Theodicy in Light of Theologia Crucis: Martin Luther
Before the Mystery of Human Suffering

by

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Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to delve into the sensitive reality of human suffering and evil in creation, in the light of a God who is believed and confessed to be omnipotent and morally perfect, from the standpoint of a theodicy based on the classic elements of Martin Luther’s *theologia crucis*. This theology, which is not circumscribed to a specific written work of the Reformer *expressis verbis* but rather constitutes the guiding thread that traverses practically all of his theological thought - notwithstanding its evident progression, tension and development - is most noticeably and consequentially expressed when addressing the problem of suffering and evil in the human being and in the creational order in two of his works, namely: *The Heidelberg Disputation* and *De servo arbitrio*, which I deal with in this thesis. It is our conviction that only from a theodicy articulated from the theology of the cross such as Luther offers is it possible to overcome both that unfortunate aporia between the theoretical and the practical that currently characterizes it, as well as to offer a true and enlightening contribution from that which is specific to the Christian faith to the painful and contradictory reality of human suffering and evil in creation. Lastly, it is our challenge here also to illuminate or deepen those dimensions of the *theologia crucis* not noticed or not sufficiently developed by the Reformer, so that the word of the cross remains a challenging – but at the same time consoling – voice in this wounded world today.
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Chapter 1
Introduction to the Problem of Theodicies: A Dead end?

1 Statement of the Problem

There hardly exists another problem, another event, or another reality that challenges the coherence of belief in an omnipotent, omniscient God who is at the same time merciful, loving, and morally perfect, more than the experience of human suffering and the evils that buffet the creational order. Of course, it should be noted that it is not only the coherence of this belief which is under the sensitive tension posed here, but even more the very existence of the same God believed and proclaimed in this confession. This is something which those who are critical and skeptical of Christianity have always taken advantage of, to the point that it has been argued that human suffering and the evils of the world are, so to speak, “the unassailable rock of atheism”\(^1\) It is, needless to say, before the confusion that evil and suffering awaken in us where we are compelled to conclude that:

Evil is the most terrible thing there is in the world. It is not possible to remove from it this unspeakable position that is assigned to it both by the indignation of the heart as the rebellion of the mind. Placing on it a discourse (logos), even theological, may run the risk of giving it an appearance of rationality or the start of justification. Evil is the irrational \textit{par excellence}; It is unjustifiable in every sense of the word. Morally, it goes without saying, it is a bad and unjustified act. But intellectually too, since who would dare to make apology for evil?\(^2\)

In consequence, the problem of evil, that impregnable rock of the critics of theism, would apparently demonstrate, in the words of one of their most distinguished representatives, J. L. Mackie, that Christianity not only lacks rational sustenance, but that it is entirely irrational and incongruous, particularly in light of doctrines as fundamental to its creed as the omnipotence and goodness of God.\(^3\) However, the truth is that not even the opponents of Christianity would be detached from answering the fundamental question that these emplace, namely: \textit{Si Deus est, unde}

\(^1\) Thus, for example, Payne exclaims in the third act of the drama of G. Buchner, \textit{La muerte de Danton. Un drama} (Barcelona: BOSCH, Casa Editorial, S. A. 1982): "Remember it, Anaxagoras, why do I suffer? This is the rock of atheism. The slightest convulsion of pain, although only it moves an atom, tears the Creation from top to bottom."103.


\(^3\) \textit{The Miracle of Theism. Arguments for and Against the Existence of God} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 150.
malum? Si non est, unde bonum? Of course, this is the case if their opposition to the Christian faith in relation to the problem of theodicy would want to appear as a relatively serious proposal, and not simply an objection motivated by ideological apprehensions.

Indeed, it is sufficient to consider the terrible events of the past century and those beginning to emerge in the current one, with two world wars and the extermination of millions of people; the Jewish Holocaust; Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the bombing of Dresden and Berlin; the purges carried out during Stalin's regime; Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Sudan; successive military dictatorships in many Third World countries that have seen much of the opposing population tortured and killed; the exploitation and dehumanization of thousands of people under political-economic models that pursue greed and the enrichment of a few at the expense of the dignity and indebtedness of many; poverty, hunger and all sorts of new diseases and pests that plague many regions and that threaten to spread throughout the world with consequences that are impossible to predict; the trafficking of human beings and human organs; the sexual exploitation of women and children; the increasing abandonment in many sectors of the elderly and people with physical disabilities, who are considered as nuisances for companies, according to which the value of a human being consists solely of its production capacity and contribution to the system; cruelty against animals, that in the absence of effective laws for their protection, or for the sake of mere scientific advancement, seems never ending; the predatory use of natural resources, poisoning of the waters, air pollution, the growing deforestation of green areas, the destruction of many species which will never be able to regain, resulting in irreversible damage to the whole environment and all life on the planet; the enormous natural disasters—perhaps largely as a result of all the above—in the form of tsunamis, hurricanes or earthquakes that have claimed the lives of thousands of people; the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York, and those after this date that have occurred in various parts of the world; the constant threat that under tense global political situations and human irresponsibility, a new planetary war might break out.

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4 Of course, we mentioned nothing more here than some of the great sufferings and evils that have plagued the recent history of humanity and the planet, without attempting to equate or confuse moral evils and natural evils -to use the typical classification of Leibniz- such as is often the custom, because with this runs the serious risk, as clearly pointed out by S. Neiman, “to excuse the architects; or comparing the Creator to criminals of the worst sort.” Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 8. However, and beyond what strictly concerns natural evil, we might feel tempted to come to the same conclusion as the great antagonist at the time of Leibniz, the French philosopher Pierre Bayle: “History,” said Bayle, “is the history of the crimes and misfortunes of the human race.” Quoted from S. Neiman, op. cit., 18.
effect of which, in the light of the sophisticated weapon technology of the time, could lead without exaggeration to the destruction of humanity and all other forms of life on the planet; terrorism brought about by Islamic fundamentalism that seeks to impose a single vision of God, humanity, truth and society and has kidnapped the security and peace of almost all nations that do not align with its fundamentalist and intemperate view of reality; and, as if this were not enough, the evils, sorrows, misfortunes of each particular individual, without exception of his own recondite areas of selfishness, misery and wickedness; suffice it simply to consider, as mentioned, these events and many other situations that we could mention, to ask ourselves with all honesty whether the Christian confession concerning a God who is believed and worshiped as good, merciful, morally perfect and at the same time omnipotent and omniscient, can continue to be held up even nowadays.\(^5\)

In other words, we are faced here with the eternal dialectic tension between, on the one hand, the skeptic-agnostic view which established from the evidence of these sufferings and evils a final judgment against the idea of a God who is believed and confessed to be kind and omnipotent, and who allows, however, human suffering and misery of the world; and, on the other hand, the eyes of faith, for which such harsh realities do not suppose \textit{a priori} the incoherence of God’s essence, insofar as they respond to an ulterior purpose, although still not clear, in accordance with the character that is God’s own. Regarding the first view, it is worth admitting that this constitutes one of the oldest and most frequently recurring human apprehensions. Thus, for example, in the classical formulation of Epicurus transmitted by Lactantius in his \textit{De Ira Dei}:

\begin{quote}
God, he says, either wants to eliminate bad things and cannot, or can but does not want to, or neither wishes to nor can, or both wants to and can. If he wants to and cannot, then he is weak – and this does not apply to god. If he can but does not want to, then he is spiteful – which is equally foreign to god’s nature. If he neither wants to nor can, he is both weak and spiteful, and so not a
\end{quote}

\(^5\) See, in this way, the penetrating paragraph of M. A. Weisberger “Where was God? Where was the intelligent designer of the universe when 1.5 million children were turned into smoke by zealous Nazis? Where was the all powerful, all knowing, wholly good being whose very essence is radically opposed to evil, while millions of children were starved to death by Stalin, had their limbs chopped off with machetes in Rwanda, were turned into amputees by the diamond trade in Sierra Leone, and worked to death, even now, by the child slave trade that, by conservative estimates, enslaves 250 million children worldwide? Without divine justice, all of this suffering is gratuitous. How, then, can a wholly good, all-powerful God be believed to exist?” “The Argument of Evil.”, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Atheism}, ed. M. Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187. Certainly, and as is implicit in our quote, it follows that for our author the detention on any of these issues already invalidates any defense in favor of a loving and omnipotent God.
god. If he wants to and can, which is the only thing fitting for a god, where then do bad things come from? Or why does he not eliminate them?6

Of course, we could discard all these refutations by arguing that we are facing an unfathomable problem, the understanding of which escapes reason, so that in the face of this dilemma we can only take refuge in the sphere of faith and draw back before it as facing an impenetrable mystery, under the hope that in all these evils and sufferings is found a higher divine purpose that in time will be manifested. We would sin by arrogance if we failed to notice the truth that is contained in the above statement. In fact, and as will be appreciated in the heading of this work, we have assumed from the beginning that suffering and evil constitute a reality that contains a wide margin of mystery,7 to which implicitly, though not exclusively, we gain access basically through faith. Related to this, who could ignore the overwhelming biblical call to live in faith, walk by faith, resist by faith, and even face death in faith that our final fate rests in the hands of the God who raised his Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead? Who could deny, moreover, the full validity of that wise advice given by Melanchthon in his Loci Communes: “We do better to adore the mysteries of deity than to investigate them”?8 Who could, finally, play down the eschatological hope in our sufferings and in evils - often incomprehensible in the moment - in the secure conviction that neither death nor pain will have the last word, but a new creation where every tear will be wiped away. Clearly there are contained here great bastions of Christian

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6 Epicurus, Fragment 374, in Epicurea, ed. H. K. Usener (Lipsiae: Wm. C. Brown, 1887), 253. In a similar line, this is also expressed by St. Augustine in his Confessions, Book VII, ch. 5. Thus also Thomas Aquinas in his Summa theologiae, I, q. 2, a. 3, ob. 1: “It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word "God" means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist”. Likewise, Hume: "Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" Dialogues concerning Natural Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74. And in a much more categorical way, P. Bayle: “A God who could have created a world that contained fewer crimes and misfortunes and chose not to do so, seems nothing but a giant criminal Himself.” Quoted from S. Neiman, op. cit., 18.

7 Certainly, from recognition that in the suffering and evil in the world underlies an evident mystery, it is not followed by logical necessity by the abandonment of their explanatory theories or their concrete actions as a way to somehow mitigate them, to the extent that, of course, this were even possible. But in such recognition is admitted the wide margin of inscrutability that both contain, despite all human efforts, legitimate though they may be, for their explanation and overcoming respectively. Already Kant himself, and later Schelling, faced with the reality of evil in the world will conclude that the fact that some persons choose to adopt good maxims while others choose evil maxims, ultimately between good or evil, is a completely inscrutable fact. See, for this, the excellent work of R. J. Bernstein, Radical Evil. A Philosophical Interrogation (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), 155, 207.

proclamation that could never be circumvented, without risk of blurring a big part of its hope and distinctiveness. And yet, this same message, to the extent that it turns its back on the modern interlocutor that challenges the coherence of belief in a God estimated as omnipotent and morally perfect, such as Christianity has held historically, but who, at the same time, allows so much suffering and evil, runs the obvious risk under such fideism, of allowing that other currents and modalities of skeptical thought would be positioned as definitive before the problem of human suffering and the evils of the world. In such sense, and if this is how we proceed, the drastic judgment anticipated by Hegel would be fulfilled: "The world loses God and God loses the world."9

What doubt can we have, consequently, about the obligation of the Christian message with respect to these realities if it wants to be more than a distant and silent spectator before this whole experience of suffering and evil that surrounds human life and creation alike, and which powerfully challenges the goodness and providence of the Creator? Moreover, we wouldn't be overstepping by affirming that humanity today, the current society, has higher expectations on the tenor that this message must take - especially in relation to any other discourse interpreting the reality of suffering and evil - because the Christian message defines the essence and act of God neither more nor less as "love." In this way, the First Letter of John expressed it explicitly: "God is love." This obvious tension, therefore, between, on the one hand, the God whose essence is love, and, on the other hand, the daily experience of suffering and evil that affects humans and creational order arises, consequently, and in its most immediate and elemental way to the Christian faith, to the extent that it is willing to take over this contrariness, the problem of theodicy.

2 The best of all possible worlds

Since the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz coined the term "theodicy"10 to refer to that rational effort to justify the existence of suffering and evil in the

9 Quoted from W. Kasper, El Dios de Jesucristo, (Sígueme: Salamanca, 1998), 33.
10 Indeed, the term "theodicy" is a neologism introduced by Leibniz in his work Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal (1710), that he himself would explain for the second edition thereof (1712) as: "The cause of God defended by his righteousness reconciled with all his other perfections and all of his actions". We, for our part, we will use onwards the translation in English Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil, (London: Routledge-Kegan, 1951).
world in light of the belief in a loving, merciful and at the same time almighty God, such as traditionally has been confessed by Christianity, we have begun to speak, at least in the technical sense, of the "problem of theodicy." Notwithstanding the foregoing, it could be noted that the discussions generated around the problem of theodicy in the context of academic research represent an occupation of modern theology, generated certainly under the experiences of evil and suffering of the last century. This does not mean, of course, that the implicit question about theodicy and abasement and wonder before the suggested incoherence between a God declared as morally perfect and the world as it is did not have a forceful presence prior to modern theological discourse.

In this sense, we affirm with Emmanuel Levinas that theodicy, beyond the formal coining of the term by the philosopher from Leipzig, is as old as the reading of the Bible itself.\footnote{Entre Nous: Essays on the Thinking of the Other (Columbia: University Press, 1998), 96.} To affirm this, it is sufficient simply to refer to some passages of the Old Testament prophets, to certain psalms and, of course, to the book of Job as well; and, independently of the biblical writings, to the formulation already quoted from Lactantius and other Fathers of church, among many other testimonies. One could then conclude that the question about the problem of theodicy, far from being a subject of exclusive interest to theological or philosophical academia, actually constitutes a question that is always open and current, whenever the human being, harassed by the daily experience of suffering and evil, is confronted with it a profound crisis of meaning that reveals in the depths of his being the anguished disconnect experienced between the world as it actually is and the world as humanity longs for it to be. Said in more religious language, it is the deep sense of inconsistency between the human experience of evil and suffering and the kindness and love traditionally attributed to the Creator.

Leibniz's theodicy essay, is seems, has tended to be caricaturized as a naive effort to reconcile the moral perfection of God with the existence of suffering and evil, and imagine, therefore, "the best of all possible worlds."\footnote{In Leibniz, the idea of "the best of all possible worlds" points rather to the idea that everything seen as a whole reflects a universal harmony and consistency that leads to the Creator, and not to the assumption that of a world without evil and suffering individuals. See, op. cit., 51; 128.} If, according to Spinoza, there is nothing more than a single possible world which is necessarily derivative of the essence of God, for Leibniz there exists in the mind of God diverse possible worlds, although in infinite wisdom and goodness God has created the best among them. Leibniz, as is known, would have reached such a conclusion in a
deductive way, that is, starting from the confession of the almighty Christian God whose attributes and perfections surpass all the most sublime that we can ever imagine. In part, such deteriorated projection of his work must be attributed in no small measure to Leibniz himself, who in several sections of this work will insist disproportionately on the principle that all evil of this world would be nothing compared with the existing good in the universe. Moreover, such evils, in view of this superior harmony, would precisely contribute to this world being the best of all worlds created by God. This deplorable idea that has been transmitted from his theodicy of the best of all possible worlds is also due to the satire of this principle created by Voltaire in his *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (1759), in which a certain philosopher, Pangloss, never tires of stubbornly promoting, in season and out of season, his peculiar doctrine of "best of all possible worlds," despite suffering himself with constant evils and calamities. In accordance with that, Candide may well exclaim: "If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?" Nevertheless, the biggest turning point against his principle of "best of all possible worlds" must be seen in the great natural disaster that struck the city of Lisbon in the year 1775 in the form of earthquake and tsunami, only forty years after the death of Leibniz, and that would put an abrupt end to the dream of every rational or natural theology to harmonize the goodness of God concerning creation. It would suffice, then, not more than a couple of decades after the tragedy that throughout Europe there were a myriad of publications aimed at undermining the idea of a perfect and benign design assigned by God for this world, those being, of course, the two works of the singular Marquis de Sade, *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* (1787) and *Histoire de...*
Juliette, ou les Prospérités du vice (1796), one of the most scathing, slyest and deepest attacks against this doctrine, bastion, up to this point, of all traditional theodicy. In the light, then, of this dramatic disconnect between theodicycal discourse and creational reality, the scathing epithet with which Schopenhauer will subsequently designate the theodicy of philosopher from Leipzig does not appear as distempered, that is, as "the worst of all possible worlds."  

Indeed, Leibniz would have committed the recurring slip up of the Enlightenment, not only with regards to an obvious Eurocentrism, but also in considering his era to be a time of infinite progress, the consummation of time, the fullness of humanity. Such realities that always arise can only refer to the nobility of their Creator. Here, physical evils are not denied, but the idea is that they always are the means for reaching higher purposes, what Leibniz would define as "the principle of the best." The problem of evil and the conviction that this world is the best is not something that for Leibniz is resolved in the realm of faith, but of reason which can understand such a superior harmony, and whose conviction will become increasingly greater according to the progress of science. As is known, Leibniz distinguished between malum moral and malum physicum, adding besides another dimension of evil, the malum metaphysicum. For moral evil Leibniz understood nothing more than sin, before which the human being must respond

from Dubois: “Become better acquainted with your providence, my child. It will land her on a dung heap, but that isn't all. Providence is a tool invented by the rich to lull those whom they oppress into silent endurance. The rich have no need of virtue or faith, for their desires are met without them”. Selección Marqués de Sade: Juliette, Justine, Ernestina, (Barcelona: Brontes, 2012), 25. Needless to say, subsequent events in the life of Justine will demonstrate that the warning of Dubois would be conclusively accurate. Finally, it is worthwhile remembering what was said by S. Neiman in relation to this work of de Sade and in order to the specific issue of Providence, and perhaps, extensible for life?: “Theoretical refutation is increasingly superfluous. Life itself refutes Providence, in long chains of suffering without sense and without end.”, op. cit., 182.  

15 Quoted from Emerich Coreth, Dios en el pensamiento filosófico, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2006), 198.  

16 In this way, in the scheme of theodicy of Leibniz the relationship between God and creation remains inverted according to Luther and his theology of the cross. If for the first one are the works of creation, the progress of his era, fundamentally, which refers to the nobility of the Creator, for Luther, meanwhile, such knowledge of the work of God can never start from what has been made, of the data from this world, but only from the passion and the cross. In that regard, we may well conclude that in essence the theodicy of Leibniz reveals more the color of the glory than the cross.  


19 From St. Augustine and St. Thomas the theological tradition had distinguished between malum culpae, evil that is sin or active evil, and malum poenae, evil of penalty or passive evil. Regarding metaphysical evil, no doubt the most problematic evil classification, the century after Leibniz will abandon it by considering it a notion with "pre-modern" features, choosing instead the term "finitude". See, A. Gesché, op. cit., 75ss.
spatially. Although God does not concur with moral evil, he permits it only on condition of *sine qua non* or hypothetical necessity that binds it to what is best. Regarding natural or physical evil, it would be natural disasters, generators of great tragedies and suffering in which the human being, despite his sin, has not been involved. God would use physical evil only on certain occasions and always according to "the rule of the best," because: “God wills all good *in himself antecedently*, that he wills the best *consequently* as an end.”20 With regard to metaphysical evil, Leibniz wanted to understand the ontological imperfection of all created things in contrast with the perfection of God, in other words, the distinction between Creator and creation.21 Such classification has until today served (with very few variants) as a starting point for the division of the kinds of evils to which theodicies refer, at least with regards to the first two categories, to the extent they are in themselves obvious.

However, current tendencies in the understanding of such categories requires evident nuances. Today, for example, we could ask ourselves, with respect to physical evil, how much of the tragedies or pestilence that rage across the planet are really the result of the direct intervention of human action, and the exploitation - without respite - of natural resources for the sole purpose of trade profits, with the obvious consequence of the deterioration of the entire ecosystem. In this regard, the affirmation of S. Neiman that after the tragedy of Lisbon natural evils would no longer have any correspondence to moral evils, and therefore would not possess any meaning, deserves important nuancing. In relation to moral evil, Leibniz would have seen in the disobedience of the first parents, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the cause of moral evil that affects human beings. It is true that such an explanation, attached to the idea of an originating human couple, in the light of modern natural science, can no longer be sustained. Our philosopher, however, in distinguishing the Creator from his creation so clearly in his category of *malum metaphysicum* would be deprived of that "original sin" which is emblematic of later philosophical idealism regarding deity to creation, and make of sin nothing more than a dialectical moment absorbed by the fullness of all content.

Be that as it may, we should admit that the category of moral evil has been one of the more resisted components of this Leibnizian triad with regards to assigning a framework of meaning and purpose before the reality of evil and suffering, even in its newer versions. In these, the most

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20 Ibid., 138.
21 Ibid., 135.
recurrent insistence is that the *malum moral* would allow human beings to become mature and free moral beings. Among those who perhaps have more recently gone deeper in the category of moral evil is the British philosopher of religion John Hick, who has defined his particular proposal as the process of "soul-making." Such theodicy of the "formation of souls" would rest for the English philosopher of religion, on three key elements: First, on the *epistemic distance*, according to which the world must experience absence of or distance from God, and as a consequence of this be subject to a series of hostile and adverse conditions (sufferings, dangers, dissatisfactions, etc.) in order to produce a superior good, in this case, the moral and free character of human beings. Secondly, on the resources of eschatology, to the extent that the epistemic distance and its results would show that human beings do not always achieve the goal of moral fullness, but rather the opposite. According to Hick, such eschatological perspective would assure that death would not constitute an irreversible end point for achieving this moral goal. Thirdly, on the resource of the mystery, which makes us go back to the enigma that the distribution of evil and suffering, or "excessive or dysteleological suffering" – to use the specific language of the author - overcome inordinately what would be reasonable to expect for the purpose of "soul-making".

It is not necessary to enter into a detailed discussion of each one of the difficulties that have arisen around the category of moral evil in the context of Christian theodicies, that is, from its initial formulation in Leibniz to the most current versions of the same. In the case of Hick's proposal concerning "soul-making," several objections have arisen from expert critics. And, without a doubt, the most recurrent of all is that which in its various forms raises the question about what kind of God would be one that before events such as the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and

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23 Already Leibniz himself would refer to a certain epistemic distance in God when he writes: “He enters there -in the sphere of human being- only in a secret way, for he supplies being, force, life, reason, without showing himself. It is there that free will plays its game”. *Op. cit.*, 215. What is written between the lines is my addition. Of course, the main reason for the “hiddenness of God” according to Leibniz, and unlike Hick, is not so much space of the free will of man and the not coercion from God, as the idea that this to become manifest and in working so miraculously, would cease to respect those laws by himself installed and that give harmony to the universe.
24 Similarly, R. Swinburne, whose points of contact with Hick's theodicy are very obvious, integrates into his program the principle of epistemic distance or hiddenness of God. In the case of Swinburne, such a principle would serve to the purpose of investigating or evangelizing, but, more fundamentally, the objective of not coercing the will of the human being so that this can choose freely between good or evil. See, *op. cit.*, 208.
the other terrible events mentioned at the beginning of this chapter has decided to retire from and be absent from the world, with the sole purpose that such unsustainable conditions could serve to form a mature and full character in human beings. Certainly, there is no doubt that once the foundation of this initial questioning has been laid, there is inferred then a question to keep on asking as an act of necessity: Are not perhaps such conditions, with all their burden of suffering, misery and devastation, insufferably disproportionate to the aim which they are supposed to achieve,

26 that is, forming moral and free human beings? Should we not conclude rather with Levinas,

27 and much more in the light of the atrocities committed in the past century, that suffering is always per se "useless damage," the "radical uselessness" par excellence, so that to argue that the suffering of others can be useful for something or someone constitutes the supreme act of barbarism and to find some philosophical utility in it the origin of all immorality? Would it not be, perchance, healthier perhaps to give up that insistent eagerness by redeeming the unredeemable one and to seek meaning and purpose to what is nothing more than tohu wabohu, and strongly affirm, consequently, with R. Bernstein that "there are ruptures and evils that cannot be overcome, that cannot be reconciled (and to which we cannot reconcile ourselves)"?

28 Furthermore, is not this epistemic distance, understood as the hiddenness of God, distance from God, deprived at the same time the only place where - to put it in the key of theologia crucis- such mystery is illuminated, the cross of the Crucified and Resurrected, a mystery that joins

26 As Mackie notes, it is common that in popular theodicies evil would be seen as a means for obtaining superior good. So, for example, the discipline of parents and teachers, the suffering caused by some surgery, the nervous system in animals in which pain plays the role of alert against any enemy or risk, etc. But in all these cases causal relationships are included, in which something estimated initially as an evil is seen then as a means or a result for a beneficial goal, it is to say, as a countervailing instrument. Now, if God exists, then, continues Mackie, such as theism confesses it, that is, not as an intermediary being and subject to causal laws but as an omnipotent and morally perfect being, God would not need evil and suffering as a means to achieve his biggest goals with humans, nor would freedom be something so precious as to warrant such a high price. See, op. cit., 183

27 In Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other (New York: Columbia, 1998), 93.

28 Op. cit., 75. Of course, underlying this assertion of Bernstein, and many other current researchers, is the vigorous protest of Jewish thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, among others, against the Hegelian idea of reconciliation of evil, and his understanding of it as nothing more than a dialectical moment within the totality of Spirit. This is something that, as we shall see in the following chapters, had already been rejected at the time by his old mate of Tübingen, the philosopher F. W. J. Schelling. In fact, and to give more strength to the objection of previous authors (Benjamin and Adorno), we should remember the bold thesis that Hegel brought forward in his The Phenomenology of Spirit, that: “The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 407. Something else, of course, is that for the aforementioned authors -and perhaps for most human beings that throughout of all history have experienced experiences limits of evil- in the light of their own experiences in the Jewish Holocaust, and Auschwitz, paradigm until today of the overflow useless and radical evil, not has been able to be more than an obscene statement.
rather with agnosticism and complete nonsense, rather than the divine pedagogy and his redemptive purpose for human beings? And, finally, do not that void and hiddenness of God – indispensable, according to Hick, for human beings to become free morals agent without coercion - deprived, as such theory requires it, of the message of the cross and resurrection, tend rather to be filled by a flood of voices and offerings of meaning, with the result that, in fact, no one can really know what it means to be a moral and free being?

