World":

. . . the great and awful doctrine of the Cross of Christ . . . may fitly be called, in the language of figure, the *heart* of religion. The heart may be considered as the seat of life; it is the principle of motion, heat, and activity; from it the blood goes to and fro to the extreme parts of the body. It sustains the man in his powers and faculties; it enables the brain to think; and when it is touched, man dies. And in like manner the sacred doctrine of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice is the vital principle on which the Christian lives, and without which Christianity is not. Without it no other doctrine is held profitably; to believe in Christ's divinity, or in His manhood, or in the Holy Trinity, or in a judgment to come, or in the resurrection of the dead, is an untrue belief, not Christian faith, unless we receive also the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice.

I turn to consider two modern attempts to understand the atonement, the cross, before turning to Saint Anselm.

A. Karl Rahner

First, there is probably what has been the most influential account in the United States in the last fifty years, that of Karl Rahner.

Rahner tries mightily to maintain the cross as a true and proper cause of our salvation, but one wonders with what success. He likens the causality of the cross to that of a sacrament: in the way that a sacrament causes grace, so the cross more originally and primordially causes grace. But how does a sacrament cause grace according to Rahner? Not the way Saint Thomas supposed, by way of an exercise of efficient causality: for Thomas, the sacrament plays a real role in making the recipient of the sacrament other than he was prior to his reception of the sacrament: he really is now forgiven—in virtue of the sacrament of penance. Or, he really is now a graced child of God—in virtue of the sacrament of baptism. Sacraments change things for Saint Thomas. They change us. Roughly, they change us the way a sculptor's chisel changes the marble relative to the sculptor: they are his instruments in refiguring the stone. So the sacraments are Christ's instruments in refiguring us in grace. But Rahner rejects this analysis. He thinks it makes the sacraments too physical in a way that elides the role of the recipient's consciousness in the sacramental event. Rahner wants sacraments rather to announce things: the sacraments announce the offer, the availability of God's grace. But they don't make grace happen in the recipient. Just so, the cross is the public annunciation of the always already availability of the love and mercy of God. This is how he puts it in "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation":

. . . 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.¹

It seems that on this view the cross doesn't change anything except in our minds: now we know that grace is available; before we didn't. Rahner is aware of this criticism and replies as follows:

The objection may be raised that a sign, which can only be directed and addressed to men, may possibly be a significant cause of their awareness but cannot be the cause of the reality signified, i.e. the salvation of men. In reply to this it should be pointed out that a notion of "sign" is here being assumed which is a quite inappropriate for a sacramental sign. . . . [I]n a sacramental sign the saving will of

¹ Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," *Theological Investigations* XVI, trans. David Morland, OSB (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 199-224, at 212.

God and grace find historical expression. Sign and signified are essentially one . . . so that the reality signified comes to be in and through the sign, and the sign, therefore, in this specific and limited sense, causes the reality signified.²

“Finding historical expression,” however, does not get us across the bridge from the availability of grace to its bestowal.

Of old, we used to say that sacraments cause grace by signifying it. Rahner’s account collapses the causality into the signifying. *Causant significando* is taken to mean that the “causing” just is the “signifying” and nothing but that. We should rather say, I think, that the “signifying” is *also* a cause. But for Rahner grace causes the sign; the sign does not cause grace. And indeed, Rahner is quite up-front about this.³ This account of sacramental causality is supposed also to work for the cross. But the same difficulty remains. Try as we might to find a more satisfying way in Rahner’s vein to think things out—emphasizing the publicity, historicity, corporeality, enfleshed character of the message of the cross, adverting to the necessity of these things for a successful communication of the word of grace, still, the cross remains only a message, a word, an advertisement. It doesn’t change anything, neither God nor man, but turns out to be a revelatory superstructure atop the fundamental architecture of redemption and salvation that has always already been eternally established before any response of man to being found guilty before God.

Rahner’s attention to the causality of the cross is not episodic but well considered. His sacramental account fits within the requirements a theology of the atonement must meet for him. Let us list them all (from “The One Christ”).

1. First, he wants a theory in which it is manifest that the salvific will of God is the cause, not the effect, of the cross (207).
2. Second, it will be one which avoids the “inconceivable notion” that Christ is our representative on the cross or does anything in our stead (208). He does something for our good, but not in our name. More positively, he wants an account that makes more evident the role of our own free appropriation of God’s forgiveness and grace, that is, an account in which “self-redemption” has a prominent place (206-207).
3. Congruently with both of the foregoing, third, it will be a theory in which the anger of God at sin and the sinner becomes a minor or even non-existent theme (208). The basic architecture of salvation is already realized and in place before ever we behold the cross of Christ. So, there is no wrath in God to neutralize (no. 1), and if there were, how could it be borne by another in our stead (no. 2)?

² Rahner, “The One Christ,” 215.

³ Rahner, “The One Christ,” 212-213; see also his *The Church and Sacraments*, in *Inquiries* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), section I, 3, d.

4. Fourth, evidently, the transaction of the cross will be primarily a transaction between the God of grace and the sinner himself, and not a transaction between Father and Incarnate Son.

5. Fifth, it will be a theory in which there is no introduction of the “metaphysically impossible idea” of a change in God (208). This requirement is bound up with the first and third.

B. Hans Urs von Balthasar

It is remarkable that Hans Urs von Balthasar can be read as wanting an account of the atonement that requires the exact opposite of each one of Rahner’s desiderata.⁴ And Balthasar’s is surely the second most influential account of the cross in contemporary Roman Catholic theology. *Mysterium Paschale* and the *Theo-Drama* are the important texts here.⁵

1. First, although the cross follows from God’s salvific will and love, it is a truly effective, and not merely quasi-sacramental, cause of the reconciliation of the world to God (TD IV, 362). It is no mere “symbolic illustration” of or “visual aid” to God’s grace and mercy (TD III, 140 [with reference to Rahner]; 117). This is said directly to Rahner.

2. Second, Christ is a substitute for sinners, and in their very character as sinners. There is a “real assumption of universal guilt” by Christ (MP, 101); “the sinner as sinner is hanging on the cross,” “and not only in some vague representation” (MP, 134). The cross is a “bearing of the total sin of the world” (MP, 137; with explicit contrast to Rahner). More, Christ bears the punishment of the damned (MP, 167, 172.). This is repeated in TD IV (260, 263, 285, esp. 334-338). Again, there is explicit reference to Rahner.

3. It follows therefore, and third, that the biblical assertion of the wrath of God, as following from his (outraged) covenant love and faithfulness must be recognized. It is ready to fall on the sinner, but in fact it falls on Christ, who identifies himself with the sinner (MP, 120, 123, 138-139). God unloads his wrath onto the Son (TD IV, 345); God’s anger strikes him (TD IV, 348). Christ experiences hell and damnation.

4. Fourth, therefore, the cross is first of all and foundationally an event within the Trinitarian economy, a transaction in the first place between the Son and the Father. Sometimes Balthasar speaks of this transaction as one that effects something in God (MP,

⁴ I have explored these contrasts more fully in “Rahner and Balthasar on the Efficacy of the Cross,” *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, 63(1997): 232-249.

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), hereafter MP, and *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, II, III, and IV*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990, 1992, and 1994), hereafter TD.

24, 27, 34-35, 125). “The event of the Incarnation [the *kenosis* of which culminates on the cross] of the Second Person does not leave the inter-relationships of the Persons unaffected” (MP, 30; see 33). Other times, it is as if the Trinitarian relations are simply the ground of a love that can be manifested economically in such suffering as Christ bears (TD IV, 324-325, 328).

5. Fifth, then, the immutability of God is very much an issue, especially if we follow the first way of taking the “Trinitarian event” spoken of in no. 4. God’s changelessness, in classical theism is to be transcended (MP, 24, an “event” in God; 26, 27, something “new” happens to God; 34-35). On the other hand, Balthasar also says that the philosophical assertion of the immutability of God is to be maintained (TD II, 280), and this is concordant with the second way of taking “Trinitarian event” in no. 4.

If the trouble with Rahner is that nothing happens on the cross, the trouble with Balthasar is that too much happens: the cross changes God himself. It is an event with infinite and absolute consequences, reaching up to the heaven of heavens. Or, more exactly expressed, God changes himself before the foundations of the world in view of the redemption: he makes himself other than he would have been, in the obedience of the Son before time began, so that the obedience of the incarnate Son could so identify with our sin as to experience it, and swallow it up in his own faithfulness and love. This is a dramatic conception of the cross indeed—a theo-dramatic one, where God himself is changed by the action of the play in the mutual interplay of divine and human freedom. This is so even if the interplay of created and uncreated freedom has already been played out exemplarily between Father and Son before the foundation of the world. Further, the alienation of the Son in his eternal obedience to his Father to identify with sinners answers to the Biblical wrath of God that threatens sinners.