But, returning again to Leibniz and the "best of all possible worlds," what about those natural evils in which man has not had direct participation and, therefore, the exercise of free will as a supreme human value is not possible according to the thesis of Hick and Swinburne? If we assent to the thesis according to which God can not intervene in the decisions of human beings in order to safeguard their moral freedom, even if these same decisions could generate great suffering and sorrow, then is it not fair to ask what the reason would be why God could not intervene, even for the purpose of lessening somewhat the enormous amount of natural evil that plagues this world, whose cost of suffering and pain is clearly disproportionate to the goal to be achieved, even more so considering, as already mentioned, that the supreme value of human freedom would not even be justified, but only a posteriori? This being the case, we may well sustain with Ivan Karamazov\(^\text{29}\) that it would suffice the suffering of a single child to break the aspiration of harmony in this world and present serious objections against whoever thinks that they have been created by a loving God. In consequence, we must recognize that no observer would need to be too meticulous and diligent to arrive quickly at the conclusion that this world constitutes, _prima facie_, a powerful challenge to the Leibnizian doctrine of “the best of all possible worlds” and, _a fortiori_, against a theistic confession of a God whose providence watches carefully and lovingly over every creature in creation. Suffice only the daily experience with its enormous burden of imperfections, pains and frustrations to find that this world could not have been created by the God who is said to have created the best of all possible worlds. Therefore, and in the best case, we could only speak here of a certain demiurge, of a certain inferior deity, but very doubtfully of that God to whom "supposedly" aspires the Leibnizian declaration, and with it theism. We put that "supposedly" in quotes, because despite what Leibniz himself pretended, his God is more than ever the God of the philosophers and not -to use the Pascalian phrase - the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; a God, certainly, who is not allowed to break into history, participate of the

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\(^{29}\) F. Dostoievski, _Los hermanos Karamazov_ (México D. F.: Editorial Porrúa 2012), 188ff.
destiny of people, and revealed himself in Jesus Christ, but an indefinite deity, hidden behind the scenes and subordinate largely to the set of laws designed by itself for achieving harmony as its top goal.

In light of all that has been said, it seems certain that the thesis of “the best of all possible worlds” could be easily be reduced to ad absurdum, and nowadays no essay of theodicy requires that we leave from this premise that the world we inhabit and know would be the most sublime of all. Moreover, after the risky thesis of Leibniz, waste of unprecedented optimism, many later thinkers refused the temptation to replace God as the author of creation, not for loyalty, of course, to the doctrine of the German philosopher, and even less because to do so might be lambasted as something wicked or foolish, but because, as well remembers S. Neiman:

On their views, the world we were given is so outrageous that no reasonable being would want credit as its Author.30

And, however, though the thesis of Leibniz may have been discarded, at least its positive side, its negative counterpart remains standing, that is, the disturbing question of why God did not consent to create, not the best of all possible worlds -something that we know very well- but a world where pain, evil and suffering do not reach dimensions as exorbitant and scandalous as we experience in our world today. That question, certainly, is unavoidable for any essay on theodicy.

3 The impossibility of all theodicy from pure reason

It would not be possible to move forward around the discussion generated by the problem of theodicy without mentioning the name of Immanuel Kant, not only because we owe him credit for coining the term "radical evil" in his famous work, Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone (1793),31 to designate that innate, and the same time voluntary, propensity of human beings toward evil, and which according to the interpretation that Hannah Arendt would make of this concept, totally exceeds our traditional conceptions of evil, awakening only astonishment

31 Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1991. It is extremely significant to note that the first part of the work reproduces, with few variations, a preliminary essay of Kant entitled, On the radical evil of human nature, sent for publication in the journal Berlinische Monatsschrift just one year before the publication of the work to which we refer.
and bewilderment.\textsuperscript{32} This concept, "radical evil," moreover, being far ahead of its time, will be useful for referring to the indescribable overflow of evil that occurred in the twentieth century, and thereby brings the traditional understandings of theodicy to a real dead end. In Kant, nevertheless, the problem posed by theodicy largely exceeds the limits of pure reason. It does not constitute a scientific task, but a matter of faith. Reason is not a competent judge concerning this issue, so that any effort to defend or justify the supreme wisdom of the Creator to the world by the theoretical sources of knowledge is, therefore, a labor doomed to failure beforehand. His treatise directly related to these kinds of theodicies, published in 1791, \textit{On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy}.\textsuperscript{33} rests precisely on this. Such failure of philosophical theodicies supported on the basis of pure reason would consist, in the opinion of Kant: first, in their inability to explain why the divine Legislator would allow moral evil to corrupt this world, which would undermine his holiness; second, in their difficulty to show why the Conserver and Governor of creation overwhelms the rational being with so many evils and sufferings, which would threaten his goodness; and, finally, in their lack of effectiveness to answer the question of why the universal Judge does not punish vices and crimes exemplarily, at the moment when they occur, which would undermine his justice.\textsuperscript{34}

Consequently, only the resources of practical reason can lead us to admit by faith -and faith for Kant is nothing more than moral-rational apprehension\textsuperscript{35}- without any coercion, that God as supreme good and moral perfection maintains a purposeful relationship with creation, despite all

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} (New York: Harkourt Brace, 1994) 14. He opposes this interpretation of Arendt about concept of radical evil in Kant, R. Bernstein, op. cit., 56, for whom radical evil in the thought of the philosopher of Königsberg does not refer to any kind of evil particularly, much less to an inconceivable something, but simply to the failure to do what duty requires, to not obeying the moral law. As Bernstein himself acknowledges, ibid., 60f, it is about a concept which is not entirely clear in Kant, that denotes in certain passages a propensity that human strength is not able to extirpate, so that the reader is tempted immediately to think it is the human will that is corrupted at its root, in a similar way, virtually, to the Christian "original sin", but that, the following step reaffirms again to human being in his capacity as free moral agent and, therefore, susceptible to overcoming this evil.

\textsuperscript{33} Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. In the words of Kant himself: “By ‘theodicy’ we understand the defense of the highest wisdom of the creator against the charge which reason brings against it for whatever is counterpurposive in the world. - We call this "the defending of God's cause." \textit{Op. cit.}, 24.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Op. cit.}, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{35} It deals, in fact, with an enlightened rational faith, a kind of belief that would be derived from reason and would confirmed within its own limits. In his great later work to which we have already alluded, \textit{Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone}, Kant would develop much more this proposal than here, in his opuscule, in which it appears as nothing more than an outline.
the contradictory evidence that we observe in this world. Trying to resolve the problem of evil is not only impossible for the philosopher of Königsberg, but simply immoral, since getting to know the connection between natural and moral evils would not only be to take the place of God, but also would undermine the exercise of morality. Of course, Kant knows very well that in this aspiration rests the unquenchable human desire, a desire that, however, he always wanted to keep within the limits of practical reason, but that other later currents, such as German idealism, will carry to their extreme consequences and with determinant results for the work of theodicies. Suffice simply to recall the insistence of Hegel, explicit especially in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*,\(^{36}\) that such aspiration, and ultimately the reconciliation of all evil, should be given not in metaphysics, as in the Leibniz proposal, but in world history, this being the cause, but finally also the redemption, of all existing evil and suffering. Said in a more explicit way, it is the pretension that history would become its own auto-theodicy. It may be secular theodicy,\(^{37}\) but it would be a theodicy, after all, where suffering and evil are understood and justified as an indispensable dialectical moment in the development of human progress. Even to the most naive and optimistic spirits of the time, too positive toward history, and for others, in the light of what history has already revealed, with all its evils, sufferings and contradictions, it is an idea, it must be said, that is simply scandalous, or at least in need of urgent rectifications. Even more so, when Hegel himself dispatched that provocative statement in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, to which we have already alluded: “The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind.”\(^{38}\) It is no surprise, as a matter of fact, and as well Susan Neiman remembers it, that Heinrich Heine has referred to Hegel as the "German Pangloss."\(^{39}\)

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\(^{36}\) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 56s.

\(^{37}\) So, for example, R. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, 107, who even does not completely discard the conclusion of A. Kojève, regarding to that Hegel deciphered correctly would rather the assertion of a speculative atheism than an open theism, notwithstanding, continues to maintain that his system constitutes despite this ambiguity a theodicy, although in this case, worth to Bernstein, the indication of "secular", indeed. In fact, regardless of the discussion about the crypto-atheistic disposition or not of the Hegel program, he himself has commissioned in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 42f, of conceiving his research as a way of theodicy, whose end would be justify the ways of God in the frame of world history, and not of metaphysics, as in Leibniz. A theodicy, of course, according to which evil be seen as a necessary phase in order to consummation of the Absolute Spirit.

\(^{38}\) *Op. cit.*., 147.

\(^{39}\) *Op. cit.*, 87. Before this opinion of Heine, it is extremely curious that Hegel himself has had referred to the Leibniz's theodicy “as a metaphysical fairy tale.” Quoted from S. Neiman, *ibid.*, 320.
But, then, under the same Hegelian redemptive idealism it is worth mentioning here some of the questions already expressed by Paul Ricoeur in his study, *Evil. A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, namely: “What fate is reserved for the suffering of victims in a vision of the world in which pantragism is constantly recovered in panlogism?”40 “If the great men of history are denied happiness by the history which they set in motion, what about the anonymous victims?”41

There is no doubt that in the light of all the barbarity and the excess of evil and suffering experienced by mankind, a theodicy raised in these such terms cannot but result in a cynical gimmick of hope for the problem of human suffering and in an understanding of redemption of evil that even has the merit of a clear eschatological openness, that tends nevertheless to not take seriously the concreteness and radicalism of evil, trivializing, thus, the concrete and real suffering of human beings and creation. It can be seen both in the theodicy program of Leibniz, as in the brief notes offered by Kant, and that despite their notorious differences -the first one affirming the validity of a theodicy, the second one, however, denying from the margins of pure reason any possibility of this- the absolute lack of eschatological openness that characterizes both, and the only consolation for the suffering human being in the resource of supreme harmony, morality, human solidarity, etc. In fact, noting the concept of God sustained by Kant, as is shown in his *Critique of Practical Reason*,42 we can observe that this is the exclusive competence of the moral sphere and not of metaphysics, closing off any possibility to physical-temporary transcendence. Just as there is no place for a speculative theology, but only for a practical-rational theology, there is no place either for a metaphysical theodicy, but only moral.

Certainly, this de-eschatologization is a luxury that can be given in a certain way to philosophy and even morality, but can it be given to the Christian faith? Clearly, a Christianity without eschatological opening would be nothing more than the abdication of Christian hope and, in such sense, it would be worthwhile to consider whether such a thought structure could still be termed as Christian faith.

Beyond that, and despite warnings, that are sometimes clear and sometimes not, from these true forerunners of modern theodicy - that is, Leibniz and Kant, respectively – that the purpose of this essay is not the judgment of God by human reason, what will endure, however, is the impression, *a posteriori*, at least in the most divulging spheres, that the end of theodicies would be to justify

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42 *Crítica de la razón práctica* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2002), 155ff.
the actions of God before the court of human reason; or, to put it another way, to take up the cause of God and defend the consistency of his attributes before skeptics and unbelievers of the faith. But, this being the case, an obvious ambiguity—if not tension—emerges with the fundamental understanding of the Christian God. Is it not perhaps true that the God of the Bible is a reality given absolutely for granted, in the sense that none of the authors attempts a previous empirical demonstration of this to convince his audience of God’s existence? Is not, per definitionem, the God of theism morally perfect and lofty in all his attributes, so that the very idea of needing of justification from finite and imperfect beings, as human beings under limitations never exhaust his understanding, result in nothing more than a flagrant contradicto in adiecto? It is not strange, in consequence, to confirm the suspicions that from one end to another have always accompanied all essays on theodicy, that is, from the judgment that declares it an a priori superfluous and inofficious task, in virtue of the insoluble inconsistency of its theme, God and creation, like that other than simply judges it as an insane audacity against the divinity or, failing that, a manifest lack of faith in it.

It is one thing, of course, to recognize the totally problematic character of all essays on theodicy, as, likewise, the loopholes and pressures with which this task has often been undertaken. But, from this the complete capitulation of this labor cannot be inferred in any way, since, as has been said, silence regarding this disturbing question offers no benefit either to the Christian faith or to the human being, torn and confused in his pain. In reality, such an omission is the perfect breeding ground for, on the one hand, a whole host of offers of meaning and promises of connection to the transcendent, but of ill-repute both emotionally and intellectually, that emerge as instant anesthetic for human pain and misery in the world; and on the other hand, that an enlightened atheism offers, without any counterbalance, its program of radical skepticism, increasing in this way nothing more than more of the doubt, meaninglessness and despair that already overwhelms to the human being today. It is true, and this is something we could never help pointing out enough, that no theodicy could aspire to be definitive, since we live in constant tension between the now and the not yet, anxiously awaiting the consummation of all things (Ro. 8, 19-23), in which theodicy will no longer be necessary. Meanwhile, and pending such fulfillment when the mystery of suffering and evil will finally be revealed to us, and every tear

43 For this reason, J. Hick, and in light of all the misunderstandings and aversions aroused by the mere idea of a “justification” of God, prefers to understand theodicy as an exercise of “understanding” God and his action in the world. Op. cit, 7.
will be wiped away, we must point out that with all this theodicy, and in the sense that we believe it is right, we do not look for human justification of God and his actions, but, rather, the justification of faith in God against the accusation of its insoluble inconsistency in the face of human suffering and the evil in the world.

4 Theodicies with theoretical or practical emphasis?

It is not purpose of this first chapter, in which we have done nothing more than enunciate the main difficulties with which all essays on theodicy must contend, to try to cover the whole state of question on the matter, that is, from its initial formulation in Leibniz to the most recent studies, nor, much less, to bring awareness to what every theological authority has said on the subject. That, of course, would far exceed the limits designated for this section, but also we would take focus away from the goal we have sought to achieve. Despite that, and given that the problem of theodicy as a theological discussion topic is, as already said, basically an activity of modern academic theology - although the questions around the reality of evil and suffering in connection with the omnipotence and goodness of God would offer a lot of data - not a few modern scholars have wanted to distinguish two major trends around it. Namely, it is a trend that would prefer the discursive and rational articulation around this problem, and other that, resisting those abstract disquisitions, would be inclined either to the empirical socio-structural dimension, or towards the existential dimension of the human being. In this regard, British theologian K. Surin\textsuperscript{44} may properly speak of a kind of theodicy with "theoretical emphasis" and another with "practical emphasis" as an element of differentiation of both trends.

4.1 Theodicies with theoretical emphasis

For now, suffice simply to note that theodicies with theoretical emphasis would be all those theodicies that conceive of the problem of evil and suffering, in the light of an omnipotent and morally perfect God, as a problem basically of contradiction, seeking resolution to such inconsistency at a primarily conceptual level. In compliance with that definition, the characterization of Paul Ricoeur, that does not hide a clear hint of irony, regarding this kind of

\textsuperscript{44} Theology and the Problem of Evil (Oxford-Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 70-141. Surin, meanwhile, opts for a theodicy with practical emphasis and issues severe judgments about theodicies with theoretical emphasis, as well as against their exponents.
theodicy as "a struggle for coherence" could not be more accurate. Indeed, rational argument and the speculative nature of the discussion appear here as a key element at the time of trying to understand the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Generally, in this kind of theodicy with theoretical emphasis, the justification given for proceeding in this way points to that, although the problem of human suffering and evil in the world contains a wide range of mystery, this does not in any way negate that human reason can offer at least a linguistically and methodologically coherent discourse that attempts to explain such a reality, without a wish to provide, of course, any definitive answers on the matter. From this position, it is argued, and as we have already outlined, giving up the theoretical debate on the problem of theodicy does not do any favors to the Christian faith, since its capitulation would not only demonstrate its irrelevance to today's society, but also would encourage the development without counterweight of both agnosticism and atheism as the ultimate answer to human suffering and the evils in the world. Ultimately, it is argued from theodicies with theoretical emphasis, that what it is trying to achieve with such rational reflection is not to justify or defend God to human reason, but rather to demonstrate the coherence of theism even in the face of all sufferings and miseries. Theodicies under the characterization of theoretical emphasis could be considered, for example, all those theodicies that from the initial project of Leibniz to the present, procure the harmonization between, on the one hand, the confessed and believed God by theism, and sufferings and evils of the world, on the other, through speculative and rational disquisition as a means of settling the apparent state of incoherence that both represent. It could be said here that with this kind of theodicy we are faced with a thinker of metaphysical character, in the sense that Richard Rorty has defined the term, that is, a thinker who believes in finding a rational basis for his final vocabulary. Under this category of theodicies with theoretical emphasis, we could align, of course, all theodicies characteristic of traditional theism, but also the most recent efforts by authors such as Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne, just to mention two current researchers who are fully recognized along this line.

46 Contingency, Irony, and Solidary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 74. In other words, and as the same Rorty explains it, the metaphysical thinker it would be one that assumes that the presence of a term in his vocabulary guarantees already that it refers to something that has a real essence and, therefore, something that is perfectible to know rationally. To abdicate of this principle would be for the metaphysical thinker, consequently, to recapitulate before a defeatist relativism. Op. cit., 16.
4.1.1 Alvin Plantinga

Both Plantinga and Swinburne have accepted, each under his own methodology and assumptions, the "challenge of evidentialism" and have attempted to demonstrate against it that belief in God remains a rational and legitimate postulate, even facing constant objections from natural science and analytical philosophy. In the case of Plantinga, we are in the presence of a large methodological and linguistic effort, and an approach that the author has refined and increased over time and in constant discussion with his opponents and critics. It could be argued that Plantinga's project is inserted fully within specific characteristics of Anglo-American philosophy of religion that, unlike its continental homonym, is more related to what has been known since the Middle Ages as natural theology, that is, the attempt to offer rational or empirical evidences for the existence of God and explain his attributes, without any final appeal to the authority of revelation or the theological tradition of the church. According to Plantinga, the postulate about the existence of God constitutes a valid and rational belief, to the extent that it does not violate any epistemic law. Against evidentialism, which on the basis of classical foundationalism holds that the proposition "God exists" is not self-evident, irrefutable and verifiable by the senses and, therefore, does not represent a "basic belief" nor is it rational, Plantinga argues that for Christians that statement is plausible, under a particular framework that the author has been expanding and reformulating in his various writings.

However, and as already observed by the first critics of Plantinga, such argument comes to a reductio ad absurdum, since any group could virtually hold a series of absurd and irrational affirmations under the premise that they are basic beliefs for them. In response, Plantinga –

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47 In the words of Plantinga himself, the criticism of evidentialism would consist of two basic premises: “1) It is irrational or unreasonable to accept theistic belief in the absence of sufficient evidence or reasons, 2) We have no evidence or at any rate not sufficient evidence for the proposition that God exists.” “Reason and Belief in God.”, in Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God, eds. A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 27.

48 To be more exact, and in the case of Plantinga as its greatest representative, we should speak of "analytic philosophy of religion," a stream of great acceptance and debate among Anglo-American circles, and characterized by a great interest in the resource of contemporary logic, as, at the same time, in less attention to theological language and the theological ecclesiastical tradition.


50 According to K. Parsons a basic belief according to the criteria of the foundationalists would be: “the foundation of our entire body of knowledge inasmuch as all our justified beliefs are either properly basic or ultimately derived by deductive or inductive inference from properly basic beliefs.” Some Contemporary Theistic Arguments, in The Cambridge Companion to Atheism, ed. M. Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.
perfecting his initial argument – has resorted to the concept of *sensus divinitates* originally formulated by Calvin, according to which our cognitive faculties, when functioning properly and in the right conditions, could effectively validate the postulate of the existence of God. In accordance with such a principle the belief in the existence of God would not be a strange communication for human beings, heteronomous, but would form a part of the noetic structure of this. Why, then, not all people come to believe, and how it could appropriately explain atheism, Plantinga, responds, is that because sin has deteriorated and corrupted to such an extreme the faculties of *sensus divinitates*, that this in its current state can no longer function correctly. Under this framework, then, of generalized corruption, and before the incapacity, likewise, of an immediate perception of God for all human beings, added to the impossibility of understanding the end God aims for, with the permission of all these evils and sufferings that afflict the world and human beings, Plantinga refuses to qualify his project as theodicy, preferring simply to denominate it as "defense." It is a defense that would have as its main objective showing that there is no inconsistency between the postulation of the existence of God and the reality of humans and natural suffering and evil, quieting, at the same time, the voices that are critical toward theism, and their recurring accusation of the irrational character of such confession.

4.1.2 Richard Swinburne

We could affirm, without fear of exaggeration, that the work of professor emeritus of philosophy of religion at Oxford, Richard Swinburne, constitutes one of the most complete and polished projects in defense of theism. Indeed, his trilogy *The Coherence of Theism*, *The Existence of God*, and *Faith and Reason* is without doubt a great work of theodicy, following the

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51 “But, as heathen tell us, there is no nation so barbarous, no race so brutish, as not to be imbued with the conviction that there is a God. Even those who, in other respects, seem to differ least from the lower animals, constantly retain some sense of religion: so thoroughly has this common conviction possessed the mind, so firmly is stamped on the breast of all men. Since, then, there never has been, from the very first, any quarter of the globe, any city, any household even, without religion, this amounts to a tacit, that a sense of deity is inscribed on every heart”. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, I.3.1*. In *The Library of the Christian Classic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 181ff.
characterization that K. Surin has defined as "theodicies with theoretical emphasis." According to Swinburne, it is not logically bad that God permits the existence of evil in the world, with the understanding that it is necessary to achieve greater goods. The greater good would be human freedom, the basis and principle of all theodicy, whose objective would in turn be the formation of the human spirit. We can see here the evident points of contact between the theodicy of "human freedom" of Swinburne and the theodicy of "soul-making" of Hick. The theodicy of human freedom, for Swinburne, is built on the classic distinction of Leibniz between physical or natural evils, and moral evils, it being this freedom that grants the human being the ability to choose between good and evil. For his part, God has had to choose between creating a world free of suffering and evil, but, at the same time a world with little creativity and resilience or, failing that, a world where evil and suffering would be a concrete reality, but with the benefit of the aforementioned. In accordance with that, for Swinburne, the presence of suffering and evil would be, therefore, evidently compensated by virtue of their benefits, which would constitute the reason, ultimately, why God would allow their existence. Now, in what way would natural evil provide the highest good of freedom for human beings?

First, Swinburne responds, through the "defense of the goods of higher order,"58 which states that natural evil offers to people opportunities for remarkable emotional responses, and free and morally meaningful choices. In other words, the great good of human beings having the transcendental possibility of being compassionate, grateful, brave, patient, cannot be conferred logically in a better way than through the provision of natural evil. Certainly, it is not possible to ignore the wide margin of veracity that this first modality contains, in which natural evil, according to the scheme of Swinburne, would move toward obtaining the highest good of freedom. Indeed, there is no doubt that it is usually the experiences of want and suffering - and not abundance and pleasure - which allow the human being to offer significant responses and, in concomitance with this, develop his spirit and character. In other words, they give birth to what Viktor Frankl has come to define as "attitude values."59 And, nevertheless, in light of the overwhelming flow of misery and suffering that plagues our world, we are compelled to ask, in a

58 The Existence of God, 240ff.
59 That is, values that are triggered in human beings from extreme situations of life and which are able to generate in him an unsuspected horizon of possibilities. In a nutshell, the value of attitude is nothing else, for Frankl, than the awareness that the human being is, himself - and not the suffering – the one who decides his stance in the face of difficulty. See, Psicoanálisis y existencialismo (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013), 75ss.
similar way as we did already with Hick and his soul-making theodicy, if it has not sufficiently exceeded the limits of these, if the consequences always justify the actions, and if, truly, it is possible to legitimize some good when disproportionate and aberrant suffering of others is involved.

Secondly, sustains Swinburne, the experiences and observations derived of natural evils generate knowledge and skills that enable human beings to make a genuine choice with regard to producing or avoiding good and evil, with the purpose of achieving the greater good of freedom.\textsuperscript{60} There must have been, continues Swinburne, a first time in human history when evil was inflicted: a first murder, a first poisoning, a first humiliation, etc., and in this case the malevolent agent has known the effect of his actions not by observation of another agent, but by his own actions.\textsuperscript{61} There must also be evils that occur naturally, not caused or by the knowledge of human beings, so that they know how to cause evils themselves or prevent their occurrence. If people would not have ever died accidentally of rabies or by cyanide poisoning, we would have no real freedom to deal with these evils and prevent them. Likewise, if earthquakes would not have happened it would not be possible to study them, meet the most prone areas to these phenomena and formulate theories about their behaviour. Of course, it is worth asking whether the only way to gain knowledge is through natural evil and the evident suffering that it entails. Anticipating this objection, Swinburne considers the possibility that God could somehow communicate to us the consequences that our actions would generate. But in that case, he adds, such communication would reveal his existence and the result of knowing that we are constantly observed by God would be a serious attack on our ability to choose freely and morally. To put it another way, we would always act in accordance with what is right, not by free choice, but by fear of divine punishment. In conclusion, in the words of the author himself: “We need ‘epistemic distance’ from God in order to have a free choice between good and evil.”\textsuperscript{62} Again we can observe in this topic of Swinburne, concerning the need for hiddenness of God, evident points of contact with the soul-making theodicy of Hick and his principle of epistemic distance.