All this makes for a stunning conception of the involvement of the Trinity in the economy of salvation. But then, how does it really work for our salvation? Christ identifies, not only with us as sinners who need help, but with our very sin so drawing the sting of God’s wrath away from us. Is that a profitable way to think about Christ’s experience? Is it even a possible way? For Saint Thomas, Christ’s sorrow over sin is as deep as human sorrow can be: given Christ’s perfect human knowledge of the goodness and love of God, and given his perfect knowledge of the nihilation and malice of sin in comparison with that goodness and love, his sorrow is as vast as the horizon, as deep as the ocean and more. But it is not the experience of hell, as Balthasar wants it to be, and which is hard to fathom within the loving obedience of Son to Father and the Father’s loving approval and acceptance of the human obedience of his Son. And in speaking about how Christ throws the distance between God and sinner into the greater distance between him and his Father in eternity, do we really have an insight into the transaction of salvation, or are we being dazzled with images and metaphors?

C. Saint Anselm

How can we navigate between these two accounts, the rock and the whirlpool, without metaphysical disaster or doctrinal dissolution so as to make sense of the cross as cause of our salvation? Is there some way to keep the cross as an event, as Balthasar is determined to do, and at the same time maintain the transcendence of God, which Rahner insists must be upheld, and which Balthasar compromises, since he introduces the finitudes and limitations of the world into the Trinitarian relations? To be sure, our hope is that finite persons will find life in the untarnished and immutable personal relations of the Trinity. But for this to happen, Anselm thinks, the finitude and limitations of the world, especially the limitations and consequences of sin have first to be addressed *within* the world, and not in some Trinitarian archetype of the world.

The biblical motif of the wrath of God that Rahner dismisses and that Balthasar underlines cannot really indicate a God who can be made irate and then subsequently placated. But neither is it a misleading and dispensable rhetorical form. It is rather a very obvious and forceful way of declaring that the relations between God and man are relations of justice. It is an immediately communicative way of conveying this, because we are ourselves rightly angry when we have been treated unfairly and our rights ignored. Now, it is just exactly a consideration of justice that frames Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*. God established man in justice, so that man might obey the will of God, and in precisely that way remain a worthy creature of God, a creature who is what a creature should be. Sin disturbs the original relations between God and man because it destroys the order of justice. How, Anselm asks, can justice between God and man be restored?

The argument at this juncture is straightforward. Sin is the creature's withdrawal of his will from just submission to the divine will. It introduces a disorder into the created world, a world that should reflect, but now in part no longer reflects, the glory of God. While God cannot be dishonored in himself, in his eternal bliss, his external honor—the order and glory of the created universe—can be and is diminished by sin. It is not only accident and sickness, pain and suffering and death that cause people to doubt the existence of God, after all, but especially the malice and meanness of man. Once this disorder has been introduced into the world, Anselm says, there are two ways to restore the proper order of the sin-defiled created will to God. One way is by punishment: here the malefactor unwillingly has visited upon him the just consequences of his sin. Another way is by satisfaction: here the sinner willingly restores the honor he has stolen from God. He does this by repairing the damage, undoing both the social and the personal consequences of his sin. Satisfaction means the malefactor himself puts to right the things he previously put askew. Punishment and satisfaction may look the same, in that they are both burdensome, both as it were costs paid by the malefactor. But punishment is an unwilling payment of the price (I.14). Satisfaction is a willing payment of the price. About half of the misunderstanding of Anselm rests on not keeping this distinction between punishment and satisfaction bright and shiny before the mind's eye. To anticipate: God does not punish his incarnate Son. Anselm never says that he does. Only the malefactor, the one with a guilty will, can be punished, and Christ is as innocent as both God his Father and Mary his mother.

There is this trouble that Anselm sees with the way of satisfaction. The human malefactor, even if he would, cannot repay what he owes God, cannot by his own power restore the order of justice he has disturbed. Anselm proves this in four ways, two of which are particularly telling. For one thing, no man can make up for all the disorder introduced into the world by Adam, a disorder he shares in and is solidary with in his own sin. Just because sin is a social reality, whatever we do in our own personal capacity to undo it cannot really provide a fix for the entire race. For another thing, sin is infinite in weight, as measured by the dignity of the one offended, the infinite God. This is not something God himself could change. He is infinitely good, infinitely loveable, and that is a necessary state of affairs. To strike at the infinite divine goodness is therefore to contract a debt of equal infinity. We should as well try to repair it on our own as empty the ocean with a teaspoon. Remember Newman's very just maxim that it would be better for the whole created world to disappear into nothingness than for one mortal sin to be committed.

So here is how things stand. That satisfaction not be paid to restore God's honor in the created world is, for Anselm, an injustice than which no greater can be conceived (I.13). If we do not pay it, we remain in the greatest debt to God. And yet, given the infinite honor of the one who is to be satisfied, it is itself something likewise infinite and beyond our capacity to procure. We are at an impasse. From the other side of the equation of personal relations, God cannot rightly forgive us without satisfaction (I.24). A double impasse.

Anselm is misunderstood, I just said, if we forget the distinction between punishment and satisfaction. He is misunderstood also insofar as we take the order of justice to be the final framework of the argument of the *Cur Deus homo*. Justice does indeed frame the argument, as I observed speaking of the Bible on the wrath of God. But it is only the penultimate frame. Why this is not evident to Anselm's readers has always been a great mystery to me. Pope Benedict can help us out here. He has recently observed that contemporary men seem no longer concerned to find justification before God, but demand rather that God justify himself to us for all the evil we endure, *especially that evil we ourselves produce* by the malice of a will that remains something created.⁶ He further observes:

It is mercy that moves us toward God, while justice frightens us before Him. In my view, this makes clear that, under a veneer of self-assuredness and self-righteousness, the man of today hides a deep knowledge of his wounds and his unworthiness before God. He is waiting for mercy.

The language of justice frightens us, and it threatens to strip off the veneer that hides our knowledge of our wounds and unworthiness before God. We do not want to hear it, and we stop listening to Anselm before he completes his argument.

⁶ Interview with Pope Benedict XVI, October, 2016 at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

A key moment of this completion occurs at the end of Book I. Just after the double impasse described above, Anselm says this: “How can we . . . maintain that God, who is rich in mercy above human conception, cannot exercise this compassion?” *Dives in misericordia*—God who is rich in mercy: this line from the Letter to the Ephesians (2:4) provides the title for one of John Paul II’s great encyclicals. What the phrase signals to us is that, greater and more encompassing than justice, there is the really and truly final framework of all things, which is God’s mercy. This is just what we should already expect if as philosophy students we have read the *Proslogion* before ever as theologians we enter into the logic of the *Cur Deus homo*. In chapters 9 and 10 of the *Proslogion*, the argument finds that God’s mercy outruns any this-worldly conception of justice and just order, because it is measured by God alone, by his goodness alone. Justice is not despised. But the standard of both is the unfathomable God himself.

Just because the standard of divine mercy is God himself, moreover, his mercy is above and beyond our ability to conceive it—it could be described as a mercy than which no greater can be conceived (see I.24). There is more. Speaking to monks who have undertaken the vowed life, Anselm puts the point as powerfully as he can. In his *Similitudes*, he has defended the superior quality of the vowed to the ordinary Christian life. And in Book II of the *Cur Deus homo*, Anselm reasons that God is, as it were, under a vow to save us; he has bound himself to save us and bring us to a good end, namely himself and his own happiness, at the first moment of our creation (II.5). How can the all-powerful God not fulfill his own vowed and promised binding of his own freedom? Both his original intention in creating us, therefore, his “vow,” and his mercy, demand some solution to the obstacle caused by human sin.

So to the solution. In order for mercy to be exercised, justice must be fulfilled, and by way of satisfaction, for only so can God keep his vow to bring us to himself and his own beatitude. Our debt to God for sin, and his debt to us contracted at our creation, come down to the absolute necessity of finding some way to make satisfaction for our sin. We owe it but cannot pay; God does not owe it but could pay it in our stead—if only he could stand in our stead. This he does, or his Son does, by the incarnation. The incarnate Son has then a human life of infinite value—a value than which no greater can be conceived, now introduced into the world, where a price also of infinite value needs to be paid on our behalf.

As C. S. Lewis paraphrases Anselm’s argument: what God in his own nature cannot do, make satisfaction for sin, he can to in Christ’s human nature; and what we cannot do because of sin, Christ can do for us and in our stead, teaching us and representing us and enabling our own repentance. Only a bad man needs to repent; but only a good man can repent. Behold the wisdom of God overcoming sin through the incarnation.⁷

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: G. Bles, 1952), “The Perfect Penitent.”