\textsuperscript{60} The Existence of God, 245ff.
4.1.3 Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne: A brief assessment

We could not do justice in just a few lines to the intricate methodological and conceptual effort carried out by these two thinkers in their eagerness to articulate a defense or a theodicy that accounts for the plausibility and rationality of the postulation of the existence of God to human beings today, such as theism has traditionally confessed. We have, in the work of both Plantinga as Swinburne -and we could also include Hick's work- two kinds of theodicies characteristic of those with so-called theoretical emphasis, in which, despite commendable logical effort and terminological precision - recognized even by their own critics - the final conclusion tends to be a regrettable oversight regarding the structural and existential dimension of the problem of suffering and evil. Plantinga himself has acknowledged in more than one of his writings, the limitations of the philosopher before these disturbing questions which exceed mere rational disquisition, and the coldness and abstraction of this kind of approach when it comes face to face with the scandalous and concrete reality of suffering and evil in the life of a person. Before the spiritual perplexity of such a case, warns our philosopher, the recommendation is to look to the spiritual counselor and not to the ruminations of philosophy.63 Of course, and in spite of all the significant contributions we can notice in many other areas, this is the lasting void of all those theodicy projects that start and remain within the framework of natural theology, and whose ultimate concern, as well A. Gesché has warned, it is rather the "God in himself or for himself, and not the God for us, for the human being."64

The second purpose of this task dealt with, then - that is, the "God for us, for human beings"- we are obliged to turn to the first, the "God in himself or for himself," and ask whether, on the one hand, these defense or theodicy projects have achieved their goal of showing that the postulation of God's existence remains a rational and valid claim, and that suffering and the evils in the world, seen in the light of their ultimate purpose, does not result in a vital contradiction in

64 Op. cit., 28. In other words, continues Gesché, following the proverbial distinction made by Pascal, the God of the philosophers and not of the believers. It is true that the above statement can give the impression of containing an underlying dismissive sense. However, we must not forget that it has to do with an outline of theodicy that, according to both authors, moves rather within the limits of analytical philosophy of religion (Plantinga) and natural theology (Swinburne), without the guidance either of revelation or of theological tradition, and whose ultimate goal is to show the plausibility of the postulate of God's existence preferably for the illustrated skeptical to theism, the atheologian.
relation to the morally perfect character of God, such as theism confesses; or, on the other hand, whether the detractors and illustrious antagonists of theism have been pleasantly stimulated by the density and the accumulation of evidence and arguments, both from analytic philosophy and from natural theology, to the point of modifying even substantively their critical stance towards it. Recognizing, as it has been widely insisted, the scale and thoroughness of both projects, we must admit that the reception among the latter does not appear to be too promising. As an example of this, and to close this brief conclusion about the proposal of these two authors, we can quote the Keith Parsons's comments, in an essay precisely aimed at Plantinga's and Swinburne's work:

…are the products of brilliant minds. This is to the credit of the authors of these arguments, but to the discredit of theism… Yet the end product of all that brilliance is a set of arguments that, at least from the atheist’s perspective, achieves very little. Is theistic belief warranted? Plantinga has given me no reason to think so. Is the theistic hypothesis confirmed by evidence? Swinburne’s promise of a quasi-scientific theism fails to deliver. Is this the best that theism can offer in support of itself? I am forced to conclude that it is.65

4.1.4 Critical remarks

It must be admitted that most of the criticisms toward those theodicies with emphasis on the theoretical relate primarily to its clearly speculative and even metaphysical treatment of the problem of suffering and evil in the world, and only at second glance to the gaps in its system or method. They are accused of being cynical treatises, typical of an exclusivist intellectualism and detached from the praxis and the concrete reality of life, and that ultimately end up justifying or legitimizing the suffering and misery of the world as well as the conditions or structures that produced them. It is a discourse that, as T. W. Tilley has expressed it,66 in its quest for semantic accuracy and argumentative logic, has silenced those that suffer and the voices that in their pain curse God, thereby creating a profound disconnect between, on one hand, academic theology and philosophy, and pastoral theology, on the other. Adjunct to that, and in this quest to achieve a theory that can demonstrate the rational and argumentative plausibility of the existence of God, namely, overcoming the element of incoherence, this kind of theodicy is reproached for

65 “Some Contemporary Theistic Arguments.”, in op. cit., 116-117.
prohibiting or silencing academically all spontaneous lament and cries that emerge from the daily reality of evil and pain.

Anyone who has read the *Theodicy Essays* by Leibniz, a paradigm of that kind of theodicy with theoretical emphasis, will see the ostensibly reduced space that the German philosopher devotes to the human being in contrast with the broad range dedicated to divinity and especially to his freedom. It is perhaps this disproportionate attention with regard to the treatment of divinity and the creature that is one of the most lasting legacies of the philosopher from Leipzig most recognizable to the current theodicies with theoretical emphasis. Certainly, many of the detractors of this kind of theodicy argue that the end of theodicy is primarily to perceive the experience of evil and suffering from the perspective of the victims, with the purpose of contributing to conditions that enable the overcoming -or at least the reduction- of these painful realities. This is something, critics accuse, that has been noticeably set aside in theodicies with theoretical emphasis, given that those obsessed by speculative argument are only interested in the alleged reasons about why an omnipotent and morally perfect God could allow evil and suffering, and not on specifically how those realities affect human beings and creation concretely.

It is necessary, however, to specify that much of these antagonistic reactions, many of them bordering the *ad hominem* argument, as in the case, for instance, from the strong words expressed by Surin⁶⁷ against the theodicy of Swinburne, come precisely from the representatives of so-called theodicies with practical emphasis. Thus, for example, Surin⁶⁸ argues that these kinds of theoretical-traditional theodicies suffer from an extremely limited view of God typical of seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Deism, in which evil is understood as an abstraction rather than a concrete reality, an exercise in logic and, therefore, a problem that can be solved primarily in the sphere of intellect. But the latter, according to Surin's analysis, would be explained moreover to the extent that such theodicies have fully internalized the epistemological paradigms of the Enlightenment, according to which reason would be an aistorical principle that operates practically *in vacuo*. All of this, for the British thinker, is simply inadmissible, since the

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theologian could never create his work from the abstract, without regard to the practical consequences of his discourse and the specific context towards which this is directed.69

For his part, another author whom we have already mentioned in previous pages, T. Tilley,70 even goes on to say that this form of theism and its respective theodicies is actually confusingly ambiguous and strongly anti-Christian, since it offers a basically impersonal projection from God, ignoring or not wanting to attend to the historical person of Jesus and the Trinitarian mystery, the inalienable foundation of the Christian message. To put it another way, in Tilley's opinion, that which is sought here is to resolve via rational discourse and metaphysical speculation, real and concrete evils and sufferings of human beings and the world, from an abstract and impersonal concept of God. This would be, definitely, according to Tilley, and in the opinion of many other researchers in this same line of criticism, the original sin that practically would affect all theodicies classified under the heading "with theoretical emphasis."

4.2 Theodicies with practical emphasis

Much of what might be understood as "theodicies with practical emphasis" we could come to discover by taking note of the objections and questions that the aforementioned authors and many others in the same line of dissension71 have made against that kind of approach which prioritizes rational discourse and metaphysical speculation, so that it does not seem necessary to expand more on the subject. In general terms, however, we could point out that in theodicies with practical emphasis, the theoretical or metaphysical discussion about the problem of human suffering and the world's evils is practically irrelevant, or only serves the purpose of emphasizing the inefficacy and deviation of such occupations facing the problem of theodicy. Even more, certain recognized representatives of such theodicies with practical emphasis, with clearly belligerent spirits, go so far as to affirm that such rational and metaphysical concern around the problem of theodicy, so typical of those theodicies with so-called theoretical emphasis, is cynical and pedantic in the light of the painful reality of suffering and evil experienced by human beings and creation alike. Therefore, according to this type of theodicy with practical emphasis, the

rational or theoretical efforts to explain human suffering and the evils of the creational order would be destined to total rational failure and structural and existential frustration, not providing really any effective aid for victims who experience such conditions of pain and calamity. Moreover, such disquisitions, in accordance with this practical-theodicycal paradigm, would create, or at least would encourage, such unfortunate conditions,\textsuperscript{72} since they are positioned in nothing more than an abstract and speculative dimension of the problem, diverting thereby attention to any concrete resolution of the matter.

The scandalous experience of human suffering and evil in the world constitute an insoluble mystery, before which human reason can only stand back, avoiding any metaphysical speculation about their possible purpose and origin, and concentrating nothing more than on their practical resolutions, to the extent that this is feasible. All this, in consequence, that from the theoretical theodicies constituted an object of acute speculative and rational argument, namely, evil and suffering, from theodicies with emphasis on practical in exchange is nothing more than a great \textit{reductio in mysterium}.\textsuperscript{73} In contrast, then, to the theodicies with theoretical emphasis, the alternative task proposed by a theodicy with practical emphasis, would be, according to K. Surin, to maintain the centrality of the practical element, to not lose sight of the subject to whom it directs its discourse, and to address the sufferings and evils in their particular positioning, not to seek a metaphysical or analytical explanation of these, but to overcome them. It would seek, ultimately, in the opinion of Surin, to replace the God of the philosophers by the God susceptible to experience suffering and emotions according to the integral message of the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{74}

4.2.1 Liberation Theology and Political Theology

In a space dedicated to the so-called theodicies with practical emphasis, we would be remiss if we failed to mention two of the major theological currents in this line of classification. These are two streams, moreover, that have been dedicated with extreme care to the problem of evil and suffering, specifically in their social and structural dimension. We refer, of course, to the theology of liberation and political theology, respectively. Of course, we cannot enter here into a thorough analysis of both theological currents, so that our appreciations will only be related to the aspects related to the topic of theodicy. Suffice, for the time, simply to say that these are two

\textsuperscript{72} Cf. T. Tilley, \textit{op. cit.}, 5.
\textsuperscript{73} In this way, K. Surin, \textit{op. cit.}, 52ff.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, 144ff.
theologies which seek to combat the conditions that generate evil at the social and structural level, through political and social analysis. The aim of both theologies, as is well known, is not to reflect on metaphysical conditions that would lead to evil and suffering, but rather to employ the resources of empirical sciences to fight them and transform them through praxis itself. Beyond the differences we can notice between the two theologies, we can, however, recognize two basic principles by which both are governed and that will mark the fundamental guidelines in how they approach the problematic of theodicy, namely: 1) ideological suspicion, which situates itself as a critique of all traditional and theoretical approaches to theodicy, accusing them of the error of acting under ideological interests; and 2) The insistence that theology must be understood, before the preponderant value of praxis, as nothing more than a second act.

Thus, for example, Johann Baptist Metz, insisted on the fact that Christianity should not be understood as a set of doctrines that have to be preserved in the most aseptic way, but as a praxis that must be lived out in the most radical way possible. Thus, according to Metz, all theoretical articulations, including of course Christianity's doctrinal approaches, should be submitted to a hermeneutic of suspicion or doubt. Consequently, all theodicies wielded by traditional Christianity would fall under the judgment of "critique of ideology" (Ideologiekritik), insofar as they have conceived of suffering as a means to a higher end (holiness, character formation, the supreme good of freedom, etc.), or as punishment for the sinful character of humanity or the particular sins of individuals (original sin, doctrine of retribution). Such traditional theodicies, as per this judgment, have seen the suffering of human beings only as spectators and, therefore, in their eagerness to preserve doctrinal purity or overcome the incoherence between God and evil in the mere rational argument, have ended up legitimizing the social and political structures which have given rise to those conditions of suffering and oppression that afflict humans. There has been, then, according to this type of theology and their respective theodicies, an intimate connection between traditional theism and the repressive societies, so that in light of these common interests, the concept of God has served rather to strengthen the positions of privilege of those who wield power at the expense of the excluded and afflicted. Said in other words, and in

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75 The influence of Marx and Marxist doctrine is evident in this type of approach. Thus, one could say that the judgment of this kind of theology with respect to traditional or theoretical theodicies, mutatis mutandis, would be the same as Marx himself would have said of the philosophers: “Philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world. The point, however, is to change it.” Quoted from S. Neiman, op. cit., 103.

76 Más allá de la religión burguesa, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1982), 33.
this state of affairs, as Jon P. Gunneman has expressed it very well: “A theodicy justifies the happiness of the powerful and the suffering of the powerless.”77 Hence, the importance of ideological critique for these theological currents, as this would be the instrument by which all those theoretical articulations would be submitted to critical revision, not in the sense of their logical consistency or their doctrinal truth, but in their practical relevance and their liberating component in the framework of society.

Now, these theoretical disquisitions about evil and suffering are not dismissed a priori here as completely banal or superfluous,78 but it is understood that if these don't remain subordinated to the overriding value of praxis, the problems of disease, poverty, oppression, natural disasters, etc., will remain sublimated into pure metaphysical or doctrinal lyricism. Therefore, and with regard to theodicy in such theological currents, instead of the theoretical argument, it tends to praxis; in lieu of justifying what exists, protest is encouraged; rather than passive attitude, it seeks the active transformation of society; instead of reflecting on the metaphysical origin of evil and suffering, it is motivated to fight against the political, social and economic structures which promote that state of calamity.

4.2.2 Critical remarks

The first thing we should ask before venturing any attempt at evaluation, is whether this classification between theodicies with theoretical emphasis and theodicies with practical emphasis is a resource that we need to understand in a similar way to Max Weber’s ideal types, or if it is a definition that requires an exact precision. There is no doubt that in the opinion of K. Surin it would be an empirical and categorical division. However, it is worth considering some basic questions: Is it really a division of a character so absolute for describing two irreconcilable types of theodicies? How true is it that theodicies with theoretical emphasis lack any concern, at least indirectly, for the practical dimension of life, or that, on the other hand, theodicies with practical emphasis do not lay hold of some elementary theoretical apparatus to justify their attention to the political, social and existential aspects of life? Strictly speaking, the truth is that it

77 Quoted from S. Neiman, op. cit., 105.
78 J. Sobrino has rightly pointed out that the primacy of praxis is not intended to exclude the theoretical contribution, but only to caution that praxis is presented as the starting point and a continuous reference of theological reflection, to the extent that theodicy can only be understood as the liberation of a suffering world. Cf. J. Sobrino, “Teología en un mundo sufriente: La teología de la liberación como ‘intelectus amoris’.”, in Revista Latinoamericana de teología 5, 1988, 258.
is not infrequent to observe that theodicies which could well fall within the theoretical label end up illuminating totally concrete issues of human life and of creation itself. In this sense, the words expressed by the neo-Thomist Jacques Maritain could not have a more perfect application here: "Exposure of highly speculative doctrines often involves more efficiency, for the reform of customs, than the most pathetic, hygienic and social exhortations to virtue."\textsuperscript{79} Likewise, neither is it unusual that theodicies whose express finality is supposedly the practical treatment of life at the social and structural level employ at times a disproportionate introductory space relative to theoretical issues as a means to achieve their goals. This has been demonstrated by Costa Rican historian Arturo Piedra,\textsuperscript{80} for example, in relation to most treatises of liberation theology, of revealing the evident paradox between, on the one hand, a discourse that pretends to be sensitive to the people, but that, on the other hand and at the same time, makes use of a certain knowledge and sociological terminology of a Marxist line that is not sufficiently conversant with these and probably will remain without any understanding. After all, it is not possible to ignore the reality that in both types of theodicy are observed substantial differences in such essential issues as the valuation assigned to the philosophy of religion, or the understanding of theological work itself, among other topics, and that both theodicies, under their respective channels of thought, propose to address the tension that emerges between confession of an omnipotent and morally perfect God and the reality of human suffering and the evils in the world.

With the above clarification made, therefore, we can already affirm that the most notorious and recurrent mistake that is evidenced in virtually all those theodicies covered under the rubric of "with practical emphasis" lies in thinking that a true understanding of human suffering and creational evil rests solely in the realm of praxis and the concrete overcoming of these conditions, without the mediation of a larger theoretical reflection, although such an assumption, as we have noted, functions more as an apologetic discourse than as an empirical reality. In other words, it is sustained here that evil is not explained or theorized, but only combated and overtaken by praxis. Nonetheless, we do not come to understand or, even worse, to recognize in all this sort of militant discourse that no real overcoming of the conditions of suffering - at least

\textsuperscript{79} Tres reformadores: Lutero, Descartes, Rousseau (Buenos Aires: Difusión, 1968), 54.
in the structural and social dimension of life or even existential - can be achieved without having first a basis of theoretical reflection about the conditions that have led to such situation of suffering and calamity. On the contrary, it must be willing to recognize, and this can be demonstrated by a variety of historical facts, that praxis for merely the sake of praxis, without a critical and theoretical framework to sustain and legitimize it, only leads to superficial activism, to trendy slogans, to ostentatious posturing, and even to a kind of ideology that violently rejects any critical reading or opinion that is divergent to its sacrosanct understanding of praxis, be it in the political dimension, the religious dimension, or any dimension whatsoever.

Moreover, consternation and astonishment in the face of human suffering and evil in the world, or the insistence to the *reductio in mysterium* of these same principles as we have seen acclaimed by theodicies with practical emphasis, should not in any way lead *a priori* to the exclusion of the theoretical and argumentative dimension when addressing this painful reality. Precisely around these valued principles, this would generate a flagrant contradiction. Indeed, such theodicies with practical emphasis insist on the absolute relevance of discourse about God for today's society, beyond the notion that such an idea of God holds little relation to the traditional understanding of theism. At the time, however, that society starts to raise questions that are equivalent to the traditional concept of theodicy, making them uncomfortable and problematic, the subterfuge is always here, apparently, to take refuge in the principle of dismay, amazement and *reductio in mysterium* to avoid responding, or failing that, directing attention toward the always versatile and inescapable field of “praxis.” Certainly, it does not require much effort to realize here, that the problem is not *per se* the argumentative or rational dimension, such as is generally suggested from this type of theodicy with practical emphasis, but rather that it appears completely detached from the existential, spiritual and structural dimension of victims who suffer from such experiences of suffering and evil.

It should be remembered in all of this what psychiatrist Viktor Frankl developed in almost all his works, but particularly in his *Man's Search for Meaning*,\(^81\) namely, that suffering is always tolerated better by victims to the extent that they are able to find some margin of meaning to their pain. This is something that Nietzsche himself had previously noted, affirming that the curse of suffering does not lie within itself, as such, but precisely in its lack of meaning, for all, then, that

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\(^{81}\) Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.
Christianity is accused of having corrupted that meaning by a decadent ascetic ideal, a principle of all negation of life and all superior aspiration.\textsuperscript{82} Hence, his well-known aphorism: "He who has a \textit{why} to live can bear almost any \textit{how},"\textsuperscript{83} which Frankl himself pointed out could well serve as master principle of logotherapy. Now, it would be hard to disagree that this margin of meaning, this “why” as a way to cope with the pain is not easy to obtain without at least some theoretical platform of understanding.

It constitutes, therefore, an incontestable fact that obtaining meaning from a determined experience is almost never possible simply by means of the capacity for amazement and dismay before it, or by reducing it to a mystery, and even less by turning that experience into an endless activism, but rather to the extent that is possible to be located within a theoretical framework that interprets it, processes it and, finally, assigns it a particular purpose or objective. Similarly, we can also conclude that overcoming human suffering – or said with more restraint, gaining a better understanding of it with a view to reducing it – is not achieved by positioning all theological work in the field of praxis, but by granting it the fair importance of fitting into a theoretical dimension in this process.

With respect to political and liberation theologies specifically, whose contributions regarding the structural understanding of evil we will not discuss just now, we will also need to raise some sensitive concerns. Perhaps the most important of these relates to the principle of ideological critique or suspicion. Specifically, we wonder if it is not the tendency in these types of theology and their respective theodicies to use critique solely in relation to other theological systems, but not in relation to their own systems. This, it seems to us, is very evident especially in liberation theology since in this system the traditional theistic concept of God is not completely rejected, but is used selectively to the extent that reinforces or not their representative emphases and visions. In contrast, the unpleasant or uncomfortable connotations of theism which raise questions, consequently, about the essential tenets of its discourse are accused immediately of being alienating and ideological and, therefore, are excluded under the charge of constituting a "science of domination." In a nutshell, such critique of suspicion would operate here as the ideal subterfuge, although, as has been already said, with criteria of application not entirely consistent,

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{La genealogía de la moral} (Buenos Aires: Gradifco, 2007), 188ff.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{El crepúsculo de los ídolos} (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2004), 35.
so as to avoid embarrassing questions and rather dismiss them as irrelevant, dominant, and ultimately not harmonizable according to the guiding principle of praxis.

In the same line as the above, we should also ask whether an understanding of evil solely at the structural level, where sin is understood as nothing more than in a horizontal dimension, manages to really explain in all its complexity the existence of this reality in a world created by an omnipotent and morally perfect God. It is true that in relation to the criticism already outlined by Schelling toward Christianity, which we reviewed in part in this chapter,\textsuperscript{84} it is possible to observe in all these theodicies with practical emphasis a commendable effort to not give in to metaphysics, dialectics or moral blurring of evil. In this regard, it should be recognized that structural analysis has been the instrument that has largely allowed the elucidation of the historical and socio-political components of "real evil" which underlie the genesis of conditions of political oppression, institutional violence and social injustice that recurrently befall humanity. Nevertheless, as useful and even indispensable as such an analytical resource proves to be, it must be admitted that it does not completely exhaust all understanding of evil and the questions concerning its origin so that, although sentenced in this scheme as remnants of an innocuous metaphysics, it has never been possible to silence or absolutely suspend it. On the other hand - and once again the historical experience in the case of liberation theology seems clearly to prove it - an exclusive and exclusionary treatment of evil solely on the horizontal and structural level runs the serious risk of forgetting that the superstructures of oppression, injustice and social coercion settle initially in the infrastructures of concrete human beings of flesh and blood, whose hearts are already previously committed with the germs of that same selfishness, injustice and oppression.

Likewise, the idea that all theoretical articulation - much more so theodicy - leads inexorably to the legitimation of suffering, and indirectly to the consolidation of the structures of oppression and power, should be put in serious doubt. It is true that many traditional theodicies of theism, in their eagerness to resolve the problem of coherence, have situated themselves generally in a

\textsuperscript{84} Namely, that there has been a continuing trend to exculpate real evil in order to reconcile its confession of a God who is both kindly and omnipotent, and that this has been expressed basically from that stream that has understood evil as \textit{privatio boni}, such as in the Augustinian and Thomist traditions, passing for seeing in it nothing more than a dialectical moment in the consummation of absolute spirit, as in the doctrine of Hegel, until his understanding of itself only as a means to higher ends, such as in the traditional theism and the current exponents of the \textit{Free will defense}. 
purely rational and metaphysical disquisition, thereby forgetting the structural dimension of the problem of suffering and evil. However, to conclude from there that such logical-argumentative reflections do not have any value, or that such a sidelining of the structural aspects of life makes them directly responsible for the conditions of social injustice that operate in society, seems to us a judgment that is - to say the least - absolutely disproportionate. It is possible, indeed, that the questions posed by traditional theodicies have not always had the most lucid of answers or have had derived in unilateral positions. But while all that should be reproached and corrected, it must be admitted that it has treated questions that are essential for every Christian theodicy, that is, the relationship between the God who is confessed as omnipotent and morally perfect, and the experience of suffering and evil of human beings and in the world.

5 Final words

We should ask here, at least as far as liberation theology concerned, if that evident subordination to derivative discourses or to instruments of mediation from sociology or political sciences has allowed the raising of the essential questions for a Christian theodicy with sufficient clarity. Regarding the second one, likewise, it would be good to remember that not always - not to say never– is a theological discourse of declared political and social activism able to generate by the power of solo verbo the political, social and structural transformations that its message would desire. On the contrary, experience would seem to prove, once again, that this does not generally lead to anything but ostentatious and rebellious posturing of those who emit such discourses solely from within their safe academic spaces.

Considering all that we have said, what can we conclude? Is there any resource, some instrument that allows us to overcome such a dead-end in which we believe the exercise of theodicy is currently facing, or must we resign ourselves to this aporia between the theorist and the practical, between the rational and the praxis? Could the theologia crucis of Luther help us in the task of freeing the theodicycal discourse from a fatal quagmire, resulting in a message both contributory and hopeful toward the problem of the evil and suffering of the human being and creation? Certainly, we believe so. Indeed, only a theodicy developed from the theology of the cross - open however to the resurgence of the Risen One from the dead - might be able to overcome such an unfortunate schism of theodicycal dimensions, so that the theoretical and the practical are not mutually exclusive, but rather are inextricably required. Not only this, but also it
alone can respond from the absolutely unique and non-negotiable Christian identity, Jesus, his message, his death and resurrection, to that cry of pain and confusion that arises from the depths of each human being and of creation itself, and that manifests itself in the most varied forms of expression, from the denouncing and contributing attitude, to the unleashing of the darkest forces and destructive that exist in the human heart.