And we can say also: Behold the *mercy* of God overcoming sin through the justice of satisfaction. Baptism is a sign of repentance and conversion, and the Lord's baptism is a figure of his passion and death. Just so does John the Baptist seek to prevent Jesus from baptism. Whose reply to John is, "Let it be so for now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all *justice*" (Mt 3:15). So John baptizes him into his own death. And Saint Paul says the same: "For God has done what the law . . . could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the *just* requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rom 8:3-4). Christ introduces justice into the world by his willing reparation of the ravages of sin so that God can suitably show mercy. Our mercy to one another triumphs over the judgment God would mete out to us, the Letter of James says (James 2:13). But this is just because God's own mercy has "triumphed" over his own justice in Christ. Pope Benedict: "God simply cannot leave 'as is' the mass of evil that comes from the freedom that he himself has granted. Only He, coming to share in the world's suffering, can redeem the world."⁸

In the foregoing, I have tried to bring out the peculiarly Anselmian emphases in the logic of theology: an offense before an infinitely good God, than which no greater can be thought and contracting an equally infinite debt; a divine compassion than which no greater is conceivable, a divine vow than which no greater or more steadfast or more trustworthy can be thought. So also, the projected solution is a satisfaction than which no greater can be conceived, a satisfaction of infinite value, realized in a human life capable of inserting that value into the world because it is the human life a divine person, the Son of God. "Mercy and justice have met," as the psalmist says; "faithfulness shall spring from the earth"—the faithful satisfaction of Christ—"and justice look down from heaven"—the just forgiveness of sins in view of the satisfaction of Christ.

We have not yet deployed all the resources Anselm can bring to bear, however. The life of Christ is something whose worth must be assessed just as Anselm assesses it, infinite in value. This is satisfaction materially considered. The *form* of satisfaction is located rather in the soul of Christ. It comes to expression not in the *Cur Deus homo*, but outside the text in one of the *Orationes* or *Prayers* of Anselm.

It too betrays the peculiar logic of the saint, the logic every sophomore in philosophy knows from the *Proslogion*, since its nerve is the idea of "that than which no greater can be conceived." We have already seen this form of thought in Anselm's conception of the weight of sin and the extent of God's mercy. This form of thought, Anselm's preferred way of indicating the uniqueness of the Christian God, shows up also where he conceives the inmost heart of the personal relations of that same Christian God's dealing with his creatures. It's the heart of the issue, for it directs us to the heart of Christ.

In *Oratio* 18, a prayer for one's enemies, Anselm writes as follows:

⁸ Interview with Pope Benedict XVI, October, 2016 at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

Sweet and kind Lord, Jesus Christ, who showed to us such a charity than which no one has greater and which no one can equal; who was not bound in any way to death and nonetheless laid down your pious soul for sinners and slaves, and who prayed for your very killers, so that you might make them your brothers and reconcile them to your merciful Father and yourself; you Lord, who had such great charity for your enemies, you yourself have commanded us to have charity for your friends.

Good Lord, by what affection will I recognize your inestimable charity? What will I return for your limitless kindness? For the sweetness of your kindness goes beyond every affection.

A charity than which no greater can be found and which no one can equal. We remain within the confines of Anselm's logic, a logic that declares God escapes all confines. Such a charity, allied with a knowledge of sin better than that of sinners, makes for a sorrow over sin than which a greater, Saint Thomas will say, cannot be imagined (*Summa theologiae* III, Q. 46, a. 6). Speaking of Christ's charity, we have here what to me is missing from the *Cur Deus homo*, an attestation of the interior attitude with which Jesus goes to his death in satisfaction for our sins. This gives us to re-write the equation enacted on the cross in a way more calculated to move our own hearts. We can put it this way: the charity of Christ is a good so good that it outweighs all the un-good of human sin. In this way, the world is changed. And we enter into that changed state of affairs when by faith and baptism we cast our lot with Christ.

So, Anselm to Rahner: as you say, the cross does really and truly have to do with declaring God's grace. It is, as you put it, an embodiment or sacramentalization of God's grace. But it is more than such an actualization of grace in Christ. For if we leave it at that, then the cross is conceived exclusively as the culmination of revelation. It is that, to be sure, but is more than that; it really and truly is an event, a happening. It changes things, and in a way more than the kind of change that happens when we simply tell someone something. The cross changes things morally. More than an announcement of God's grace, it re-configures the moral relation of man to God. It does this by putting into the world something better than all the good cancelled by sin. In this way, it makes the world a place fitting for the renewed offer of grace to sinners. In other words, more than the supreme embodiment and sacramentalization of the offer of grace, the cross is also the supreme embodiment and sacramentalization of the satisfaction that makes up for sin; it's the real symbolic actualization of penance, to combine Lewis and Rahner, a penance that goes before and enables ours, letting us even justly—with the justice of Christ—become once again friends of God.