Only a theodicy articulated from the treatise on the theology of the cross, is able, in our opinion, to preserve in its entirety, without distorting or blurring the human and divine faces with which God himself comes in Christ to an encounter with the suffering and evil that weighs on humanity and the creational order; the human face of God, in Christ, insofar as it is only from the theology of the cross that it is possible to fully affirm the real experience of suffering, vulnerability, precariousness, agony and death undergone by Jesus, which entails, moreover, his full humanity, and this constitutes, in turn, the best refutation of the repeated accusation -not always entirely happy nor sufficiently documented- that the image of God internalized by Christianity from the first two centuries and maintained virtually without any variation until the end of the last century, would be in debt almost exclusively to the doctrine of the Greek apatheia or the Aristotelian unmoved mover, that of God who is susceptible to experiencing emotions and breaking into the history of the Old Testament. Attention to the divine face of God in Christ is also equally present in the doctrine of theologia crucis, which guarantees that the suffering, evil and, ultimately, the consummation of all that - that is, the kingdom of death and meaninglessness – through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, does not have the last word forever, nor will it prevail over us. But such a wager on the part of a theodicy articulated from the treatise of the theology of the cross does not come from the sky, but has its roots in the name and the theology of Martin Luther, who rediscovered such a theology which was initially affirmed by the apostle Paul, and which today is distinctively characteristic of Lutheranism, according, at least, to the framework of "theologically correct discourse" if not always current Lutheran practice.\footnote{In this sense, we might well conclude with the penetrating words of Walther von Loewenich: “While the Lutheran church has clung faithfully to the ‘for the sake of Christ’ (propter Christum) principle, it surrendered Luther’s theology of the cross all too quickly. The theology of glory that Luther opposed has made a triumphal re-entry into his namesake church. One occasionally wonders whether the doctrine concerning the cross has not even been forced to pay tribute to this theology of the glory.” \textit{Luther’s Theology of the Cross} (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1976), 18.}
We conclude in this way, then, this introductory chapter, in form of a long prolegomena or state of the question on the treatise of theodicy, in which we have tried to lay the groundwork regarding its problems, since its origins right up until the most recent discussions and trends. With this background, then, we move on to our second chapter which will develop the article of the theology of the cross in the thought and work of the German Reformer, always in relation to the mystery of human suffering and creational evil as central themes for all essays on theodicy.
Chapter 2
The Heidelberg Disputation: The exposition of the law, the condemnation of sin, the revelation of God on the cross of the Crucified?

1 An itinerary of the Theologia Crucis

It could be affirmed, without risking exaggeration, that the treatise of theologia crucis, originally associated with German reformer, Martin Luther, is one of the topics receiving greater attention in the theological discourse of our time, and not only within the area of Systematic Theology or the History of the Church, but many of the various departments of theological work: Bible, pastoral theology, practical theology, ethics, contextual theologies, etc. It is true that this growing interest in the theology of the cross is a relatively recent phenomenon; nevertheless, it should be noted that the figure of Luther never ceased to be fully present in the discourse of the church, regardless of whether it has always been evoked with total fidelity to his theological thought. And, yet, while other doctrines attributable to the Professor of Wittenberg received continuous attention - among them, of course, the triad of sola fide, sola gratia, sola Scriptura, the doctrine regarding the real presence of the Lord's supper, or the matter of the two kingdoms - just to mention perhaps some of the best-known topics – the treatise on the theology of the cross practically fell into complete obscurity just after the death of the Reformer.

Thus, for example, Lutheran orthodoxy, in its eagerness to set creeds and confessions that could somehow systematize what appeared to be the essential doctrines of the Reformer and thereby to unify the theology of the emerging church, and then in its effort to appear as an academic, objective theology which had nothing to envy in its supposed scientificity to other emerging disciplines of university, almost completely dismissed this cornerstone in Luther's theology. Likewise, during the period of liberal theology -also Lutheran- virtually no meaning was attributed to the theology of the cross, confining it only to an ascetic or ethical principle, or to a theological relic whose real importance had already had its time and place.86

With the advent of the First World War, and with it the dramatic collapse of the dream of liberal theology with respect to having reached an era of full progress in scientific advancement and the

86 Thus, for example, Alister E. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 179.
development of human culture and civilization - shared of course by all of enlightened Europe- the treatise of *theologia crucis* would see a new and unusual flourishing. It is no accident, as A. E. McGrath\(^{87}\) rightly points out, that it was immediately after this war that the first and most profound studies about the theology of the cross appeared, many of which - like the seminal work of Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, originally published in German in 1929- constitute to this day foundational sources for this fundamental topic of the reformer's theological thought.

However, it would be only a couple of decades later, on the occasion of the unprecedented horror caused by the Second World War and the overflow of evil, suffering, and senseless death that this would bring - and from there the crisis of faith not only in God but in the human being and his scientific and cultural instruments to preserve human civilization; that *theologia crucis* would regain all its meaning and appreciation. That became possible, of course, to the extent that such a theology of the Crucified One and his cross appeared as the only theology capable of facing the most urgent question of the time, which according to McGrath was none other than: “Is God really there, amidst the devastation and dereliction of civilization?”\(^{88}\) We have already discussed in the previous chapter the profound crisis into which the traditional theodicy of theism had submerged, based mainly on the majestic attributes of God, all the tragedies that occurred in the twentieth century and especially the Second War, so it is not necessary to dwell on that here. Nevertheless, as McGrath\(^{89}\) has warned, if all these cruelties and barbarities constituted a devastating blow to such theodicies, the truth is that the hidden presence of God precisely there, on the cross of Calvary, where it is not possible to observe anything but pain, humiliation, loneliness, and cruelty, was able to touch a very sensitive nerve for all that generation that likewise felt abandoned by God, and to which it was likewise impossible to discern his presence in the midst of all the consternation and horror.

No longer were we dealing with a God who, being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent inexplicably and contradictorily observed all that hell in complete indifference, but of a God who had, himself, experienced all that suffering and dismay, to the point of giving himself into the hands of his executioners and even to death itself. Here, of course, in order to make more vivid

\(^{89}\) *Ibid.*, 179.
the idea of a God who suffers injustice, pain and finally death, sharing in this way the same fate of those who are humiliated and condemned, we can remember the almost proverbial passage of Elie Wiesel's autobiographical novel, *Night*, where a Jewish boy is hanged in a Nazi concentration camp and left there to die cruelly and slowly before the astonished gaze of the other prisoners, who were forced to witness such a repulsive scene:

> Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “For God’s sake, where is God?” And from within me, I heard a voice answer: “Where He is? This is where –hanging here from this gallows.”

However, it should be said, that before Wiesel or the theologians of The Death of God, and even before Nietzsche, Hegel and Feuerbach, Luther was perhaps the first Christian thinker to speak so completely radically of the death of God - *Gott selbst ist todt!* bringing to the ultimate consequences the ancient Christological resource of Alexandrian theology known as *communicatio idiomatum*. Here we should recognize, however, that the Reformation and most of its theologians did not extract the same Christological consequences of Luther on the basis of this

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91 According to Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 64, the expression *Gott selbst ist todt*, although not precisely of Luther's authorship, as is often supposed, was always traditionally related to Lutheran theology. According to Hegel, he used to remind his students in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion imparted between 1821-1831, that the phrase would correspond to a quote taken from the book of Songs of the evangelical church. In reality, it would correspond, as Jüngel points out, *op. cit.*, 64, to a version made by Johannes Rist of the second verse of a hymn corresponding to 1628, entitled: *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid* (“O sorrow, O Suffering”), And whose stanza already mentioned will say: *O große noth! Gott selbst ist todt, am kreuz ist er gestorben: Hat dadurch das himmelreich Uns aus lieb' erworben* (“O great distress! God himself lies dead. On the cross he died, and by doing so he has won for us the realm of heaven.”) Notwithstanding, although the expression is not originally derived from Luther's pen, it does represent with complete assertiveness his radical understanding of the exchange of properties between the divine and human nature in Christ, under which he has been able to say that if Christ died on that tree God also experienced death on that tree. Of course, as Jüngel warns, *op. cit.*, 65, the expression *Gott selbst ist todt* originated from its early heated scholarly discussions, being replaced in several Lutheran hymnbooks of the time and to this day, by the less scandalous expression: "The Son of God has died." Of course, it is not intended to suggest with all this, as Jüngel himself it emphasizes, that such a Christian understanding with respect to "God has died" doesn't have any precedent before Luther. In this way, and just to mention a few examples, Jüngel continues, *ibid.*, 94, already Tertullian had defined as the faith of Christians that God had died but lives eternally. And, yet, Tertullian himself opposed the thesis that God the Father had suffered, had been crucified, and had died on the cross. Athanasius, though in his controversy against the Arians and Apollinaris circles, will come to expressly confess the Crucified as God, however, he will also specify that Christ, not in the divinity but in his flesh, suffered and died for us. Finally, neither was the idea that God had died strange to German mysticism, and especially Meister Eckhart. But here it is a death rather mystical than real, whose purpose is to invite the initiate to die to himself and to creation.
Alexandrian doctrine. In this way, Luther will uphold that the exchange of properties in Christ does not only occur from the divine nature to the human, the transition that the Alexandrians had sustained, but also from the human to the divine. Consequently, and since both natures are inseparable in Christ, it must be concluded for Luther that if the man Jesus suffered and died, likewise God also suffered, was crucified and died; although, of course, for the Reformer it was not death but resurrection that had the last word in Christ. In this sense, it may well be said that Luther opened the door to modern kenotism.

From this renewed appreciation of Luther's thought amid the desolation, despair and horror caused by the terrible wars of the twentieth century, and especially of this God whose hidden presence could be deciphered in the suffering and abandonment of the Crucified, the treatise on the theology of the cross was not only generating more and more sympathy and attention, but was growing to the point of containing concepts and ideas that, certainly, were not foreseen in the original formulation of the Reformer.

1.1 The “Loewenichnian principle”

A privileged place within studies about Luther's theology of the cross will always be given to the outstanding work already mentioned of Lutheran theologian Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*. Here, von Loewenich, strictly following Luther's thought, will understand

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92 Here we must recognize, however, that the Reformation and the majority of its theologians did not extract the same christological consequences as Luther on the Alexandrian doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*. Thus, for example, Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, xiii, 2, safeguarding as always the transcendence of God, emphasized the absolute impassibility of God, who cannot suffer nor be subject to the weaknesses of human nature. Likewise, Zwingli, reluctant to assume fully the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum*, and instead proposing his principle of *alleosis* borrowed from classical rhetoric, according to which the Scriptures would speak only rhetorically of an exchange of properties in Christ, pointed out his part the impossibility that the divine nature can suffer or experience any variation. Consequently for Zwingli suffering and variation are only applicable to the human nature of Christ. See, specially, J. L. Gonzalez, *History of Christian Thought. From the beginning to the present day*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Caribbean, 2002), 80ff; W. Pannenberg, *Jesus, God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 299ff.

93 With respect to the proposal of informing ourselves in general lines along which the theology of the cross has gone, also known as the state of the question, if you will, both with regards to the greatest works of the 20th century and with more recent publications, in order to observe what its particular guidelines and emphasizes, and thus assessing where a possible response to human suffering could fit within this treaty, the previously mentioned work of Rosalene Bradbury, *The Classical Theologia Crucis and Karl Barth's Modern Theology of the Cross*, constitutes a resource of inestimable value. For all this, see “Recent Conception of the Theology of the Cross: Reviewing the Secondary Literature.”, in *op. cit.*, 13-32.
the theology of the cross not as one chapter more in the work of theology, but rather as a specific type of theology. The cross of Christ is not only significant in relation to redemption or salvation, but constitutes the very center of faith and that which provides meaning for all theological statements. There is no topic in Christian dogmatics for which the cross of Christ does not represent a mandatory reference point.

We can gather, therefore - and this is nothing more than an advance of what we will develop later - that according to von Loewenich's understanding of the theology of the cross, the problematic concerning suffering would find full validity in the treatise of *theologia crucis* and would not be reducible to private expertise of an ethical, practical or pastoral theology, insofar as the theology of the cross possesses an authoritative word in the face of all realities of life and, consequently, with regard to all theological disciplines. However, the approach to this complex subject would require an exclusive or rather referential treatment within the particular methodological and epistemological margins of this "specific type of theology," that is, the theology of the cross.

1.2 Theology of the Cross beyond the Loewenichnian principle

It is perhaps in the already well-known work of the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (1972)\(^94\) where we find almost perfectly the fulfillment of that tendency observed by Bradbury in the studies subsequent to the work of von Loewenich,\(^95\) namely, the notorious propensity since the initial declaration of von Loewenich that the doctrine of the theology of the cross constitutes of its own a specific type of theology, towards a gradual and apparently irreversible diminution of this principle, to the point that, on a common minimum - the Crucified and his cross - such a treaty has come to serve as the starting point for embracing a diversity of *Loci Theologici* which far exceed the original and fundamental guidelines of the *theologia crucis* of Luther. In Moltmann's work, the theology of the Cross of the Reformer constitutes nothing more than an initial impulse of solely general reference which, nevertheless, it is necessary to submit to deep rectifications and updates if this intends to achieve at least any indirect relevance in the present political and social life, while in the Loewenichnian declaration it is a theological


\(^{95}\) *Ibid.*, 17.
principle which is certainly correct, and whose range of action cannot be confined to a mere historical-dogmatic statement. It is true that the programmatic statement by Moltmann will establish that: “Either Jesus who was abandoned by God is the end of all theology or he is the beginning of a theology and an existence that is specifically Christian.” However, there is no doubt that this Christ and his cross, in order to reach his ambitious trinitarian, cosmological and eschatological project, has required the incorporation of diverse mediations from derived discourses.

A decisive step towards the radicalization of the tendency already observed by Bradbury, in terms of breaking with the Loewenichnian maxim, will occur, according to the author, from the middle of the eighties of the last century and will continue to grow to this day. Such radicalization can be observed in a variety of expositions the contributions of which, unlike the treatises of yesteryear, no longer come from specialists in Luther's theologia crucis or from the ancient Christian theological tradition, but basically on the part of those exponents of the so-called theologies of vulnerability and suffering of God, as, well as contextual or genitive theologies, that is to say, feminist, liberationist, ecologist, and so on. More than trying to unravel the richer contents that underlie and give life to the doctrine of Luther's theology of the cross or to the world of religious and philosophical ideas that in no small measure have been inflated or preceded it, and also then to attend the state of the question, in order to try to add a fresh contextualization to this doctrine, the denomination "theology of the cross" ceases to become a strictly theological postulate with its specific history, language, epistemology and methodology to become an instrument or either speculative or holistic of combat and liberation; a resource that, from the designation "theology of the cross," and on a common

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96 The Crucified God, 4.
97 Ibid., 19.
98 Within this break from the Loewenichnian principle, raised by Bradbury, we could mention here, according to the outline offered by the author, and choosing only a few names, the work of United Church of Canada contextual theologian, Douglas John Hall, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross.” (1989); Bradbury, ibid., 20; and of another United Church of Canada theologian, Harold Wells, “The Holy Spirit and Theology of the Cross: Significance for Dialogue.” (1992); “Theology of the Cross and the Theologies of Liberation.” (2001); Bradbury, ibid., 20; and that of American feminist theologian, Mary Solberg, “Notes Towards an Epistemology of the Cross.” (1997); Bradbury, ibid., 25.
99 So expressly points out, Gerhard Forde: “There has been a recent burgeoning of articles and books concerned with the theology of the cross, but most of it is related to questions surrounding liberation theology or problems of victimization, speculation about the “vulnerability” of God, and so forth, which doesn’t get at the central issue of being a theologian of the cross as I attempt to set that forth here.” On
minimum, as we have already said, the Crucified and his cross, serves to raise the voice of
denunciation against gender, social, ecological, structural oppression, etc., and to illuminate
those realities that a traditional reading of the Bible or more conventional theology has typically
ignored or directly silenced.

Therefore, from a general reference point, which is in no way restrictive or exclusively
determined by the historical theology of the cross of the German Reformer or the same state of
the question on this doctrine, provocative answers and with relevant effects would be sought
within these works to the problem of human suffering under the heading of "theology of the
cross." These are responses to a suffering that is understood fundamentally in a merely structural
key and under a certain burden of political and ideological interest, and that, more than being an
explicit articulation of the contents of *theologia crucis* to a historical conjuncture in particular or
to a certain type of contextual problem, acquire practically *a priori* and with total independence
of the treatise of the theology of the cross, the character of combative, revolutionary,
deconstructive, liberating. But as Bradbury herself points out, such a tendency to surpass the
Loewenichnian principle does not seem in any way to reduce itself to these few chosen
examples, but to continue every day in growing increase. Said in Forde's words: "We thus find
ourselves in a situation where there is increasing talk about the theology of the cross but little
specific knowledge of what exactly that is."\(^{100}\) Thus, for example, at a date quite close to 2004,
according to our author, it was already possible to appreciate a virtually uncountable number of
publications that, based on the heading "theology of the cross," were opened to topics as diverse
as climate change, the rehabilitation of torture, the situation in Africa, in the Third World, gender
identity, the emergence of post-industrial society, etc., etc.\(^{101}\)

### 1.3 Theology of the Cross in the framework of the
Loewenichnian principle

This does not mean, of course, that after the decade of the eighties of the last century and so far
in our time only expositions of theology of the cross under the radicalism of contextual
theologies have come forth, although, indeed, it must be recognized that these constitute a clearly

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\(^{100}\) *Op. cit.*, 8.

dominant trend. Proof that such dominance does not exclude, however, dissidence, is found - and always within the itinerary suggested by Bradbury – in a series of contributions that, not refusing to illuminate specific aspects of human, political and social life, procure, on the contrary, substantiate this from a decided return to the sources of Luther's *theologia crucis*, for freshly starting to establish such connections with the structural dimension.

We could not fail to mention in this effort to return to the fundamental contents of Luther's *theologia crucis* – so that we might then establish contextual connections – the previously-cited work of the American Lutheran theologian, Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation 1518* (1997). According to Forde, a serious mistake is made in associating the theology of the cross with a sentimentalist or emotionalist idea of the general identification of Jesus with the suffering of the world, or in reducing it to a pure subject of interest related to the speculation of the internal suffering and vulnerability of God, widely accepted, otherwise, in popular discourse and preaching, and even among certain current theological trends. According to Forde, that is nothing more than a fickle reading of this treatise which does not do justice in any way to the complexity of its subject. In this way, and faced with a human being who would like to be understood rather as a victim and in no case as a sinner, in an age when all resources would seem to be at the service of eradicating from him all vestiges of guilt, and rather than to make of him a mature and responsible individual to affirm his self-esteem, to contain him, to stimulate him, not to contradict him or to offend him, the theology of the cross, in Forde's opinion, tends to be presented as a kind of therapy or a discourse of self-help than as gospel.

Quite to the contrary, according to Forde, the theology of the cross must be understood as a broad and rigorous hermeneutic lens, through which the world can be seen in its real crueness.

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102 Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Likewise, we could also mention within the publications that according to Bradbury would find some margin of solidarity with the *Loewenichman* criterion, the writing of the American Lutheran theologian, Gaylon Barker, “Bonhoeffer, Luther and *Theologia Crucis*.” (1995); Bradbury, *ibid.*, 22; the essay of the German Lutheran theologian, Oswald Bayer, “The Word of the Cross.” (1995); Bradbury, *ibid.*, 23; the article of the American Lutheran theologian, Kurt Hendel, “Theology of the Cross.” (1997); Bradbury, *ibid.*, 24, among others.

103 In the very clear words of Forde: “‘The suffering of God,’ or the ‘vulnerability of God, and such platitudes become the stock-in-trade of preachers and theologians who want to stroke the psyche of today’s religionists. But this results in rather blatant and suffocating sentimentality. God is supposed to be more attractive to us because he identifies with us in our pain and suffering. ‘Misery loves company’ becomes the unspoken motif of such theology.” *Op., cit.*, viii.

and such as it is, namely, in its total rebellion against God and in its obstinate stubbornness to turn itself into its own god. As Forde presents it, the theology of the cross not only informs us about something general, but of something specific and concrete that actively impacts us and affects us,\textsuperscript{105} for this something relates to God's determined attack against the sin of humankind and its radiation in the world.\textsuperscript{106} Certainly, the problem of human suffering is fully included in this exposition, although rather in a derivative way, and certainly not as the demand of an immediate and primary objective that should be demanded practically under pressure to the treaty of \textit{theologia crucis}, and further aggravated by the burden of romantic, ideological or popular understandings of that Christ crucified on the cross. Rather, the problem of human suffering can only be properly situated, so that it can then be dealt with, insofar as it first reveals to this very human being his condition of rebellion before God and his stubborn path of self-divinization, as well as exposing the reality of this world as it is. All of which, in fact, is only made possible by a correct understanding of the purpose of the theology of the cross.

1.4 Conclusion

We have wanted to recover nothing more than a few chosen works according to the instructive itinerary offered by R. Bradbury, and to classify them according to their correspondence or not with the principle already offered by von Loewenich; that is, to understand the treatise on the theology of the cross as a specific type of theology which, at the same time, provides meaning to all other theological statements, and in which, furthermore, the classic \textit{theologia crucis} of Luther constitutes a point of obliged reference and source of constant research and inspiration. Failing that, and on the basis of the common minimum of this doctrine - the Crucified and his cross - and on an appeal basically to certain common places of the historical theology of the cross of the Reformer, we wanted to utilize this treaty as a starting point for the later approach to diverse topics, assigning to it the function of an instrument of denunciation, combat and liberation with respect to those conditions or structures that are considered dominant or oppressive according to a certain ideological or political directive.

Perhaps the reader may judge that we have fallen short of considering all of the works that could be of obligatory reference, according to the itinerary proposed by Bradbury; but what we are

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}, 90.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, 1.
seeking here is not to belabour all of the references, but rather to demonstrate a trend. It is a trend which, unlike the distinction we made in the previous chapter with respect to theodicies with theoretical emphasis and with practical emphasis, and although it might result a little stricter in terms of its demarcations, nevertheless, divides into branches which do not, after all, demonstrate extreme rigidity. Already the treatment that Moltmann himself has applied to his theology of the cross is a good example of this, given that the relevant dimensions posed in his program (structural, cosmological, eschatological) do not appear to be void of a rich biblical and theological tradition to sustain it, for more than, however, to Luther's *theologia crucis* is only glanced at.

Ultimately, this tendency has helped us to identify - with regard to the doctrine of the theology of the cross, without prejudice to the foregoing clarification - two notable guidelines for addressing the problem of human suffering and, in a broader sense, the problem of theodicy: first, a directive within the framework of the specific and particular coordinates of Luther's classic *theologia crucis*, in which the problem of human suffering appears more as a secondary and derivative discourse, yet is not posed as a less valid concern related to the theology of the cross. Second, within the framework of an epistemology that clearly transcends the doctrine on the theology of the cross - its particular grammar, its own intelligence, its prehistory and its sources - to open itself to the exploration of various themes related to suffering and evil, with evident predominance of the structural, deconstructive, militant, relevant criterion.

Indeed, it would be very unfortunate to conclude that a correct treatment of Luther's classical theology of the cross could be sufficiently achieved by the mere explication of its prehistory, its organization, and its conclusions while not taking the risk of inserting it into the burning and urgent problems of life, perhaps for fear of blurring of its contents or crossing the boundaries of its own margins. This kind of research, of course, contains undeniable value, regardless of any efforts at contextualization, to the point of affirming that it would never be possible to exaggerate the importance of all these contributions for clarifying and developing this doctrine. The truth, however, is that Luther's own appropriation of this treaty clearly demands this vital involvement, since in that particular historical conjuncture it had not been possible for the Reformer to envisage all the political, social, and cosmological consequences, if you will, that are inferred in
the message of the cross.\textsuperscript{107} That for Luther the theology of the cross has in no way constituted a merely theoretical construct or a series of dogmatic propositions but rather an ever-living and salutary dynamic which has to breathe its truth into all dimensions of the believer's life is demonstrated by the pastoral connotation of which he never dispenses in his approach to the cross. The \textit{theologia crucis} is precisely a word always interp\textit{ellant }\textit{pro me} and \textit{pro nobis},\textsuperscript{108} a living word, and not merely a rational or theoretical disquisition,\textsuperscript{109} since it gets involved in those places where life is decided, the true life, the life that meets God, in contrast to the human word, the theorizing discourse that is apart from life, that is, the theology of glory, represented at the time by the scholastic tradition.

Having assured and even required the internalization of \textit{theologia crucis} in the most burning and decisive aspects of life at both an individual and a structural level, the question that follows, then, is not around the validity of this involvement, but to determine, on the one hand, to what extent

\textsuperscript{107} Of course, it is not possible to deny the evident political and social conservatism that characterized Luther's theology and especially his theology of the cross, to the point that the image of Lutheranism as politically servile has remained to this day. This is perhaps the reason why a large part of Lutheranism of the First World, precisely that non-confessional faction, nowadays throws itself with so much excessive - and not always lucid - effervescence towards political and social activism. That is to say, they seek by means of that activism to somehow make up for this uncomfortable inheritance, but, it seems to me, without seeking greater depth, so that once again it relapses in spite of the apparent enormous differences, into a similar ideological and political servility, nothing more now than the opposite tendency. In Luther's case, however, without attempting to deny any responsibility for that conservatism that often played against him, especially in relation to the Peasant's war, one could qualify that severe criticism by adducing the convulsive political reality of those days, and the urgency to maintain at all cost afloat the banner of gospel, in times when neutrality was practically not permitted and any false step could have put an end to the incipient evangelical movement, as well as to the fact of the horror and terror that caused the Reformer even the slightest idea of revolution and revolt, to which he saw as the great plague that rises against God and destroys men. And, yet, we should not forget the basic -though not to the point of non-existence- interest by political and social contingency - but not to the point of indolence- which, at times bordered with ingenuity on the part of Luther, for whom his true calling was the teaching and preaching of the Word of God, while the political and social matter received his attention only insofar that brushed with his vocation and that Word, therefore, should be pronounced. This latter is clearly put forth in the words of Ch. S. Anderson: “Naive -Lutero- politically and economically, not basically concerned with the rush of military and social movements, he devoted himself primarily to the task he knew -teaching and preaching.” In Regin Prenter, \textit{Luther's Theology of the Cross} (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971), v.


\textsuperscript{109} I. Dalferth rightly points out that the theory of knowledge in Luther, or epistemology, if you want, and that specifically concerning his theology of the cross, does not consist of a series of verifiable axioms solely from reason, as in natural theology and the scholastic system itself, but of declarations of truth that are verifiable and objective only within the framework of faith in Jesus Christ and him crucified. In this case, one could speak, consequently, of a Christological epistemology, as well as an existential faith that apprehends and experiences in a living way those statements. “The Visible and the Invisible: Luther’s legacy of a Theological Theology.”, in \textit{England and Germany: Studies in Theological Diplomacy}, ed. S. W. Sykes (Frankfurt: Lang, 1981), 24.
the fundamental contents of the theology of the cross are effectively placed at the service of this contextualization, thus generating from the dialectic between cross and concrete situation the reflections and answers required; or, on the other hand, to ascertain if other departments of theology, including discourses that are derived from or peripheral to it, are the first source from which to address the reality of human suffering, and to which only subsequently are added the common points of the doctrine, at that time denominated this exercise as theologia crucis.

So, then: What is ultimately the theology of the cross? How could we define it? Has it occupied a place only in the young Luther, whereas for the posterior Luther it has been displaced by other themes that have attracted most of his attention? Has it been a formula constantly utilized by the Reformer to describe his own theological project, or does it rather constitute a characterization of his thought configured by modern theology? If we wish to inquire into the Reformer's own bibliographical production in search of such a theology, we must firstly turn our attention to his early work, The Heidelberg Disputation (1518), as the principal source of information, and in general to all those treatises written between 1519 and 1521, that is, Asterisci Lutheri adversus Obeliscos Eckii; Operationes in Psalmos; Resolutions disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute, and especially his Lecture on the Epistles to Hebrews, where we find, for the first time, the term "theology of the cross" in his explanation of passage 12, 11:

Here we find the Theology of the Cross, or, as Apostle expresses it: ‘The Word of the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles’ (1 Cor. 1:18, 23), because it is utterly hidden from their eyes.\(^{110}\)

The first thing that should be said, and in answer to the last of the questions, is that the term theologia crucis - as well as theologia gloriae- was never used by Luther as if it were a recurring slogan to account for his programmatic theological activity, but rather a term he used on very few occasions. In fact, and strictly speaking, Luther spoke more of the theologus crucis than of theologia crucis. And, yet, it could not be concluded either, from its infrequent mention that the concept of theologia crucis and all that it implies should be referred to a circumstantial moment of the theology of the young professor of Wittenberg, since, as Ebeling\(^{111}\) rightly has pointed

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\(^{111}\) “The expression -theologia crucis- serves as an indication of the object of his constant concern, the fundamental orientation of theological thought.” Op. cit., 227
out, it is the fundamental concern which has directed the course of all his theological thought and, therefore, a term that results fundamental at the time of trying to understand the whole theology of the Reformer. That is to say, as McGrath points out, complementing Ebeling’s contribution, it is not a pre-reformation element in Luther's theological thought but the very essence of his reforming thought.\textsuperscript{112}

Now, with respect to what is, or how we could define the treatment of, the theology of the cross in Luther it is perhaps most appropriate to begin by pointing out what it is not, and once that is clarified then we can venture a definition. In this sense, we can follow Forde,\textsuperscript{113} noting that for Luther the theology of the cross could hardly have been a discourse that could be reduced to the mere repetition of the story of the passion, or seen simply as a treatise about of the doctrine of atonement, or understood as a certain type of spirituality or religious experience. It also cannot, and by way of contemporizing the problem, be treated without more ado of a theology that is exhausted purely in the emphasis on divine suffering, social justice or an attitude of denunciation or combativeness, even when much of that may be very close to its contents. On the contrary, the theology of the cross, and here we quote the words of Forde himself: “is rather a particular perception of the world and our destiny, what Luther came to call looking all things through suffering and the cross.”\textsuperscript{114} It is a stand before the world and an understanding of our whole life, we can also add, under the guiding principle of the cross of the Crucified One and the God who has been pleased to be found there, and who from that event and that revelation, calls everything by its name, denouncing at the same time the tempting theologies of glory of, those of the past as well as those which are currently being proclaimed, in order to provide the human being, divided in his sin and lost under the siren song of those types of theology, the true evangelical hope that restores communion with God.\textsuperscript{115} The cross of Christ, therefore, is not only the definitive

\textsuperscript{112} “Far from representing a ‘pre-reformation’ element in Luther’s thought, the \textit{theologia crucis} encapsulates the very essence of this ‘reformation’ thought.” Alister E. McGrath, \textit{Op. cit.}, 179.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Op. cit.}, xi-xii.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, xii.
\textsuperscript{115} In a less lyrical form, but very clarifying, von Loewenich distinguishes the following five elements as essential to the treatise on the theology of the cross: “1) The theology of the cross as a theology of revelation, stands in sharp antithesis to speculation. 2) God’s revelation is an indirect, concealed revelation. 3) Hence God’s revelation is recognized not in works but in suffering, and the double meaning of these terms is to be noted. 4) This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith. 5) The manner in which God is known is reflected in the practical thought of suffering”. \textit{Op. cit.}, 22.
criterion of theology, as Moltmann will say, or the transmutation of all values -and here we must include, of course, those religious values that both the factions of a leftist or progressive Christianity, as those of the right or conservative, claim for themselves as the most authentic criterion of the Christian faith- as Prenter will say, but the most immeasurable of the revelations of God and that which most brutally disrupts the limits of human knowledge and its understanding of morality and religion. The cross of Christ is, in the end, the criterion that defines it all: *Crux probat omnia!*

Consequently, we can well conclude what Forde points out with regard to there being an infinite number of theologies and religions in the world, that at the root of it, there have always been no more than two types of theology: the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, and it is the theology of the Crucified which stands as the definitive rule to measure the validity of all theological work and all discourse about God. It is, moreover, and in a broader sense, as von Loewenich has emphasized, that which makes inescapable demands on Christian thought, which can only be ignored at the risk of becoming nothing more than a Christianity molded by theology of glory. Therefore, the theologian of the cross, both of yesterday as of our day, may well make his own the Reformer's slogan and raise it as his own guide: *CRUX sola est nostra theologia!*

Such a lucid statement, indeed, considered in its deepest sense evidently debunks the accusation that the treatise of the theology of the cross would be nothing more than Luther's obstinacy, because in reality the cross as the center of Christian theology has existed both before and after Luther, and will continue to exist insofar as the message of the cross - foolishness to the Gentiles and scandal to the Jews, and both for a large part of (post)modern Christianity, continues to be the judgment of God against sin and rebellion of the world as, at the same time, the power of hope and salvation for the human being under that same condition. In this sense, and in corroboration of the above, we quote the lucid words of Prenter:

There has always been a theology of the cross, both before and after Luther. It has found expression in numerous ways, for example, in the writings of St. Paul in the New Testament, St.

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116 *The Crucified God*, 4
Augustine in the ancient church, St. Bernard in the Middle Ages, and Kierkegaard in the modern ages.\textsuperscript{120}

But, finally, in order not to incur ourselves in this same haste at the time of rehearsing a response to the reality of human suffering, utilizing nothing more than a diffuse and general principle to treat the theology of the cross, let us see immediately some of the elementary contents of this treatise in the thinking of the German Reformer, beginning with certain chosen theses of \textit{The Heidelberg Disputation}.

\section{The Heidelberg Disputation}

\subsection{Preliminary aspects}

It is extremely curious to note that a document such as the \textit{Heidelberg Disputation} (1518),\textsuperscript{121} which specialists in Luther's work and thinking affirm is the most influential of all the disquisitions of Reformer, and the first and most important source for determining both the origin and the evolution of the doctrine of \textit{theologia crucis} – a doctrine which intertwines all the theological thinking of the Reformer\textsuperscript{122} - has received so little attention and promotion for many years. How much more, as Forde\textsuperscript{123} points out, in spite of the problem of its grammar and its time, that is, in full sixteenth century, the Heidelberg Disputation offers such deep and penetrating assertions that continue to hold their validity and actuality even in our time, anticipating questions that continue to be extremely vital for today and no doubt for what will come. Such a lamentable omission had already noted by James Atkinson in his research on Luther,\textsuperscript{124} and likewise G. Forde, who refers to the Disputation as one of the lesser known and read works of the Reformer that has never received the accurate investigation that it deserves.\textsuperscript{125}

Indeed, as a chosen example of such behavior, suffice to recall the benevolent biographer of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}[\textsuperscript{120}]
\item We follow here the edition of T. F. Lull in, \textit{Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings}, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.
\item Thus, for example, P. Althaus: “The theology of the cross permeates all of Luther’s theological thinking.” \textit{The Theology of Martin Luther} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 30. For the same, G. Forde, pretends to see in the Disputation an outline of the entire theological program of the Reformer. \textit{Op. cit.}, 20.
\item Ibid., xii.
\item \textit{Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism} (Pelican Books: Great Britain, 1968), 158.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Luther, Roland Bainton, who in his work on the Reformer offers very brief comments of an order nothing more than picturesque of this event, focusing much more of his attention on the dispute that was to be held only a year later in Leipzig.

In itself, the contents of the theses could result quite surprising and even contradictory, particularly in relation to the audience that had followed the first public movements of Luther, and who finding themselves on the occasion of the debate, would probably have logically expected the heated continuation of the controversy over indulgences and penance. In view of such a possible scenario, the vicar for the German congregation, Johannes von Staupitz, had previously asked Luther to dispense with any controversial question. It deals with a dispute carried out within the Augustinian order in the city of Heidelberg, Luther's own order, and that as a desperate effort to resolve the conflict caused by the Augustinian monk within his own congregation. To this end, the generalissimo of the Augustinian hermits, Gabriel della Volta, commissioned by Pope Leo X himself, will contact Staupitz with a view to reaching a solution. The theses, otherwise, although written and defended by Luther, will nevertheless be read by the Augustinian friar Leonhard Beier, former convent companion of the Reformer and master of arts and philosophy.

In spite of the vivacity and energy of the conclusions of the thesis, in contrast with the rationalist and mechanistic style of the scholastic method which was predominant at the time, it had to do, as the occasion demanded, with an erudite debate on theology which the representatives of Wittenberg probably saw as a propitious opportunity to inform the other members of the order of the incipient evangelical theology that was being forged between their classrooms, as well as to demonstrate Luther's orthodoxy. However, as Atkinson tells it, even though Heidelberg's most seasoned and senior professors, despite their courtesy and goodwill towards Luther, would show no greater adhesion or commitment to the content of the theses, other attending young theologians would be pleasantly impressed by the new theology that was being revealed. Among them, it is worth mentioning because of their important participation later in the cause of the Reformation, the names of Bucer, Benz, Schwarz and Böllkanus.

126 Here I Stand. A Life of Martin Luther (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 86.
There are a total of forty theses in the Disputation, divided into twenty-eight theological and twelve philosophical. Theological theses, some of which we will focus on, will be established in the form of paradoxes such as the revelation of God in the Crucified and his cross, and will generally concentrate on sin and grace, law and the gospel, justification by works and justification by faith, the free will and the bondage of the will. These are subjects which, though incipient here, are of fundamental importance later in the work of Luther, and although recovered and perfected in the later works of the Reformer, they are always under its unmistakable seal and not totally unpublished in the theological tradition. However, the clearly novel element in the debate will be given by Luther's outline of the treatise of *theologia crucis* as opposed to *theologia gloriae*, and to a lesser extent, in the sources he used in the foundation. There is no place here, of course, for the traditional sources of scholasticism: Aristotle, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, among many others; everything resolves, fundamentally, using the testimony of the Scriptures - primarily Paul - and in Augustine, his interpreter.

A framework that is in accord with this one regarding the *Disputation* is that offered by Gerhard Forde\(^{128}\) who divides it into four sections, namely: 1) Theses 1-12, which address the nature and value of the works of the human being within the frame of sin; 2) Theses 13-18, which deal with the inability of free will to counteract sin; 3) Theses 19-24, which establish the radical contrast between the approach of the theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross; and 4) Theses 25-28, which conclude the work, emphasizing that the love of God in Christ is a creative act that attracts us to his being, such an action being the true *opus proprium* of God. We, in our treatment of the Disputation, and in relation to the problem of human suffering, will presuppose this structure, but we will choose only some theses in support of our subject. This outline of *theologia crucis*, however, will proceed, according to the organization of the Disputation, from the position of a radical break with scholasticism and in particular with the Ockamist tradition - this latter, in which Luther himself was initiated and which made up a large part of the audience for the occasion, at least in regard to the establishment of the faculty of reason as a starting point for arriving at the knowledge of God. In fact, here it will be emphasized, and with great energy, that the only possible way to gain access to the knowledge of God and to allow a relationship with him, is through the paradox of the cross, scandal and misery for the religiosity of this world.

and its reason. With respect to philosophical theses, they will constitute a decisive attack against Aristotelian metaphysics, represented likewise by the Ockamist faction.

2.2 Law, condemnation, revelation

It is of great importance to note - as a key to understanding the development of the Disputation, including, of course, the outline of the theology of the cross - the place where Luther situates the human being, namely, far from the justice of God (Thesis 1) without human works being able to help access that divine justice (Thesis 2) even with the help of natural inspiration; and, therefore, under a state of constant sinfulness that allows him nothing more than to sin, and this in spite of the fact that his works have the outward appearance of goodness and beauty (Thesis 3).

Luther has already expressed at the beginning of the Disputation, that each of its paradoxes - that is, each of the theses - must be in full harmony with the teaching of the apostle Paul, vessel and organ of Christ.\textsuperscript{129} Since Luther places the human being under the weight of the law, it is convenient therefore to briefly refer to the purpose that this law would have, according to the Apostle. It is an indisputable matter that for Paul (as for Luther himself, supported here in his testimony), since the fall of mankind the law - which in itself is holy, just and good, given by the giver of every good gift - is not able to reveal the knowledge of God, nor does it constitute the starting point toward reaching this knowledge; rather it reveals the fallen condition in which the human being is found (Ro. 3:19-20), being under condemnation. Indeed, the law, which is holy, just and good (Rom 7:12; 1 Tim 1:8), demands of the human being its perfect fulfillment, without excuses or partialities, since he who fails at only one of its points is guilty of all (Jas. 2:10), remaining thus in a state of curse (Gal 3:10). In this sense, then, and since the fallen human being cannot meet the high demands that the law poses, this - the original purpose of which was to lead to life - has finally led him to death (Ro. 7, 10). Yet, although the law reveals the condition of judgment and condemnation upon all humankind, and no human being can be able to fulfill to the total of its stipulations, we cannot remain indifferent to it, cannot escape from its dominion, cannot evade or deny it.

\textsuperscript{129} “We humbly present to the judgment of all those who wish to be here these theological paradoxes, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ.” Op. cit., 30.
Consequently, and as Bradbury\textsuperscript{130} has rightly pointed out, the human being can only act in relation to the law and in his condition of being fallen and, therefore, is unable to satisfy its holy, fair and good demands in two ways that, although in principle are clearly dissimilar and antagonistic, end up being derived in the same state of matters, namely, in the open and total disobedience to the law of God, as in the case of the Gentiles, or by seeking the literal and scrupulous observation of its contents, such as the Jews. However, both ways of proceeding before the law - that is, by means of rebellion or ignorance before it, or through the illusion of its perfect fulfillment - are doomed beforehand to failure, and the state of judgment and condemnation weighs on both equally, because, as the Apostle concludes: “Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin.” (Rom 3:9) In the first case, the human being establishes his own law instead of God’s law (Rom 1:19ff), and his darkened understanding, ignorance and hardness of heart (Eph. 4:17ff) leads him to confuse the Creator with his creation, to offer worship to it as if it were God himself, and to getting off course completely in his ways, of which the debauchery and corruption that he evidences is nothing more than cause of the above.\textsuperscript{131} In the second case, by means of the illusion of being able to achieve a literal fulfillment of the law under the impulse of human capacity alone and the scrupulous breakdown of each apex, the human being seeks to impress God, compelling him to fulfill the promises of his covenant. Already the second thesis of the Disputation will attack such a pretension of the human being with respect to believing that he possesses certain forces or natural inspiration within himself that would enable him to satisfy the demands of the law. Here, Luther will resort to the testimony of the apostle Paul in his explanation, according to the quotation from Romans 3:10-12: “None is righteous, no, not one;

\textsuperscript{130} Op. cit., 84. Here Bradbury is explaining the thought of Paul.
\textsuperscript{131} In the opinion of O. Bayer, \textit{Martin Luther's. A Contemporary Interpretation} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 91, the law convinces the human being of sin, both in the form of a statement that comes from outside, by way of an external sentence (preaching, exhortation, the Scripture, etc.), as, at the same time, from his own inner being. The externality or the forensic nature of the law does not mean, according to Bayer, that it does not keep any correspondence with the human being itself, otherwise this would be nothing more than a mechanized echo and the law would be somewhat heteronomous with respect to him. Of course, God has written prior to the Decalogue or Old Testament law a law which was written in the heart of human being, which, as Luther points out in his commentary on Romans 2:14, should naturally lead his spirit to Worship God and love his neighbor. Notwithstanding, since the fall, sin has so greatly muddied this law written in the heart of the human being that God had to deliver his written law through Moses so that it would have a guide, a norm to relate to God and with his neighbor. The same could be said of the \textit{sensus divinitates}, which Calvin originally formulated and which, as we have already seen, Plantinga will continue to utilize. The reality of sin has led to this tendency in the human being to confuse the Creator with the creature, and to promote the theology of glory as a correct path to God, in its various religious expressions. Quite rightly, Calvin himself can conclude with that famous sentence: “The human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.” \textit{Institutes, I.11.8}.
no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one.”

Thus, he demonstrates the fallacy of the presumption that the fallen creature - as St. Augustine\textsuperscript{132} has expressed - can do anything other than sin. Even in those works that appear to be good, beautiful and pious (cf. Thesis 3), but that are marked by arrogance, vainglory, the desire for power and self-love in the depths of the heart, though they may be attributed to great moral, social and religious values on the part of man, none of us would like to believe that they are contaminated by the sinful nature of the human being.\textsuperscript{133} Indeed, as Luther will say in the explanation of his fifth Thesis, what happens to these works is that they "are essentially fruits of a bad root and a bad tree."\textsuperscript{134} Therefore, since they are not produced from faith and from a pious fear of God (cf. Thesis 7) - the latter being language that no one would like to use today, because it goes against the image of that jolly and good-natured God we find in much of today’s preaching\textsuperscript{135} - they are mortal sins, and not just venial, despite their external appearance of goodness.


\textsuperscript{133}This does not mean, of course, that such actions are despicable, have no use and, therefore, must be disesteemed, so that the only option left to the human being is to abandon himself - and with him the world - to fate and not to strive to establish human, social and environmental conditions that allow a world of greater respect, justice and solidarity. It is true that Luther in his understanding of the first use of the law, was not able to envisage all the aforementioned aspects, insofar as, clearly, he was a man subject to his time. Nonetheless, all of them are clearly deductible from the civil application of the law highlighted by the Reformer. What we’re concerned with here is the value of the works of the fallen human being as a meritorious action before God and how God himself observes them as being detached from faith and communion in Christ and the respective fear of his name. We could apply the lucid example utilized by Bonhoeffer, although presented in a negative way, in relation to the external work to explain everything we have tried to describe: “If a drunkard signs the pledge, or a rich man gives all his money away, they are both of them freeing themselves form this slavery to alcohol or riches, but not from their bondage to themselves. They are still moving in their own little orbit, perhaps even more than they were before. They are still subject to the commandment of works, still as submerged in the death of the old life as they were before. Of course, the work has to be done, but of itself it can never deliver them from death, disobedience and ungodliness.” \textit{The Cost of Discipleship} (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 65-66.

\textsuperscript{134}Op. cit., 36.

\textsuperscript{135}Of course, fear of God is not about a simple attitude of reverence or respect for the divinity, as is commonly taught, if, of course, such terminology is even still utilized. We are talking about that numinous and devastating fear before which, certainly, no human being could continue to live. Rightly, Forde, \textit{op. cit.}, 41, does not think he can find a better way of explaining that fear contained in the fifth
In other words, and from the fallen condition of human being, the truthful knowledge of God and the fulfillment of his law cannot be established on the basis of a natural theology. Underlying here, indeed, is the rejection of the *analogia entis* represented principally by Thomas Aquinas and his *via antiqua*, for whom nature and grace are fused, with nature serving as a vehicle for grace, and the latter perfecting the first. That, according to Luther, not only constitutes a previously failed way, but it also exposes the acrimonious pride of the creature and his contempt for the work of Christ, considering it nothing more than a secondary addition to what he himself, by virtue of his own natural capacities, can reach or achieve. With this, of course, the praise and honor that belongs to God alone is usurped, religiously and piously reaffirming the theology of glory, and it is forgotten, in turn, that the only possible knowledge of God is by means of an *analogia fidei*. Of course, as Forde\textsuperscript{136} warns, this does not have to do with an archaic and obsolete reality, with such terminology no longer used in everyday speech. For the truth is that, other than a certain faction of Christianity for whom the postulate of the *analogia entis* still continues to be a normative principle both in its historical as dogmatic sense, much of the current religious message with which the human being is bombarded - such as allowing internal spirituality and energy to flow in order to connect with the divine, which is believed to already inhabit the very nature of people - is no more than an uneducated and popular version of this doctrine. In other words, and as Karl Barth\textsuperscript{137} has clearly expressed, it's about a human nostalgia of religiosity, in which the human being really believes he exists in intimate unity with God and shares with him a common background, even though his concept of God is nothing more than a projection of his own mental images of God and the enrichment of those general ideas that humanity has built around the divinity and, therefore, a concept that is susceptible to manipulation in every way possible.


\textsuperscript{137} *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 35-36.
Returning to what we have said about the Apostle Paul, both Jews and Greeks are in the same condition of sin and condemnation according to the judgment of the law, only revealing the condition of complete incapacity that weighs on all humanity in terms of satisfying its demands. Therefore, the law cannot serve as a starting point for access to the knowledge of God, nor can it grant, under that fallen condition that weighs on all humanity, access either to justice or divine salvation. If this is the case, that is, if by means of the fulfillment and strict observance of the law the human being could be justified before God, then Paul would be a good prospect for access to divine justice. Certainly, as is related to us in the letter to the Philippians 3:4-7, Paul can exhibit a series of impressive legal, moral, and racial merits upon which to put his human trust. All of them show him to be irreproachable before the law (v. 6) and, consequently, make him worthy of the justice of God. However, the Apostle esteems it all as loss, "rubbish," because he well knows that no human being can be justified by means of the fulfillment of the law, nor much less to be compared with the supreme good of the knowledge of Christ.

Now, the law not only reveals the condition according to which the human being is found - that is, under the judgment and condemnation of God and consequently unable to satisfy his good, just and holy demands - but the law also makes him an active subject concerning his capacity to sin and, consequently, of actualizing such a state of judgment and condemnation (Rom 7:5), to the extent that it incites man to sin by his own weakness. Luther himself will say in Thesis 13 that the free will of the human being after the fall is nothing more than a name, and that in his condition he can do nothing other than sin. It is true that in several passages of his letters, Paul enumerates a series of sins to which God's judgment is directed and that merit exclusion from his kingdom for those who practice them (ie. 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5). Nevertheless, a correct reading of Pauline theology leads us to conclude that all these behaviors are expressions of an earlier ontological excision which can be traced back to the fall of the human race, and whose most dramatic and immediate consequence is the break with communion with God and, from there, the stubborn human effort to reject the demands of God and establish his own norms and ways of realization, justification and salvation. The result here, evidently, can be nothing other than digging broken cisterns, which cannot hold water, in pursuit of quenching our thirst (Jer. 2:13); building ways that look good but that in reality are nothing more than ways that lead
to death (Prov. 14:12); in other words, as Bradbury points out, “the imposition of suffering and atrophy.”

Here we have, indeed, a first and crucial element for breaking into the problem of human suffering against the backdrop of Paul's teaching and, on the basis of this reference, to access the mode in which according to Luther's *theologia crucis* we can also address it. The first thing we should point out, according to the theological scheme of the Apostle Paul, and which will be fully endorsed by Luther, is that the evil and suffering that weighs on humanity is the result of the broken relationship between God and humanity, from the sin and disobedience of the first parents of humankind (Rom 5:12) against the divine commandment and his plan of life (Gen 2:17), as well as the obsession of the fallen creature for establishing its own ways of survival, realization and meaning regardless of the divine plan. This reality that weighs on every human being is brought to light by the law, and also shows the incombustible capacity of the human being to realize that condition every day.

Of course, such categories of thought might seem to the modern – or, if you will, postmodern–person to be "pre-scientific" and "pre-philosophical," and therefore a worldview that has been completely surpassed in light of current science, and which cannot, therefore, be taken seriously as a way of addressing the problem of suffering and evil. What is more, from the perspective of political and liberationist theologies the Pauline theology of the fall of humankind and the introduction of sin into the world, in which every man and woman under the judgment of the law is participating, hardly – if at all – finds a positive assessment for today's society, even less so as a background frame from which to approach the reality of suffering and evil. The suffering that weighs on humanity is essentially explained here as the result of the political and economic structures of injustice and oppression that dehumanize and alienate society. Of course, it would be unfortunate to dismiss the validity of this socio-structural analysis and to deny that such alienating superstructures are indeed the cause in an enormous part of the suffering that instrumentalizes and tears apart humanity. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged - and this is something that has passed almost unnoticed in the analysis of liberation theology, no doubt by that excessive fixation on the structural dimension of life – that the superstructures of oppression, injustice and social coercion settle initially in the infrastructures of concrete human beings, of

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flesh-and-blood, whose hearts are previously compromised with the germs of selfishness, injustice and oppression, giving account in this way of their evident excision from God's original project. Moreover, without any intention of promoting any kind of anti-intellectualist tendency, it would also be necessary to consider whether the dynamics of faith ought to be completely subordinated to the dictum of reason or to the ideological and cultural patterns of a given epoch, and not be faithful firstly to its own language and its own intelligence to express the essential aspects of its contents.