And Anselm to Balthasar: the cross is very certainly, as you say, an event. It is an event, as you truly see, of God's justice re-framed within the horizon of his love. But it is an event in the world, not in God. You want to make the drama of the cross to be an exchange, not just between heaven and earth, but an exchange determining the Trinity before the foundations of the world. The cross has not only to establish creatures, redeemed man, within the space of the

incarnate Son's obedience, but, in view of our redemption, has to establish the very nature of the relation between Father and Son such that time marks eternity and change creases the unchangeable. But in fact, this rather lessens the dramatic force of the redemption. On your account, the cross is just the manifestation of an already established dramatic Trinitarian reality. And in this sense, the incarnation and cross show us nothing new, nothing not already enacted before the beginning of time. But it is not so. The incarnation and cross is something new: a person who need not have entered the fight enters into it, and with the same weapons of satisfaction that we ourselves must use, if we can—and we can, only if Christ goes before us. This is a better drama, the drama depicted by what Chesterton called orthodoxy, beyond that of German idealism. It's more dramatic to *become* dramatic than to have always already been dramatic.

I think, then, that Anselm can meet the concerns of both Rahner and Balthasar, better than they do, and in better continuity with Saint Athanasius, who preceded him on his path, and Saint Thomas, who followed.

D. Conclusion

This is something of considerable moment for any attempt to make Christianity a living thing today. Think back to Newman's characterization of the cross of Christ as the heart of Christianity. If we have that right, we have everything right. If we get that wrong, the consequences touch everything else, and will in the end render us speechless.

By way of conclusion then, think of Good Friday, and how we comport ourselves to Christ the Lord as we hear the solemn proclamation of the Passion and Death. If we are made by the narration to lament our sins and ask for pardon, we are also moved to thank the Lord Jesus. But for what, exactly, do we thank him? If we are Rahnerians, we thank him for bringing us news of the grace of God. But we don't thank him for changing anything. We appreciate him as the summation of revelation, but not as one who refashions the shape of the world: he announces a shape already give from the beginning of time. But he doesn't install that shape. For Anselm, however, he does: he makes the shape of the world, the shape of the moral world uniting God and man to be different than it was: he changes the bad state of the world into a good state, and granted that sin was permitted, than which no better can be conceived. If we keep the Lord only as a herald, an announcer, a news carrier, we will take the news but relegate the bearer, in the end, to a quite secondary importance.

If we are Balthasarians, then on Good Friday we recall that event for whose sake God in his Trinitarian reality made himself different before the foundation of the world. We see, as it were, the timely condition of the eternal constitution of God. Whatever Christ has done for us is swept up into what he has been done eternally and we discover that what we have done as sinners has been made to change the face of God and the Trinitarian relations. For some, this prospect delights, initially; but in the end, it grants too much to the power of sin, and makes the world darker than in fact it is.

With Rahner, Christ's agency is diminished: he shows but doesn't do. Our agency, too, collapses; it collapses into sharing what has been done eternally. Just as Christ doesn't do anything in the world, neither do we: we receive an already and eternally wrought work of God's mercy. With Balthasar, Christ's agency is inflated, and so also, ours, for what we do affects the eternal God.

But if we are Anselmians, we thank the Lord Jesus on Good Friday, not for making God as he is, whatever that could mean, and not merely for telling us of God's love, but of making us what we are: people who cooperate with him in the reparation of sin, our own sin and the sin of all the world, and people who so cooperate by joining themselves to a charity, a human charity, but the charity of the Son of God, than which no greater can be conceived. We thank him, then, not for being the Word of God, but for being the incarnate Word of God for us and our salvation. We thank him, indeed for a deed, but a deed whose effect and consequence touches us, changes us, takes us up into the Trinitarian relations that are not constituted by redemption or changed by it and therefore changed by sin, but that exist in irrefrangible splendor, perfect before the world was made. We thank Christ for finding a way to insert what cannot be marred into the world to undo what sin has marred. We thank him for his own charity, his own love, the friendship that he extends to us on the cross. Christ's agency as man is appreciated as working in this graced but created order, and enables our own graced cooperation with him.