Now, returning to the understanding and use of the law in Luther, it is not a novel idea that the antithesis "law-gospel" has occupied a place of outstanding importance in the theological thought of the professor of Wittenberg, and that with an extremely experiential and practical finality, especially associated with preaching and pastoral care, to the point that: “whoever knows well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian,”\(^\text{139}\) and “Virtually the whole of the scriptures and the understanding of the whole of theology depends upon the true understanding of the law and gospel.”\(^\text{140}\) But, the application of this principle in an effective way has more to do with the dynamics of art than with the use of fixed formulations of an academic nature, such as, for example, the usual definitions of the confessional writings or dogmatic works both past and present,\(^\text{141}\) even as valuable as these may become. This does not mean that in the face of such a great enterprise and of such transcendent consequences, the believer is delivered to his own devices, for he has the guidance of the Holy Spirit to carry out this function. It is true that according to Luther the Scripture interprets itself (\textit{sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres}), but the Holy Spirit is the light that illumines it completely. Still, it is the same the Holy Spirit who is present in the exposition of the law, for conviction of sin, as in the gospel, for clinging to the promise.\(^\text{142}\) There is no doubt, in light of the above, about


\(^\text{141}\) This warning is expressed quite clearly by O. Bayer: “That is why it is difficult to come up with a written, teachable fixed definition -as was attempted when writing a confessional document such as the Formula of Concord, using authors rooted in a university culture who were familiar with disputations- to evaluate some proceeding with clarity because the liveliness of the way it happens cannot be captured by providing a description of the way it takes place. God himself is the Lord over distinguishing law and gospel, as well as Lord of the eschatological unity of law and gospel; we are not”. \textit{Op. cit.}, 67.

\(^\text{142}\) See P. Althaus, \textit{op. cit.}, 258.
the fundamental value of this principle and its correct designation for the life of the church, its pastoral care and its preaching.

And, yet, even with all the importance that this principle and its correct distinction could carry, not few are the Christian trends (many of which can even claim in other ways a total continuity with the Reformation) which relegate it, as Wolfhart Pannenberg has warned: “to the time bound form of the Reformation and its theology.”\(^{143}\) The exposition of the law comes to be seen as an archaic discourse of bad taste, even if it is the "just, holy and good” law given by God, or in the words of Luther himself in Theses 1: “the most salutary doctrine of life.”\(^{144}\) This is true, above all, during an era in which, it has been said, the feeling of guilt has been overcome and the human being does not feel himself to be a sinner, just a victim; and sin, if it is still possible to refer to it as such, it is blurred into only the structural dimension. It is considered a typical topic, it will be insisted, of outdated orthodoxies, of the most conservative or directly fundamentalist sectors that are still trapped in the rigors of the law, and that do not yet know how to enjoy the libertarian delights of grace and the gospel; and, consequently, it is an extemporaneous message that in no way conforms with the human beings that in this present era are considered, by essence, to be free, noble, mature, good. It is about, as Bayer has said, an antinomian era\(^{145}\) in which we could include many currents within Christianity, and that rather than asserting their anthropology within the framework of Pauline theology - even as a way of explaining the anthropological understanding of Luther - seems to remain firmly anchored to Rousseau’s anthropological model and to a promotion of grace which, rather than being related to the costly grace of God, resembles more the cheap grace of which Bonhoeffer spoke in his seminal work, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

The first outline of this antithesis in Luther, as Ebeling\(^{146}\) has shown in his work dedicated to the thought of the German Reformer, has been the distinction between "letter and Spirit," which was subsequently derived into that well-known modality of law and gospel as a more elaborate and mature way of defining his thought with regard to this fundamental hermeneutical principle. These principles - the law and the gospel - cannot be confused or mixed under penalty of the

\(^{143}\) Quoted from Oswald Bayer, *op. cit.*, 65.

\(^{144}\) *Op. cit.*, 33


fatal misplacement of both, but this is much truer of the gospel since this constitutes the opus proprium of God - where God is revealed - whereas the law is his opus alienum, inasmuch as God is hidden in it. In the law, God speaks against me (contra me); and in the gospel, for me (pro me). In the law God gives death; in the gospel, life. The law is not the final word of God; the gospel is its definitive word. Therefore, its mixture or confusion, according to Luther, has eternal consequences, since they are related to the eternal destiny of the human being. With complete clarity, Ebeling expresses the danger of this mixture or confusion:

And a confusion of the two -law and gospel- it is not misfortune of little significance, a regrettable weakness, but is evil in the strict sense, the total opposite of salvation.147

The law constitutes a very heavy burden on the human being, and has a fulminating impact on him, which can only lead him to total despair and hopelessness by showing him his condition of being fallen, separated from God, obstinate in his own frustrated ways of self-justification, and incapable, therefore, of fulfilling God’s good, just and holy demands, demands that even ask an account for what he has not done, for everything in which he has already failed, and which are still demanded of him. Thus, Luther expresses himself in his Lectures on Galatians 3: 24:

Therefore the proper function of the Law is to make us guilty, to humble us, to kill us, to lead us down to hell, and to take everything away from us, but all with the purpose that we may be justified, exalted, made alive, lifted up to heaven, and endowed with all things. Therefore it does not merely kill, but it kills for the sake of life.148

Despite this devastating picture that the law presents to the human being, even with all its rigor, it can become a turning point for him in that decisive opportunity in view of his ill-fated condition, when he renounces his own ways of redemption and his human resource of self-justification, to open himself up to a hope that does not reside within himself, that is, to the hope that is contained only in the gospel, and Christ is the gospel as well as the end of the law. Such hope may already be seen budding in the foregoing quotation. That is why the order of factors must always be for Luther, first the exposition of the law and only then of the gospel, never the reverse, since law shows his sin to the human being and his state of condemnation, and gospel

147 Ibid., 117.
his only hope of redemption and peace with God. As well pointed out by Thesis 18 of the *Disputation*:

> It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.\(^{149}\)

And, yet, such an order of factors should not imply separation, for the preaching or exposition of the law alone can only produce hopelessness and terror among persons, as, likewise, legalism, while preaching or exposition of the gospel without its antecedent of law, antinomism or - said in Bonhoefferian terms - cheap grace. This order of law, first, then gospel, is expressed clearly by Luther in his *The Freedom of a Christian*:

> We must bring forth the voice of the law that men may be made to fear and come to knowledge of their sins and so be converted to repentance and a better life. But we must not stop with that, for that would only amount to wounding and not making alive, leading down into hell and not bringing back again, humbling and not exalting. Therefore we must also preach the word of grace and the promise of forgiveness by which faith is taught and aroused. Without this word of grace the works of the law, contrition, penitence, and all the rest are done and taught in vain.\(^{150}\)

As we have already seen, the concept of law in Luther is based firstly and evidently on the concept of the law of the Apostle Paul, as well as on the Mosaic law, but, as Gerhard Ebeling\(^{151}\) rightly points out, it is not the exact equivalent of Paul's concept of law, nor of the Old Testament understanding of it, to the extent that Luther has incorporated his own categories of thought and his own concerns and experiences, extending the concept, although always retaining that fundamental background. In this way, he could describe a dual use of the law, a *usus civilis* or *politicus*, and a *usus theologicum*.\(^{152}\) It is about the same and only law with which God treats the human being, however, in two different ways. The first serves the purpose of ordering, forming

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\(^{149}\) Op. cit., 42.


\(^{151}\) Op. cit., 133.

\(^{152}\) As it is known, Luther did not incorporate into his dual use of the law, a third function (*tertius usus legis*), as occurred in the reformed tradition with its *usus didacticus* or *normativus*. Such a third expression, as P. Althaus remind us, *op. cit.*, 273, would be used for the first time within Lutheranism by Melanchthon, and hence incorporated into the Formula of Concord, from where it would become common terminology in Lutheran orthodoxy.
and maintaining life under an order of justice and legality, counteracting offence and crime for the good of society, particularly so that there is in it no obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and the conditions are given for young people to receive education in peace; the second, although dealing with the same law - and on which Luther will elaborate more - is related to the dialectic law-gospel use that at present occupies us. Certainly, the believer in his condition of *simul justus et peccator* lives under the two uses of the law. That is to say, that every human being is capable of satisfying the civil use of the law and, at the same time, may bow joyfully to the law of God, not by his natural capacity to obey it nor by fear of his judgment, but by grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit who works in him. This does not mean, of course, that the law does not continue to fulfill its function of awakening his conscience, and convicting him of his faults every time that he sins or is idle in his faith – just as he lives in the constant tension of being justified and sinner at once, and the old man and his fallen structure are still struggling inside to displace the new creature in Christ – but it does mean that he does not remain in a state of despair and condemnation, for he can turn at all times to the gospel in search of forgiveness and restoration.\(^\text{156}\)

\(^{153}\) In Luther's own words commenting on the first use of the law in his *Lectures on Galatians*, 3, 12: “The first is to restrain those who are uncivilized and wicked. In this sense the statement, “He who does these things shall live by them” is a political statement. It means: If a man obeys the magistrate outwardly and in the civil realm, he will avoid punishment and death. The civil magistrate has no right to impose punishments upon him or to execute him to live impunity. This is the civil use of the Law, which is valid for the restraint of the uncivilized”. *Op. cit.*, 275.

\(^{154}\) See, P. Althaus, *op. cit.*, 253.

\(^{155}\) Now well, as Ebeling well warns, *op. cit.*, 133, the antithesis "law-gospel" in Luther's thought cannot be understood according to a strictly Biblicist criterion, that is to say, associating the law with the old testament and the gospel with the new or, failing that, by means of the use of a concordance to collect all the times in which the word "law" and "gospel" is found, so as, in this way, to settle the matter. With regard to the former, it should be said that many sections of the Old Testament contain large portions of the gospel, as, on the other hand, many of the New Testament contain law. Actually, law is everything that convinces us of our sin and awakens our consciences regarding our condition of judgment and condemnation, just as, in the same way, the gospel is everything that liberates us from the judgment of the law and offers us a hope of salvation. See, P. Althaus, *op., cit.*, 261. At the same time, it is necessary to point out in relation with the second the many biblical passages in which the word "law" are found in a clear gospel context, as, likewise, many others in which appears gospel the exposition of the law.

\(^{156}\) In such sense, it is important to remember that the law, despite its terrifying and condemnatory nature, operates in a very different context in the believer before being reached by the gospel and after having been embraced by it. In this regard, the words of P. Althaus are very clear: “And yet the terrifying and killing which now takes place in the Christian are quite different than they were before the gospel. It now takes place in the context of justification and forgiveness instead of under the destructive curse of the law as it did without Christ. The lifelong repentance in which the law keeps the Christian is clearly distinguished from the effect of the law without Christ. The death which the law inflicts is now ‘bearable,’ and it no longer leads to despair and damnation but to righteousness.” *Ibid.*, 269.
With the twofold sense in which Luther uses the concept of law clarified, and in particular the second use of it in the framework of the Disputation, what can we finally conclude from all this in relation to the painful reality of human suffering? We have already said that the law reveals to the human being his condition of being fallen and separated from the communion of God, requiring at the same time the fulfillment of its just, holy and good demands, and this, of course, under such a state of scission with God, with himself, with his neighbor and also with creation, so that he is never able to satisfy it. Nevertheless, as we have also stated, from the incapacity of the human being to comply with the demands of the law, it does not follow in any way that he can elude or remain indifferent to it. Quite the contrary, consciously or unconsciously, the human being can only adopt before the law two types of behavior which, despite appearing irreconcilable and opposed to each other, end with both sharing the same fate, namely, the path of works or the theology of glory - be it secular or religious - or a symbiosis of both. Let us broaden this statement a little more:

In the first place, the human being can harbor the illusory presumption of the perfect fulfillment of the law, by a scrupulous division of its properties into an endless series of points and sub-points, either from the Old Testament law or from its actualization to our days, in order to impress or pacify God - and thereby commit him to lavish his blessings in fulfillment of his part of the covenant - or simply to appease his stern demands. It is true that Luther has thought firstly here of Judaism, according to the description of the apostle Paul, as well as in the way of meritorious works so typical of the religiosity of his time; but there is no doubt that legalistic behavior and mentality cannot be reduced to a particular epoch so long as continues it to be par excellence the theology of glory, or as Forde\textsuperscript{157} rightly points out, theology proper of the human being after the fall. In this sense, and although such a tendency would seem to be in open antagonism to antinomianism, so characteristic of postmodernity, not few are the factions within Christianity - as well as outside - that remain anchored to this path of self-perfection. Thus, the law and the effort for strict compliance with its stipulations - even those made by the very imagination of Christian piety - become even more important than God himself. That would be, as Bonhoeffer has masterfully expressed it, the same mistake that Israel would have made and

\textsuperscript{157} Op. cit., xii.
that continues to the present, which is: “to put the law in God’s place, to make the law their God and their God a law.”\textsuperscript{158}

In the second place, the human being can pretend that the law does not exist; he can deny it, ignore it, even reject it by becoming his own law in and of himself; or, failing that, he can adopt the antinomy of postmodern society which, after all, ends up proposing antinomism as its own law. But, here too the human being - and in this case the Christian - can enter into an epic crusade against the law, which he understands only as pernicious legalism, to maintain that it has become obsolete, that it is no longer useful in the present, and that it has been completely overcome by a candid concept of maudlin love and cheap grace that covers everything, and that makes us see ourselves as victims and not as sinners. Bonhoeffer's statement with regards to that could well be applied in this case: “In our effort to combat legalism we land ourselves in the worst kind of legalism.”\textsuperscript{159}

Under both reactions before the law, of course, human beings establish their own paths of self-assertion and self-redemption, that is, the path of the theology of glory, rejecting meanwhile the way of the theology of the cross, which is the only way that leads to true knowledge of God and to the restoration of his communion, for therein is found the Crucified One and his cross. Indeed, the stubbornness in these human ways of redemption and fulfillment, whether by means of legalism, denial or open rejection of the law, or in a more subtle and "Christianized" way, if you will, the statement that it has already been overcome, in favor of love, boundless grace and Christian freedom, result in failed ways, which begin in the human being and end in the same human being, as all theology of glory, but that openly or surreptitiously reject the theology of the cross. We could apply here the sentence of Prov 14:12: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Consequently, the theology of the cross results inevitably critical and polemical,\textsuperscript{160} since it brings to light and fights both ways of human

\textsuperscript{158} Op. cit., 122
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{160} Forde says, \textit{ibid.}, 4: “Wherever there is mention of a theology of the cross without indication of this combat, it is not truly the theology of the cross that is being expressed.” However, it is necessary to warn how careful we must be in making sure that the instrument of criticism and combat is the scandal and madness of preaching the cross, and not that which scandalizes and ultimately leads to consternation to society as well as to the church itself which arises from the human agenda and its conjunctural cultural models and ideologies. In this sense, and despite that it continues to appeal to the typical language and vocabulary of the theology of the cross, these no longer operate as more than mere slogans, emptied of
rebellion and self-divination, that is, the one of open antagonism to the original project of God, as well as that sneaky rebellion in the name of grace and Christian freedom or, as expressed by Forde: “Their perfidy behind pious facades.” Such human stubbornness to establish his own ways or to encircle the way of God does nothing more than reveal the condition of rebellion to the project of God’s life and of self-divination that subjugates the creature from the fall, and that constitutes the origin of his excision with himself, with his neighbor, with creation and, of course, with God himself. It would be impossible to deny that much of the suffering and evil that weighs on humanity, even that suffering and evil that appears to us scandalously gratuitous and useless, is at bottom the consequence of that rupture of the relationship between God and the human being, from creatural sin, beginning with the excision of the individual, then expanding in concentric circles towards the social collective and its structures of oppression and radical dehumanization.

But, then, what is the fundamental sin that the law reveals in the human being, the sin *par excellence*, according to Luther? Nothing other than unbelief. Thus, we can read in *The Freedom of a Christian*:

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161 *Ibid.*, 4. For the same reason, warns von Loewenich, *op. cit.*, 20, with respect to the difficulty of discovering the theology of glory in an open and evident manner, since it tends to act in very subtle forms, often hiding in the honorable field of morality and reason. Of course, this does not mean that the theology of the cross has nothing to do with morality and thought, but, as Althaus clarifies, *op. cit.*, 27; it parts from the Crucified and his cross in determining all its worldview and discourse, including these matters. Instead, the theology of glory addresses these issues exclusively from the works of God’s creation, with the result that it is the human being who is finally exalted. Of course, von Loewenich’s warning with respect to the recesses in which such theology usually takes refuge is still fully in force. Nevertheless, we should ask ourselves in what subtle ways or spaces the theology of glory tends to hide in our days. Surely, this is not the most appropriate place to answer such a question, but the truth is that the theology of glory will always be a discourse that enjoys of not a small admiration. And although in several opportunities it tries to be a provocative and scandalous word, nevertheless, it is not the scandal and provocation of the Crucified One and his cross which ultimately generate such a reaction, even if this lexicon is used, but rather the contents of certain cultural and ideological preferences. Moreover, it is worth bearing in mind the guiding principle indicated by von Loewenich himself, *ibid.*, 23, as the correct criterion for identifying such a theology of glory from the oblivion of the theology of the cross, and this on the basis of which we have previously pointed out, namely: When the theology of the cross is no longer understood, the Bible in turn remains as a closed book - we would say now accommodated to certain cultural patterns, and silenced or censored in those passages that result precisely uncomfortable to these same conjunctural worldviews, for the cross of Christ is the only key to its understanding.
What greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise? For what is this but to make God a liar or to doubt that he is truthful? – that is, to ascribe truthfulness to one’s self but lying and vanity God? Does not a man who does this deny God and set himself up as an idol in his heart? Then of what good are works done in such wickedness, even if they were the works of angels and apostles?162

With regards to the above, it is possible to conclude that the rebellion and self-divination that characterizes the human being are the most visible and extreme manifestations of that sin that we could well identify as unbelief;163 that is, not believing that God is always good and trustworthy, that his promises are sure, that we can entrust to him our very existence, and that in the commitment and complete surrender to him consists life, the true life. Furthermore, not believing is also rejecting his project of redemption to establish, instead, our own ways of survival and self-justification, which, although for some time allow us self-dependence, gratification and realization, will always lead us to suffering, fear and frustration, because they must be traveled alone since they have been forged excluding God. Rightly Bonhoeffer will warn of the intimate relationship between unbelief and cheap grace: “Unbelief thrives on cheap grace, for it is determined to persist in disobedience.”164

Having arrived at this point, it is not surprising that the human being raises his fists against God and blames God for a world filled with suffering, evil, selfishness and fear that he himself has created, and of which he feels victim, not responsible, much less sinner. Is not this, perhaps, the

163 According to O. Bayer, op. cit., 179, disbelief as the essence of sin has nothing to do with a kind of quality in the human being, or something that has subsequently been added to human substance, but something that provides a definition of the whole human being: something that involves, therefore, his whole nature. At the same time, the believer, in his condition as simul justus et peccator, is not immune to the temptation of unbelief, even we avoid the violence that such a concept evokes and prefer to say in its place things like, "concern," "eagerness," or "anxiety." But, what is all this, in truth, but a subtle (but no less concrete) form of unbelief? As believers, we may be able to entrust to God our eternal destiny and our salvation with the understanding that we have been able to do nothing to obtain it or to preserve it, and that everything has been accomplished by the undeserved grace of God. And, yet, we have enormous difficulties in entrusting to God our day, our tomorrow, our needs, our troubles and sorrows, as if the God who has granted us eternal life by his grace and salvation alone could not at also supply all our needs and to take charge, as our good heavenly Father, of all that disturbs us. In this sense, to worry and fret, is this not a form, as has been said – one that is subtler but no less real – of unbelief? Is it not, seen in all its crudeness and radicalism, to call the God who has promised to supply each of our needs a liar? Therefore, is not such mistrust the most common form - and we speak here not of unbelievers but of believers- of this sing (see Jer. 17:9)?
164 Op. cit, 68.
situation that underlies the account of the fall of Genesis 3 and that which we call precisely *peccatum originale*; that is, that original sin is the primal doubt of the human being with respect to the goodness of God and thinking, consequently, that God has reserved something for himself out of selfishness and stinginess? In other words, it is humanity’s disbelief concerning the excellence of divine purposes and insistence on establishing his own ways, creating his own destiny, believing himself to be God, disregarding that his own ways and destiny end up being his own idols to which he remains enslaved and to which he sacrifices his own life.

We could define the sequence of this disastrous process of *homo incurvatus in se ipsum*, in the following manner: 1) Unbelief (original sin, sin *par excellence*) → 2) Disobedience to God's life project (effective and consummate sin) → 3) Independence of God and affirmation of one's own human resources in search of affirmation and redemption (the claim to be God for oneself, but to end up being enslaved by one's own constructed idols) → 4) Result: suffering, fear, and condemnation. Of course, it is not a question of the doubt that tempts us and that constitutes the reverse side of faith,¹⁶⁵ and which intertwines with faith in a constant dialectic, the result of which is always the invigoration of faith, because doubt, though distressing, always turns in search of divine strength, as in: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9, 24) No, we speak here, clearly, of that doubt, of that unbelief that is established already in open antagonism toward communion with God, and which only makes more evident the attempt of the fallen creature to survive according to its own means and resources, rather than those provided by God.

Faced with the human’s stubborn disbelief about to the goodness of God's plan for his life, and his insistence on building his own earthly kingdom under the scheme and condition of his fallen structure – marked, of course, by egocentrism, ingratitude, the depredation of his surrounding world, the instrumentalization of his neighbor, insecurity, and fear, etc. – we can, in fact, fully agree with the judgment of Jonas and Levinas that radical evil and suffering cannot be reconciled, nor can a theodicy of a happy ending or a candid optimism of the world in the manner of Voltairean's Pangloss be argued from them. They cannot be, not only because the

¹⁶⁵ This temptation for the Christian, as P. Altahus states, *op. cit.*, 33, is the result of being in a world that operates under the dictates of reason and experience, which pushes him to doubt the truthfulness and goodness of God. Faith, then, lives in this constant tension between accepting this empirical reality as definitive or trusting in that which remains hidden, and which can only be found by means of the cross. The theology of the cross, therefore, is *par excellence* a theology of faith, the reverse of which is the theology of temptation, that is, the theology of glory.
cross exposes and condemns the terrible sin that weighs on this world, but also because the human being has rejected the only possible redeemer of all evil and suffering, and the only one who can carry creational and human history to its eschatological plenitude. In this sense, as Forde will say: “The cross makes all superficial optimism impossible”\textsuperscript{166} since it exposes the world as it is, namely, in all its rebellion against God and in its endeavor of self-divinization. Therefore, the only theology after the fall that can provide the true path to the knowledge of God and, consequently, redemption and restoration of the human being, is none other than the theology of the cross.

But it is precisely this exposing of the world as it is and of the human being in all its fallen structure which makes \textit{theologia crucis} a theology that does not evade reality under the subterfuge of being inevitably engaged in rational-doctrinal and speculative thinking, nor that looks at humanity with the gullibility and naivety of one who holds that only political and social transformation can lead to the inner and spiritual transformation of people.\textsuperscript{167} Certainly, it is this treatment of the world and humans as they are which allows the theology of the cross to arise as an eminently practical and relevant worldview for life, since it does not disguise or theorize, much less romanticize, reality as does the theology of glory, that inevitably ends up being - despite presuming to be a striking, combative, revolutionary, relevant, contextual discourse - a theology of gullibility and illusion. Therefore, Ebeling asserts that the theology of the cross turns out to be an existential theology,\textsuperscript{168} since it affects the believer in every area of his life, showing him first what he is - namely, a fallen and sinful creature - and then what has come to be by means of Christ - that is, a forgiven and redeemed sinner who lives now under the Lordship of God.

Nevertheless, as has already been emphasized, this transition from the cognitive level - that even the natural man can possess, as a correct intellectual affirmation of the dogmatic-doctrinal

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{166} Op. cit., 16.  
\textsuperscript{167} Consequently, we must continue to affirm still that which was emphasized in \textit{The Lausanne Covenant} in terms of reconciliation with man – hence, all horizontal reconciliation efforts – is not yet reconciliation with God; and Political liberation - and from there all the efforts of emancipation the oppressive socio-cultural structures – is not the salvation of God; rather divine reconciliation and salvation make such horizontal efforts of reconciliation an urgent task. The commentary and explanation of such an affirmation can be seen in J. Scott, \textit{The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary} (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 19ss.  
\textsuperscript{168} Ebeling says: “Thus the aim of theology of the cross is in a pre-eminent sense ‘practical,’ for its aim is a right use of reality. Its leads into experience, and is existential theology.” Op. cit., 228.}
contents of the cross - to the existential level, as an appropriation of those contents to the whole life of the believer, and which according to Luther constitutes a fundamental element of the true faith, cannot be given and explained on the basis of reason alone, since it is the exclusive prerogative of the sovereign and unfathomable grace of God and not of human effort. Now, that the existential level of faith in relation to the cross constitutes a fundamental element does not in any way suggest for Luther that the cross can be emptied of its historical contents and reduced to having significance for the believer only - such as Bultmann's theology proposed – and the cognitive level consequently discarded as irrelevant. Quite the contrary, the cognitive level and the existential level around the cross are intertwined and require one another; but while reason by itself can assert nothing more than an intellectual sense of the doctrinal contents of the cross, only faith as the work of God himself can make the leap to the existential, and make its own the grace, forgiveness and new life that it represents.

In light, therefore, of this existential dimension, for which that cognitive background is in no way disposable, but complementary and fundamental, it would be greatly wrong to conclude that the appreciation - both of the human being and of the world - of the theology of the cross, without any sublimation of reality, leads only to pessimism and resignation. Rather, in it is contained the most truthful and well-founded optimism and a hope that even death cannot contain, because it does not end in itself but in the resurrection. Otherwise, the cross would be nothing more than the theater of absurdity and the realm of hopelessness and nonsense. Said in the words of the apostle Paul: “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15, 14).
Chapter 3
The Bondage of the Will: The Heidelberg Disputation and De Servo Arbitrio\textsuperscript{169}

1 Preliminary aspects

If it is possible to establish a specific date or event that caused the Reformation - represented by Wittenberg's teacher, Martin Luther, and by Christian humanism, whose most emblematic figure at that time proved to be the great humanist of Rotterdam, Desiderius Erasmus - to experience a break with practically no return (at least as far as Luther is concerned) that could be found on the occasion of the his writing \textit{De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collation},\textsuperscript{170} published in September, 1524. It was a piece of writing born under the pressures of the Roman Church and even of the English court itself, due precisely to the attacks of Luther against Henry VIII, so that once and for all the measured and circumspect humanist - always sailing between Scylla and Charybdis, as Luther will say - would leave from his warm neutrality and thus take public action against the teaching of Wittenberg's professor. Certainly, any opinion expressed by the venerable and famous humanist would immediately have a decisive impact, especially between the enlightened world of the time and \textit{a fortiori} in the public conscience, and this was something, of course, sufficiently known by the detractors of the Reformer.

Notwithstanding the pressures on Erasmus, he had his own reasons for abandoning the sympathies that had initially aroused in him the evangelical movement, basically, due to the danger of the division between the European Christianity to which the reformist movement seemed to be directed, and with it, the latent threat of deriving in popular uprisings, wars, moral and social chaos, and finally, in the decline of the humanist ideal with regard to placing man at the center of the universe. Even Luther himself, with some of his fiery writings such as \textit{The...}

\textsuperscript{169} We will follow from here onwards the Spanish edition, \textit{Obras de Martín Lutero}, Tomo IV, \textit{La voluntad determinada} (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1976), taken from the German edition, \textit{Martin Luther, Ausgewählte Werke} (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1962).

\textsuperscript{170} We will follow from now on the bilingual the Latin-Spanish edition, \textit{Erasmo de Rotterdam. Discusión sobre el libre albedrío} (Buenos Aires: El cuenco de plata, 2012) translated by Ezequiel Rivas directly from the original of 1524, which we will cite as, \textit{Diatribe}. 

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Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), seemed to see Erasmus as the cause of the definitive excision of the church and a radical agitator who could not be reconciled to the long-awaited unification of the church, the renewal from the inner spirit, and the civic morality to which his own humanist-Christian program tended. This was something, of course, absolutely repugnant to Erasmus’ pacifist and conciliatory spirit. It is not surprising, therefore, that Luther for his part would reproach the humanist who had preferred to choose peace rather than the cross, and that his struggle against Rome and the papacy was not precisely a gift that God had granted him.

Up until this time, Luther had never spared any praise for Erasmus, particularly for his erudition and especially for his edition of the New Testament in Greek - moreover, this was of great help to Luther’s readings on the book of Romans and later on for his own German translation of the New Testament – through which he had seen in the humanist a measured ally of the evangelical cause or, at least, not an antagonist. Nevertheless, as has already been said, this would radically change because of the publication of Erasmus’s treatise, in which he left an opening for an internal force in the human being to adhere to salvific grace or to reject it according to the exercise of his will, and rejected what in his view was a dangerous determinism in Luther, the result of which tended to undermine human freedom and destroy the kind and magnanimous image of God, making him practically the author of sin who then blames the human being for those sins he cannot avoid. Consequently, for Erasmus, from the sin of our first parents and the

171 In fact, and as R. Bainton certifies, op. cit., 125ff, Erasmus could well be considered the humanist that closest to Luther, precisely because of his “humanist” adherence to Christianity, apart from the fact that his greater efforts in literary research were not devoted to the classics, as would be assumed in any figure of the Renaissance, but to the New Testament and to the Fathers of the Church. Moreover, as Bainton goes on to argue, both men shared the same view that the church of their day had fallen into a type of legalism equal to or even worse than that which the apostle Paul had combated in his day, substituting the principal commandment to love God and neighbour - heart of the Christian faith - for a series of rites, fasts, indulgences, pilgrimages, and an endless succession of external exercises that in no way help the common people to mend their ways. Both men, also, were fully convinced of the enormous deterioration which had come to the institution of the papacy, and of the abuse that was being done of this investiture against the simpler people and, therefore, of the urgent need for its purification. Both, and firstly Erasmus, though not with the same viscerality as Luther, had declared that the concept of substance applied to the elements of the Lord’s Supper constituted rather a philosophical gimmick without any biblical foundation. However, despite all these obvious points of encounter between the humanist and the Reformer, Erasmus, Bainton points out, was still a Renaissance man interested in understanding religion within the limits of human reason and morality, and concerned with maintaining neutrality at all costs in a time when neutrality was not tolerated.

172 “Porro liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus vim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem avertere.” Diatribe, 56.
fall, the will of the human being would have been nothing more than wounded but not extinguished.\textsuperscript{173}

Moreover, according to Erasmus, the Scriptures were not at all clear about that matter which Luther gives as unequivocal and definitive.\textsuperscript{174} Erasmus argued that the best exponents of Christian scholarship from their origins to the present had discussed these same subject without being able to reach a satisfactory conclusion. In consequence, if the recognition of the captive condition of the human will constituted for Luther a fundamental truth for anyone who would deign to call himself a Christian,\textsuperscript{175} and his ignorance made him worse than a pagan,\textsuperscript{176} for Erasmus, instead, it was prudent to not make propaganda of such a doctrine, either from the pulpit or among the people, as Luther had been practicing, but rather to keep such complex matters within the exclusive circles of scholars and theologians to avoid risk of undermining the desire of the ordinary Christian to do good deeds and thus to push him into worse moral laxity\textsuperscript{177} than the one to which the papacy had led him. Moreover, in certain passages of his \textit{Diatribe}, Erasmus will qualify Luther's interest in inquiring into such divine mysteries as an irreverent and superfluous curiosity.\textsuperscript{178}

The \textit{Diatribe} of Erasmus, however, did not find an immediate answer as it would have expected from Luther, not because he considered it to be a minor dispute or an adiaphoron matter – we have already said that this writing meant a definitive break between the humanist and the Reformer – but because the peasants' war had already erupted and he was busy in the preparation of his writings, \textit{Lectures on Deuteronomy} and \textit{Against the Heavenly Prophets}, which certainly

\begin{footnotes}
\item[173] “\textit{Quamquam enim arbitrii libertas per peccatum vulnus accepit, non tamen extincta est.”} \textit{Op. cit.}, 67.
\item[174] “\textit{Hic audio: Quid opus es interprete, ubi dilucida est scriptura? Si tam dilucida est, cur tot saeculis viri tam excelentes hic caecutierunt, idque in re tanti momento, ut isti volunt videri? Si scriptura nihil habet caliginis, quid opus erat apostolorum temporibus prophetia?”} \textit{Ibid.}, 48.
\item[175] “It is not disrespect to God, indiscreet curiosity or superfluous thing to know whether the will effects something or nothing in the pertinent to salvation, but is a highly healthy and necessary thing for a Christian.” \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 55.
\item[176] “If we ignore these things, we know absolutely nothing about the Christian religion, and we will be worse than any heathen.” \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 55-56.
\item[178] “\textit{Nec erat irreligiosa curiositate irrupendum ad illa retrusa, ne dicam supervacanea.”} \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
\end{footnotes}
consumed much of his time. On the other hand, in his reply to the *Diatribē*, in his already famous, *De servo arbitrio* published in December 1525, he will declare that Erasmus, concentrating the debate on the subject of human freedom, has been the only one of his opponents who has come to understand the very heart (*summa causae*) of his theology and that which is decisive for the faith, instead of dealing as others did on indulgences, the papacy, purgatory, and other such trifles.\(^{179}\) Subsequent to that, taking a retrospective account of his works, he will confess that he would not mind if all his works perished so long as his *Large Catechism* and the response to the humanist were preserved. As was to be expected, the fiery response against Erasmus – or as Heiko Oberman will say, against “modern men of all era”\(^{180}\) – attacking his pride and his illusion a free will with which to collaborate with God in his salvation, would cause a great sting in him and in most of the humanists of his time. It would mark, at the same time, the divergent paths that these two giants of their time, Erasmus and Luther, would have to follow, and with it, two ways of understanding the Christian faith, the grace of God and the freedom of the human being which, despite their many points of agreement, will remain irreconcilable to this day.

The first avoids the scandal and madness of the cross so as not to disturb the human being, presenting an idealistic anthropology that maintains a certain vestige of freedom to cling to divine grace or to reject it, in order that his human capacities do not remain completely eclipsed, with grace being nothing more than a secondary and passive agent of this divine election; and maintains the understanding of the Christian faith within the limits of mere reason, ethics and common sense. The second calls each thing by its name, that is, presenting a realistic anthropology in which the human being does not find himself, as in the previous vision, at the crossroads of faith or unbelief and deciding when he deems it convenient for one of them according to his will, because the human being already bet his freedom and lost it, and is now captive. Of course, one thing is what the human being can think of himself and his possibilities before God; it is something else - very different - what God thinks of him and his possibilities and his real condition. Hence, free will is nothing more than an empty word, "a nothingness"\(^{181}\)

\(^{179}\) *La voluntad determinada*, 332.

\(^{180}\) *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 211.

\(^{181}\) Precisely, Luther's reply to Erasmus in Latin, would be almost simultaneously translated into German by Justus Jonas, under the explicit title of *The Free Will is a Nothingness (Das der freie wille nichts sey)*. See, Joachim Iwand, “Introducción teológica.”, in *La voluntad determinada*, 12.
which has no relation either to justification or even - as Luther will say in his own reply to Erasmus - with sanctification; for no one can call Jesus Lord if it is not by the Holy Spirit (1 Co. 12, 3), and it is God who produces both the will and the doing (Php. 2, 13), so that neither in the regeneration nor in the preservation of this state is there any merit on the part of the human being. Because of this, for Luther the concept of *liberum arbitrium* is a term that can be used only in relation to divinity, since God alone has no limitations or restrictions for carrying out his purposes and doing what his sovereign design disposes, both in heaven and on earth.

Consequently, free will is neither more nor less than a divine name which alone and exclusively belongs to the divine Majesty; for this "can and do all he wants, in heaven and on earth," as the Psalm says (135: 6).\(^{182}\)

Of course, the immediate criticism of the doctrine of the enslaved will, especially within the circles of progressive Christianity, is that the patriarchal and dominant doctrine would make the human being simply a puppet, a marionette manipulated by the threads of a tyrannical, despotic and capricious God who mercilessly annihilates the inalienable rights of the creature. From there, then, we find the urgency to deconstruct, even to censure and eliminate those irritating and annoying biblical testimonies that confirm without ambiguity the doctrine of the captive will, adducing to the limitations of its historical conditioning, to its condition of exclusivist, dominant and oppressor texts.

Certainly, the presumption of the human being having a completely free will is idealistic and undermined by the experience of life itself, since this is always a will exerted in context, conditioned by factors ranging from family background, socio-cultural context, political and religious worldviews, the world of values, and organic-structural factors, without this necessarily leading to a necessary metaphysical fatalism such as the Muslim way, or an historical determinism in the form of Marxist materialism. In this respect, we cannot ignore the fact that defenders of creatural free will tend to weigh it generally as a universal principle, established in a virtually ahistoric way and under an anthropological burden that suffers from an extreme optimism and idealism that is not consistent with reality. Now, for Luther, to use precisely the concept of *liberum arbitrium* in relation to the fallen, split and sinful creature, is simply a

\(^{182}\) *La voluntad determinada*, 88.
a crime of lese majesty, the rebellion of the human being in his most apotheosic expression, because with it an attempt is made to usurp an attribute that belongs only to God and can only be applied to him. In Erasmus' theology, Iwand will say,\textsuperscript{184} the place of the Spirit of God is occupied by the spirit of the human being himself, who is presented as a being who sovereignly disposes of his destiny, and of salvation and condemnation, possibilities depending on his own determination, not of the sovereign election of God.

Could we, therefore, conclude that such an understanding of the Christian faith, represented here by the \textit{Diatribe} of Erasmus, but receiving enormous acceptance from the earliest centuries of Christianity, has been the everlasting hiding place in which the theology of glory has taken shelter again and again, with scarcely a few variants; although perhaps one from our time would be the replacement of the supposedly obsolete code of values of traditional morality, to position in its place political and social activism as the countercultural propaganda – although what is really countercultural in our day is a return to conservative values and customs - and the sacralizing and idealistic discourse of the periphery and miserableism, the latter, to use the language of the French philosopher and political scientist, Pierre-André Taguieff? The reader may judge on this point, but, whatever it may be, one thing does seem absolutely certain, and this, as Iwand rightly points out, is that Erasmus' arguments and objections about the subject of free will managed to penetrate into theological and popular thought much more than Luther's own thoughts.\textsuperscript{185} Indeed, already Melanchthon, after Luther's death, took care to soften the treatise on the enslaved will, and later Lutheran orthodoxy will be responsible for qualifying the timid glimpses of the doctrine of predestination among its ranks as the introduction of an unacceptable crypto-Calvinism. \textit{The Formula of Concord} will also reject the divine decree which extends over reprobates and elect; not to speak of much of today's theology, where the mere mention of a captive will merits immediate submission to that sentence of ideological suspicion,

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\item \textsuperscript{183} "And if it is attributed to men (the term "free will"), it is attributed to them with no greater property than if they were also attributed the divinity itself, which would be a sacrilege as there can be no greater.” \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 88.
\item \textsuperscript{184} \textit{Introducción teológica}, in \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 19s.
\item \textsuperscript{185} But as Iwand points out, “\textit{Introducción teológica},” in \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 29, in Luther's own time, and precisely on the occasion of the debate concerning captive freedom, the two antagonistic blocks to the Reformer, that is to say, that represented by Erasmus and the humanists, who at this point already saw Luther as a radical agitator; and the one represented by enthusiasts or fanatics (\textit{Schwärmer}), who, on the contrary, judged him as a conservative timorous, and despite being absolutely in the antipodes, coincided at least in one same vision with respect to the captive will.
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whose a priori conclusion is that we are here with an ancient dominant and oppressive discourse. But, if the will still maintains a certain vestige of potency (potentia activa), and not only passivity (potentia subjetiva), in such a way that by doing its best it could collaborate with salvific grace (or at least prepare for it), then the work of Christ has not been complete without human work, and God has consequently the obligation to share in his glory with the human being, although, in reality, such an idea of grace would be no more than a cheap grace, the only grace which the theologian of glory knows. Here the words of Bonhoeffer cannot be more precise, especially in connection with the break between Luther's proclamation and later Lutheran tradition, but, likewise, and with some exceptions, with the whole religious movement after the Reformation:

Yet the outcome of the Reformation was the victory, not of Luther’s perception of grace in all its purity and costliness, but of the vigilant religious instinct of man for the place where grace is to be obtained at the cheapest price.186

Beyond these resistances to the doctrine of the enslaved will or the offense to human autonomy that this might bring about, the case is that the doctrine of the captive will is an inseparable component of the theology of the cross, for the redemption of the human being comes to him from the outside, not by the fulfillment of the law nor as a reward for his collaborating or perfecting attitude of this redemption, but exclusively through Christ crucified on a cross. Previous to the publication De servo arbitrio, however, even to The Heidelberg Disputation itself, Luther had already referred to the nullity of free will in some of his sermons and writings. As early as 1516, for example, he had been able to point out: “The will of man without grace is not free, but enslaved;”187 and just one year after this declaration, on the occasion of his Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam: “It is not true that the free effort (of man) is able (to decide) on either of two opposed courses. Rather it is not free at all, but captive. It is not true that the will is by nature able to follow right guidance.”188 Such statements about captive will - regarded by Rome as heretical - together with the well-known accusations against Luther would have contributed to the bull of excommunication, Exsurge Domini, against the Reformer presented in June 1520. All that, added to the growing annoyance of many of the humanists of

187 Quoted from Ebeling, op. cit., 215.
188 Ibid., 215
the time, and the urgency on the part of the papacy to promptly put an end to the teaching of a captive will - which Luther was far from retracting - would lead to Erasmus writing his *Diatribe* under much pressure, but without betraying his conscience. For our part, our reflections on the following pages concerning the captive will as an indissoluble element of Luther's *theologia crucis* will be based specifically on the Heidelberg Disputation and on *De servo arbitrio*, but always in view of the subject at hand: Human suffering in light of the theology of the cross.

2 The Heidelberg Disputation

Gerhard Forde believes he has found the guiding thread that interlaces Theses 13 to 18 of the *Disputation* around the problem of the will.\(^{189}\) It is precisely on the basis of this division that we will develop our observations regarding the subject of the captive will. Certainly, the first thing we would say, as has already been stated above, is that the doctrine of captive will does not constitute in any way a foreign concept to Luther's treatise on *theologia crucis*, or to the contents of *Disputation*, occupying a significant section in this work. It’s that, despite the great difficulty shown by much of today's theological thought, when it comes to associating the cross of Jesus with the doctrine of the captive will, this represents a fundamental pillar of this theology and, consequently, an essential element at the moment of reflecting on the painful reality of human suffering from the perspective of the Christian faith. The captive will, both in the *Disputation* and in *De servo arbitrio*, is not only a doctrine that has to do with the margin of freedom that the volitional faculties of the human being could possess before himself and before God, but in a much deeper sense with the very understanding of grace, its scope, and the possible participation of the human being both in its preparation, as also in its adhesion or rejection.

There are those who would sustain that only in the days of Luther, as well as in the later confessional orthodoxies, could such a doctrine of the captive will generate such interest, while in our day it would be nothing more than, in the best of cases, an absolutely assumed principle - who could not know, especially among Protestant circles, that salvation is only by grace? - and in the worst of them, an absolutely irrelevant discussion - like all doctrinal articles - in the light of the capital value of the practical aspects of life as the imperative challenge to the Christian faith, such as social justice, political activism, denunciation against patriarchalism, among others. One gets the feeling that among a large part of Protestant circles there are two quite recognizable

reactions to doctrines such as justification by grace alone and captive will. The first one, basically among the groups most closely associated with confessional orthodoxy, Lutheran or Reformed, consists of a laudable defense of such treatises, although with the recurrent deficit of a rough and uncontextualized exposition of such articles of faith. The second one, as has been said above, is found principally among the most progressive sectors and is expressed in the tendency to empty such articles virtually of all usefulness to the present before the hegemonic value of praxis, and even directly to suppress all reference to these doctrines by the fear of being offensive to the human being today and - why not say it - to themselves as well.

Beyond such reactions, the problem, with respect to human will remains the same, and we could disaggregate it into two capital questions. In the first place: can a will that from the fall is nothing more than a simple name, already emptied of all meaning, and that can choose nothing but sin, be an active collaborator of salvation, preparing the conditions for the advent of divine grace, or even to have the volitional power to cling to it or to reject it? The answer to this question we found in Thesis 13 of the Disputation, and in such a strong and categorical way, that it must have aroused a high degree of stinging in the papacy of the time as to be the only anathema in the bull excommunication of Leo X against the Reformer:

> Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.\(^{190}\)

In the second place, if the human being is saved by grace alone, does he have the right to claim any participation in that event which, according to the Apostle Paul himself (Eph. 1:4), has been decreed even before the foundation of the world? Again, this question is answered categorically in the Disputation. Thus, we read in Thesis 16:

> The person who believes that he can he obtain grace by doing what is in him to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.\(^{191}\)

It is an answer that, at the same time, serves as a firm position against that anthropocentric order of salvation commonly known under the western name of *ordo salutis,\(^{192}\) which came to take


\(^{191}\) *Ibid.*, 41.

\(^{192}\) In total opposition to the western *ordo salutis*, the gracious *ordo salutis* will be established, with a dialectical method and a theocentric order of salvation, in tension with the analogical method of the
relative strength among certain evangelical currents of the post-Reformation, such as Methodism, and which related in turn to the principle of the *analogia entis*, and which will be affirmed in the postulate of *liberum arbitrium*, understanding sanctification as a precedent - even enabling of justification - and the decision to choose with regard to salvation as resting in the human will and not in the Creator. Although the clarity of such a response cannot lend itself to any misrepresentation, the fallen structure of this human will - characterized in its deepest being by unbelief, selfishness, and its inextinguishable tendency to establish its own paths of realization and affirmation, discarding in turn the way of God - will not give up so easily on claiming even a tiny share of participation as it relates to grace and salvation, even, if possible, dressing itself in the clothes of piety and talk of the cross. But, is it possible for the theology of glory, the way of works, to hide in pious talk of the cross and in its sensitive meditation? Precisely, in the days of Luther - and beyond Luther and his time - this turned out to be the situation, inherited from the medieval mystique of the cross and the *imitatio Christi*. It was a state of affairs that Luther knew very well from his own experience as an Augustinian monk, and which would mark, despite some undeniable points of convergence, the absolute difference for the understanding of *theologia crucis* on the part of Wittenberg's professor.

Indeed, in the medieval mystique of the cross, as Prenter\textsuperscript{193} has warned in his brief but concise study of the Reformer's theology of the cross, is basically an example by means of which men can be exercised in humility and finally modeled to imitation of the suffering Christ. In Luther, however, the cross is not a way of exercising poverty or a supreme example of humility which only certain specially qualified men are called to imitate, but the act by which Christ charges with judgment and punishment for the sin of all human beings equally, in their condition of being sinful and fallen. This, the cross, does not come to us as in the *imitatio Christi* through a mystical process, but through the concrete afflictions and temptations of our life. In accordance with that, the cross of Christ is identical with respect to the cross that as believers we have been called to bear, but also unique and unrepeatable. It is identical because we have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) for the death of our sins and reborn to a new life by means of his resurrection (1 Pet 1:3). But, at the same time it is different because we have been called to bear our own cross, the western *ordo salutis*. In this, sanctification does not precede justification, but is the consequence of that, while the decision of election rests on the sovereign decree of God and not on the creature. For all this, see the excellent comments of Bradbury, *op. cit.*, 71ff.

\textsuperscript{193} *Op. cit.*, 3ff.
one imposed particularly on each one (Mark 8:34), in the particular contingency of our life, and not to take upon oneself the single and unrepeateable cross of Christ, so as to believe we are converting ourselves into Christ,\textsuperscript{194} for: “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord” (Mat. 10:24).

And, however, continues Prenter,\textsuperscript{195} this mysterious identification between the cross of Christ and ours puts a definitive point to the idea of an \textit{imitatio Christi} as a good work and a pious exercise that only a few initiates could reach, since, in the same way as justification by faith, the cross that we are called to carry inspires our sinful nature to abandon all demands before God, all pretension of self-justification, in such a way that we depend only on the Word of God to justify and grant forgiveness in the historical event of the cross of Jesus. Consequently, Prenter\textsuperscript{196} claims, the \textit{theologia crucis} of Luther is an indissoluble theology of the word and of faith, unlike the medieval mystical theology of the cross which is essentially a cross without word, under the very peculiar idea that in humbly carrying the cross in likeness of Christ man prepares himself in obedience in order to enable the outpouring of the saving grace of God. But, Prenter argues, it is not only a cross without a word, but also a piety without it, because it ignores both the judgment of the sin of the world that is exposed on that cross, and the graceful approach of God to the sinner through Christ and his gospel, whose consummation is also that cross. After all, and as we find here, Prenter\textsuperscript{197} concludes, an idea of a cross emptied of the word is not the cross of Christ, and the result cannot be anything other than boasting and false humility beneath a cloak of piety, and abandonment of himself and the world, such as the Luther himself came to know as a monk.

Nevertheless, such as there has been a "cross" without a word, there has also been a "word" without a cross that, in the same way, but now under a modality rather of an academic tendency,

\textsuperscript{194} Regarding this sense of imitation Unamuno had already presented his discrepancy, when in his \textit{Tragic Sense of Life}, he wrote: “For Christ did not say, ‘Take up my cross and follow me,’ but ‘Take up thy and follow me’: every man his own cross, for the Saviour’s cross the Saviour alone can bear. And the imitation of Christ, therefore, does not consist in the monastic ideal so shinningly set forth in the books that commonly bears the name of à Kempis, an ideal only applicable to a very limited number of persons and therefore anti-Christian; but to imitate Christ is to take up each one his own cross, the cross of his own civil occupation -civil and not merely religious- as Christ took up his cross, the cross of his calling, and to embrace it and carry it, looking towards God and striving to make each act of this calling a true prayer.” (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 277.

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ibid.}, 5.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Op. cit.}, 6.
has likewise been the refuge of the way of works and the theology of glory. Here, Prenter can correctly identify that the theology that emerged immediately after the time of the Reformation - that is, that of orthodoxy, and this specifically Lutheran – is one in which the theology of the cross from Luther would be separated quickly from its own theology of the word, with the result of producing its peculiar version of a protestant scholasticism and the pretension of offering a completely academic and objective theology, if not, perhaps, definitive. In this way, the Christian faith would be practically reduced to the mere intellectual affirmation of certain doctrinal propositions. The consequence would be - unlike the previous system, although with similar results - a "word" without the cross, in which the cross of Christ no longer would have relation with the life of the believer and his call to crucify each day the sin and the Old Adam. In other words, it is the teaching and preaching, not of the grace obtained at the costly price of the son of God, but of cheap grace, hidden under the reverie of an objective theology, and to get a position again of the way of works, hidden under the ostentatious discourse of a "correct theology."  

Certainly, it is not being insinuated here in any way that the legacy of orthodoxy has no value, nor forgotten that in the history of Christian thought it has constituted an enormous effort of theological systematization and of affirmation of the classical tradition, not always entirely happy, it is true, but of broad methodological and conceptual importance, so much so that it has often been agreed to estimate it, as has already been said, as the very form of evangelical scholasticism. In this sense, we may well remember in this regard the words of Paul Tillich referring to this period as the basis of all subsequent theological movements. However, and as

198 Ibid., 5.
199 It is not a very difficult task to confirm that a church too ample of resources, of social tranquility and comfort, will always be exposed to the risk of softening, idealizing and even completely forgetting the treatise of theologia crucis. But, on the other hand, and in honor of the truth, we must also point out that there is no less danger, and from this we can well testify that a supposed theology of the cross precisely gestated in contexts of political and social instability, in its eagerness to be at all relevant, committed, combative-although in a more lyrical and academic way than real-it becomes a theology of the cross not mediated by the Word but by means of accessory instruments of mediation or derived discourses, particularly from the empirical sciences, as has been the case, for example, with liberation theology. It is worth remembering here the wise words of Clodovis Boff: "A theology (and a faith) that allows itself to get entangled by this game and that disguises itself as sociology or politics because of shame of itself, with the intention of recovering and becoming trustworthy, does nothing more than to bring to light the symptoms of its morbid situation and, therefore, of its near end". Teología de lo político: Sus mediaciones (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1980), 169.
200 "Orthodox theology was and still is the solid basis of all later developments, -as was usually the case- were directed against Orthodoxy, or were attempts at restoration of it. Liberal theology to the present time has been dependent on the Orthodoxy against which it has fought. Pietism was dependent on the
it relates to the treatise of *theologia crucis*, there is no doubt, as Prenter has clearly expressed, that orthodoxy deprived it of all the depth, vigor, and force with which Luther’s pen had characterized it, in order to confine it simply to be one more article within his sophisticated system, to which it was enough to assent intellectually to believe it already assumed, although in total disconnection from life.

But Prenter does not remain only in the analysis of primordial orthodoxy, but daringly goes a step further asserting that our present orthodoxy is also not having much success in its attempt to connect the cross of Christ with the experience of modern man. The reasons? It is a discourse of the cross of Christ and of ours belonging only to the sphere of the sacred; a discourse, in most cases, demonstrating an optimum knowledge of the historical background of the treaty and not adding anything that could detract from its contents, but not understanding at the same time its the profane nature, which Luther always pointed out, unlike the understanding of medieval mysticism and scholasticism in general. Consequently, Prenter concludes, we find ourselves here in such present orthodoxies, and despite their commendable efforts to keep the *ipsissima verba Lutheri* as aseptic as possible, with a word without a cross, and the latter, converted into a simple religious "theological ideal,” but which no longer says much, if anything, to the human being today. Finally, and in relatively recent times, another theology noted by Prenter in which the discourse of the cross appears in the same way emptied of Word, despite its insistence to be precisely "a theology of the preaching of the word," turns out to be Bultmann's existential theology. Here, the word no longer refers to that apostolic message that brings salvation to the human being by means of saving acts that happen in history, but is strictly related to a particular possibility of existence in which the cross of Christ, as historical event of redemption, becomes nothing more than an ideal type, according, as is known, to a particular philosophy.

Orthodoxy which it wanted to transform into subjectivism. Past and present restoration movements try to recapture what was once alive in the period in a much more serious way than is usually done in America. … It is an unheard-of state of things when Protestant churches of today do not even know the classical expression of their own foundations in the dogmatics of Orthodoxy. This means that you cannot even understand people like Schleiermacher or Ritschl, American liberalism or the Social Gospel theology, because you don’t know that against which they were directed or on what they were dependent. All theology of today is dependent in some way on the classical systems of Orthodoxy.” *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 276-277.

These few examples brought up by the Danish Lutheran theologian are sufficient to show how crucial the theology of the cross is to protect against these two enormous dangers which threaten to undermine its contents, and to make into a subtle refuge, both pious and erudite, to cover up the theology of glory and the way of works, namely: On the one hand, the cross without word, which will always lead to mere human piety or, as the reproach of Luther to Erasmus, to a piety with Christian pretension but without Christ; and, consequently, a return to the monastery, to the way of works and to the abandonment of oneself. Although, for the theologian of glory, without any commitment to the cross or the word, such piety always turns out to be something endearing, picturesque, autochthonous, that is, something unquestionably Christian, although it lacks the Christ of the word and of the word of Christ. On the other hand, the word without the cross, which always will translate into a merely human program or immanent idealism, calling these existentialism, commitment, solidarity, suspicion, activism, progressivism, etc., supposing that these would express the same concept, and in an even more up-to-date way, of the "theology of the cross," to the point that in any moment we could dispense with such terminology.

Without a doubt, this is a warning which, because of its vital importance, could never be exaggerated. However, one is tempted to wonder if currently the treatise on the theology of the cross is faced with the danger of a cross without a word or a word without a cross, and not, truth be told, of an absence of cross and of word at the same time. An absence of word and cross shows that it is no longer piety without word, nor the correct doctrinal statement without cross,

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202 With regard to abandoning himself and the world and returning to the monastery, we should note the radical difference between the understanding of the world in Luther, and that of the great Spanish mystics and monks. In the figure of the most distinguished Spanish mystics, Juan de la Cruz, Teresa de Jesús, Fray Luis de Granada and Fray Luis de León, for example, we find without doubt an inner religious passion of such vigor that, in the judgment of John Mackay, El otro Cristo español. Un estudio de la historia espiritual de España e Hispanoamérica, (Buenos Aires: CUPSA, 1989), 144, seems to have no competitors. Regrettably, as Mackay points out, the legacy of their religious intensity did not succeed in germinating as would have been expected in the spiritual life of the peninsula, perhaps because of the constant suspicion of heterodoxy in which they always lived, having passed all of them, with the sole exception of Teresa, a season in the prisons of the Inquisition. Sadly, and as Mackay, op. cit. 149, warns us, despite this profound concept both in the spiritual, the ethical, and even in the dimension of the daily life, which the Spanish mystics sustained of Christ and Christian piety, this itself was confined only to monastic activity and in the fascination of the interiority, this Christ and his cross being beyond the monastery and the heart, a stranger to the world. And, yet, how different has been the itinerary of that other monk, Luther, whom the encounter with the sola fide in Christ did not separate him from the world, but gave him back to it. As Bonhoeffer has so beautifully expressed in his The Cost of Discipleship, 48: "Luther had to leave the cloister and go back to the world, not because the world in itself was good and holy, but because even the cloister was only a part of the world. Luther’s return from the cloister to the world was the worst blow the world had suffered since the days of early Christianity.”
and not even its reconversion to certain philosophical categories of the moment, which today threatens the theology of cross with its total distortion and the emptying of its essential contents, but rather its reduction to the political and sociological currents and even to particular cultural guidelines, according to, of course, to certain ideological bias. Consequently, is it not an exercise equally or even more dangerous than the existential reductionism to which Bultmann, in his time, submitted the theology of the cross, to give the name "theology of the cross" to any political, social or cultural agenda, when they are not based on the historical fact of the crucifixion of the Crucified, and otherwise lack interpretations and accommodations according to the ideologies that underlie them, so that in fact, the cross of Christ and the correct understanding of his message has not only lost its meaning of judgment against sin and the redemption of sinner, to transform it into nothing more than an excuse for the imposition of these programs of interest? Is it not forgotten here, too, that not all suffering, marginality or victimization mean taking up the cross of Christ, but properly taking up the cross of Christ is that one who has been previously uncovered in his condition of fallen and sinful man by the implacable law of God, and then in his desperation has accepted the word of grace and redemption that is contained in the gospel and consummated in the historical event of the crucifixion, and from there on follows the Risen Crucified as his Lord and Savior in the everyday of his life, dying each day to his old self?

But going even further, in the absence of the word and of cross does theologia crucis not function as a pretext for the construction of a human being or of a community understood as the "suffering" - that is, a human being or a collective that has already assumed such commitments as victimized, oppressed, harassed, "taking up their cross," whether or not they recognize the cross or even hate it directly - and consequently need their cause to be taken, their demands to be promoted and denounced by all means to their alleged oppressors, those who deny their rights, those responsible for subjecting them to the condition of detriment, dehumanization, exploitation, censorship? And, to be more direct, does not this particular construction of the "suffering" and "oppressed" turn out to be indebted more to ideological interests, both cultural or political, than to the actual facts of life, all the more so when we observe that the suffering of those human beings or collectivities that do not conform to those particular ideological interests are neglected or even denied, even if the same turn out to be Christians who suffer the hostility of a society that presses in on them to adopt certain cultural patterns contrary to the message of the cross, or that they are in persecution and constant danger precisely for love of that cross in parts
of the world where it is detested, hated, persecuted? Here the theologian of the cross cannot escape his duty to call everything by his name, that is, "to call evil, evil and to call good, good", although he himself must also suffer for love and fidelity to the message of the cross.

Forde\textsuperscript{203} rightly notices that the treatise on the theology of the cross has become in our day a kind of new theological fad, holding under its imposing heading, \textit{theologia crucis}, a series of claims and programs ranging from the ethical to the therapeutic, from the political to the cultural; it has become a sentimental discourse of general solidarity with those who suffer, or a call for political and social activism that parishioners can put into practice on the weekends by buying certain products, boycotting others, supporting certain partisan political stances or certain cultural patterns, but which leaves aside the perversion and sin of the human being. Going deeper by Forde, the result of this evident reconversion of the content of the theology of the cross to the ideological demands of the times is that, despite being promoted as a genuine representation of this treatise, it becomes combatant, committed, contextualized into a theology of glory planted negatively.\textsuperscript{204} And, as Forde\textsuperscript{205} himself rightly points out, religious people usually have both difficulty in hearing the message of the theology of the cross and in becoming a theologian of the cross, as it turns out to be devastating to anyone who bases their religious claims on the wisdom and justice of the law (1 Cor 1:19; 3:20) and who believes from this and from its internal spiritual potentialities to know God and to work for him by carrying out external works. Although, of course, this external work is never exempt for its configuration of certain ideology.

Consequently, what for the theologian of glory can be esteemed as evil or good, in the absence of either word or the cross, and more frequently with absence of both word and cross, will always be in function of what can be useful or beneficial to him and to his system, even if it is necessary to redeem what is unredeemable, and to do his utmost to rationalize or "Christianize" this redemptive act. Therefore, and returning to the \textit{Disputation}, Forde\textsuperscript{206} may well affirm that the theologian of glory is a good haggler. A good bargainer who, if it is no longer possible that the human being can actively participate in saving grace, will at least cling to the idea that he is doing his best effort, that what is in his power or within him (\textit{facere quod in se est}) can at least

\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Op. cit.}, 83.
\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Ibid.}, 84.
\textsuperscript{205} \textit{Ibid.}, 92.
\textsuperscript{206} \textit{Ibid.}, 50.
awaken within him the desire to aspire to that grace, to prepare the conditions conducive to its advent.

Certainly, this best effort, as far as Luther's historical context is concerned, is not a very difficult task to notice, and can immediately be mentioned: indulgences, pilgrimages, monastic life, abstention from certain foods, observation of specific days, laceration of the body, vows of poverty, in other words, works. And, in this way, it will be said, the matter of works has already been completely overcome and resolved, since no one in their right mind would like to return to these obscure practices again, much less pretend that by their observance and fulfillment we could make our best human effort to desire or prepare for the grace of God. However, one wonders whether the inexhaustible desire of the fallen and divided human being to persist in his idea of an autonomous freedom and in his miniscule participation in saving grace, by giving the best of his inner being, or his best effort, has not simply changed in other subtler modalities of expression, but always in the same rut of the way of works. Could it not be, perhaps, that the notorious overvaluation of many sectors of Christianity today by the excessive political and social activism - under a given ideological position, of course - by the countercultural posturing, by the provocative and anti-conventional ethics, by the sacralization and idealization of everything that seems to come from the periphery - a periphery, certainly more of ideological and political construction than of reality - and which can be covered under the exculpatory mantle of miserabilism, are the new modalities of making the best effort from inside oneself, and with this to feel that we are collaborating with divine grace, which is in some way to be worthy of its advent and to impress God?

Now, if we speak of a fallen and divided creature who is under the judgment of the law, and who likewise has a will that is captive to sin and that pushes him to persist in sin - principles without which a correct understanding of the theology of the cross would be impossible - does it not constitute a pessimistic and embittered anthropology, a theology that is gloomy, legalistic and antiquated, obsessed with slavery and sin, the result of which in the end is nothing but human guilt, fear, and shame, and that ultimately leads the human being to such degree of despair that he is incapacitated to appropriate the goodness of the gospel or to develop all its internal potentialities and thus achieve its full realization? Perhaps we have overemphasized the contents of our rhetoric, but is this not the complaint with which the theologian of glory has always tried to discredit the theology of the cross? Precisely, and as Luther intuited that this would be one of
the everlasting objections against the doctrine of the captive will and consequently against the
treatise on the theology of the cross, he can affirm in Thesis 17 of the Disputation:

Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble
oneself and seek the grace of Christ.207

Indeed, to speak this way - that is, to demonstrate the human condition of fallen creature and
under condemnation, to remove the blindfold from his eyes and to make him see that his will is
captive to sin, and neither autonomous nor free to hold onto saving grace or reject it according to
his own determination - is a difficult truth that the human being is not willing to hear, much less
admit. But the truth is that only a theology such as the theology of the cross that takes seriously
the depth of sin and the chains with which it enslaves the human being will be able to understand
with equal depth the sublime grandeur of the costly grace of God, and not make of it a cheap
copy of human self-indulgence. The converse, of course, is to sweeten the ear of human being by
speaking of its intimate inner communion with the divinity, simply by virtue of its condition of
good, free, spiritual creature, in which case the profession of the Christian faith would be simply
the explication of all that is already within its own human potentialities; and then, to convince
him that the state of condemnation that weighs on every human being, from the imperious
recognition of sin, and the disbelief and rebellion before God, and of the urgent necessity of
grace, etc., is a matter just of fundamentalists and fanatics, and language that leads only to such a
state of despair that does not allow the full realization of all the potentialities of the human being.
Of course, there will always be the danger here of incurring both an unhealthy despair and pride
with similar characteristics, both tendencies are very recurrent among ecclesial life depending on
the extreme in which they find themselves. Perhaps no one has described more clearly the above
than Blaise Pascal:

The knowledge of God without that knowledge of our misery produces pride. The knowledge of
our misery without that of God gives despair. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is intermediate,
because therein we find God and our misery208.

207 Ibid., 42.
208 Blaise Pascal, Thoughts, Letters, and Opuscules (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1859), 334.
But to show the human being its state of condemnation, misery and captive will, as expressed in Thesis 17, is not to give a reason to despair of this, at least not as a final goal that leads to death, but to overthrow all pride and boastfulness in the creature so as to lead it to humility and finally to the joy of freedom in Christ. It is about, therefore (Thesis 18), a necessary desperation, because it is the despair of himself and of human possibilities that prepares the heart to receive the grace of God. In the same way, a dangerous disease could never be cured if the topic is denied, minimized or avoided in order to not alarm the patient, and instead it is repeated to him that what he suffers is only a circumstantial malaise which his body itself will take care of, but only when this disease is accepted in its full gravity and the patient is informed about it, can the corresponding steps be taken towards the treatment of the sickness. A human being could never be fully aware of its real condition, if – for fear of not generating in it anguish and despair, and thus frustrating its conviction of being an intrinsically good being, *per se*, in natural communion with God and, therefore, completely free to either adhere and collaborate or to postpone or reject the salvific grace of God – we never speak of its state of division and condemnation before God and, from there, of its captive will, inclined only to sin, with the purpose of awakening reality and showing it the way to its redemption and peace.

We could say, therefore, that it is the law that reveals and diagnoses this condition to the human being, this illness, while it is the gospel that grants the remedy. Consequently, neither in the desperate discovery and the recognition of sin as a mortal disease and of the will as inclined only towards to the sin, through the exposition of the law; nor in the humble acceptation to its sole hope of salvation and health, contained in Christ and in the proclamation of the gospel, could the human being have something to boast of as if all that would have been possible only by virtue of his inner spiritual capacities and the drive of his free will. In fact, neither the desperation over sin nor the humility to accept the gospel are virtues or natural reactions within the human being. On the contrary, what is natural is the minimization of sin, or its negation, along with the not-so-humble pretension, in the best case of collaborating somehow with the message of salvation contained in the gospel, in the case of being predisposed to this, and in the worst, the arrogant and proud declaration of not needing such salvation. Therefore, neither despair before the law nor humility to accept the gospel is a product of some inner capacity in the human being or of some peculiar sensitivity or inclination to the piety that only some beautiful and good souls could possess. In fact, both the one and the other, as emphasized by Forde, is produced in the human
being by the *opus alienum*\(^{209}\) of God and, consequently, they lack all meritorious character before him. Moreover, both contrition and humility in the state of grace and justification is the work of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, since this convicts the believer every time he sins, and produces in him the fruit of humility.

3  \textit{De Servo Arbitrio}

The doctrine of human will - understood since the fall as captive and, therefore, inclined only toward sin, unless, of course, divine grace touches it with no intervention or participation on the part of the creature - is one of the doctrines most resisted by humans, including, and not in lesser degree, by those who are believers. It is a scandalous doctrine, \textit{De servo arbitrio}, which not only deprives the creature of its proud claim to being collaborative in the eternal decree of God's redemption, but also claims that any participation of this creature would spoil such a salvation achieved by Christ at the expense of his own life. In other words, the doctrine of captive will says to the fallen and divided human being that its salvation has been achieved \textit{sola gratia},\(^{210}\) as a magnanimous favor to those who do not deserve it and could never pay it back, as an irrepressible overflowing of love toward one who has nothing to be loved, and whose tendency is only sin and rebellion. It has rightly been said by Luther in thesis 28 of the Heidelberg Disputation that: "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it."\(^{211}\) Indeed, man loves in the other what already resides in the beloved and makes it therefore worthy of such affection. Instead, the love of God, whose supreme expression is the cross of the Crucified, is aimed at those who are disfigured by sin, which have spit in the face of his only begotten Son, and have rejected and crucified him, those who only deserve judgment and condemnation, in those who there is nothing, thus, worthy to be beloved.


\(^{210}\) In the words of Eberhard Jüngel: “The expression \textit{sola gratia} is meant to guarantee in a most particular way that sinners are unable to justify themselves and to take any active part in their justification. The \textit{sola gratia} formula highlights the fact that God has no starting point in us when he justifies sinners -no starting point except our sin. And sinners in turn have no starting point but the grace of God when their justification is at stake.” \textit{Justification: The Heart of The Christian Faith. A Theological Study with an Ecumenical Purpose} (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2011), 175.

For the same reason it is extremely crucial that Luther, already at the very beginning of the treaty, expressly states that the doctrine of the captive will is communicated to the believer only by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, without which we would know nothing, and certainly not by the boldness of reason.\textsuperscript{212} Likewise the Holy Spirit has told to the latter in due course that it is a lost sinner (Jn. 16, 8), and then, after being reached by grace, that it is a child of God (Jn. 1, 12). In other words, it is a certainty that comes from faith, but proceeding from the most agonizing despair through contact with the law. In this way, Luther narrates his own transition from mortal despair, because of the decree of the sovereign divine election, to the grace that finally produces joy in the believer and assurance of salvation, and, as the same time, an attitude of deep humility, because none of this has been by work or merit of the fallen and divided creature:

I myself was shocked more than once, and it is thus that I came to the edge of the deep abyss of despair, in such a way that I wished have never been created as a human being before I got to know how healthy was that desperation, and how close to the grace.\textsuperscript{213}

And, yet, this truth regarding the eternal decree of divine election, although a manifest and clear doctrine of Scriptures, only the illumination of the Holy Spirit can make clear to the reader, something which, according to Luther, the Erasmian interpretation lacks.\textsuperscript{214} In addition, that tormented passage from despair to the discovery of grace, from the dark night of doubt to the clarity of the dawn of faith, which in Luther as in Augustine has marked with fire his vision of God and the development of his own theology, is something that Erasmus could never have

\textsuperscript{212} La voluntad cautiva, 25-26. Regarding the revelation of the Holy Spirit as the only possible source through which man becomes aware of the captive condition of his will, and the inability of human reason to achieve this awareness by itself, Luther replied to Erasmus: "But what the will is capable of doing in this article [referring to the supreme articles of our faith, led by the article of eternal life] Paul testifies in 1 Corinthians 2. He says –‘God has revealed them to us by his Spirit;’ that is, if the Spirit had not revealed this no human heart would know anything about these things or think about them, so far is the free will is from being able to apply to them or desire them." Op. cit., 127.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 219.

\textsuperscript{214} As is well known, Luther was able to differentiate between the inner clarity of the Scriptures (\textit{claritas interna scripturae}) and the external clarity of these (\textit{claritas external scripturae}), which indeed they need themselves, so that cannot be divided. All that, however, which seems to be dark from the external clarity, is solved whenever it is recognized that Christ is the unifying and central element to which all the Scriptures point. But such recognition is a product, first, of inner clarity, which is provided to the believer by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But for Erasmus, whose scholarly treatment of the Scriptures was not very different from that of any other literary work, and who knew nothing of internal and external clarity, all that which was not sufficiently clear in Scripture from its mere external writing, and insofar as it could not be elucidated, only could only be honored by leaving him in a mystical silence. For all this, see, O. Bayer, \textit{op. cit.}, 84-85.
understood; in part, because it could not be said of him, as Oberman pointed out in reference to the Reformer, that his faith in God and life experience are merged, but in part also because of his understanding of the law and the "you shall" of God, as presupposing in man the ability to do what the law demands, and his approach to the Christian faith and the content of the Scriptures in nothing more than intellectual and ethical interpretation, without getting to know - like the Father of the Church and the Reformer - the depths of religious despair.

In that sense, Erasmus could never have confessed, as Luther did, such disturbing statements as: “We cannot go to heaven unless we first go to hell;” or, “Before man can be raised to the heights, he must first be forced to descend to the depths; before he can be elevated by God, he must first humble himself; before he can saved, he must first be damned; before he can live in the spirit, he must first be put to death in the flesh.” Simply, his humanist spirit and his understanding of faith in terms of ethics and universal peace was not prepared for the dark night of the soul. And, yet, it is a question of despair that arises from the recognition of our misery, a true spiritual bankruptcy, which, as Luther warns with a validity, Satan attempts at all costs to hide and minimize, since if man were fully aware of such misery, he could not hold any of them within his kingdom, since God does not remain indifferent to the recognized and pleading misery, without bestowing his grace.

It would be a serious error, indeed, to convert such a state of deep anguish and religious despair that precedes the encounter with grace into a principle with a normative character without which one could not possibly reach an understanding of both the doctrine of the captive will nor to that of the decree of divine election, since what this is about is the recognition of our condition of misery and, therefore, of the urgency and absolute necessity of the divine grace. But, at the same time, it is necessary to point out that theological and scriptural truths are not accessed by

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215 “Faith in God and experience in life were so intimately linked for Luther that the beginning cannot be distinguished from the end.” Op. cit., 211.
218 Quoted from A. E. McGrath, op. cit., 1985.
219 Ibid., 153.
intellectual musing, if such adhesion expects to be more than the study and repetition of the state of the question or nothing more than the discourse of good theological upbringing, without first having a background of understanding of the existential dimension of the believer. Precisely this will be Luther’s continual warning throughout the entire exposition of *De servo arbitrio*, namely: Reason by itself - represented here by Erasmus and his *Diatribe* \(^2\) - can only consider a doctrine to be extremely harsh if it holds that the human will is nothing and is captive, and that its tendency is only to sin, and be scandalized by the decree of eternal election, judging that such a God who deprives the human being of his ability to freely choose his eternal destiny and of his participation in this salvation, can only be a tyrannical and unjust God. But in addition, reason – all the more in its religious modality, whose temptation is always to reduce the Christian faith to a mere program of ethical-social character, whose contents may be reasonable enough to accept by the enlightened human being with an understanding of gospel in terms of universal salvation, as represented by the figure of Erasmus and his *Diatribe* - acts accord to Luther’s judgment in a completely inconsistent manner; that is, it accuses God of injustice when the lost are left in their state of condemnation that they well deserve, but omits to do so when he declares them righteous, as if the latter was something to which God was obliged:

When God saves the unworthy without deserving it, and still when he declares the ungodly righteous despite their many demerits: there the human heart does not accuse him of being unjust, it does not ask angrily why he wants something that is the greatest of injustices; Rather, since this attitude of God seems advantageous and worthy of approval, it declares it just and good. On the other hand, when God condemns those who deserve it, this is unjust and intolerable, there it protests angrily, murmurs and blasphemes, because this attitude seems to him to be disadvantageous to the human heart. \(^3\)

Regarding the accusation of determinism in the doctrine of the captive will of the Reformer, perhaps the most recurrent reproach, to put it in Kantian terms, is "of religion within the limits of

\(^2\) In his *Diatribe* Erasmus will reject both the position of Augustine and, especially, that of Luther. Referring to Augustine, he will say: " *Sed durior est istorum opinio, qui contendunt liberum arbitrium ad nihil valere nisi ad peccandum, solam gratiam in nobis operari bonus opum non per liberum arbitrium aut cum libero arbitrio, sed in libero arbitrio, ut nostra volutas hic nihil plus agat, quam agit cera, dum manu plastae fingitur in quamcumque visum est artific speciem.),* 74. Referring to that of Luther, who according to his judgment is the most radical and conducive to determinism, will point out: " *Durissima videtur ómnium sentetia, qui dicunt liberum arbitrium inane nomen ese nec quicquam valer aut valuisse vel in angelis vel in Adam vel in nobis nec ante gratiam nec post gratiam, sed deum tam mala quam bona operari in nobis, omnique, quae fiunt, ese merae necessitatis.*” 74.

\(^3\) *La voluntad determinada*, 235.
mere reason," or of the ethical and illustrious religious reason. In effect, if already the mere limitation of human liberty awakens an evident breach between certain forms of thought, both past and present, how much more so does the declaration of a captive will, incapable by virtue of its fallen condition to prepare, collaborate, accept or reject the saving grace. The latter, to be honest, could not be considered on the part of these modes of thinking more than as determinism with a practically Manichaean character. Nevertheless, and precisely in the face of the accusation of determinism, it is necessary to recall here the enlightening words of Ebeling in pointing out that no theologian or thinker has ever spoken with as much conviction about the freedom of the human being, and at the same time with such terrifying force of its enslaved will, as Luther has done. The first was in his On the Freedom of a Christian, to the point of affirming that of: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” The second, of course, was in his De servo arbitrio. However, both freedom and slavery, Ebeling continues, should not be understood as parallel or contradictory realities, without any internal relation between them, but rather as developing an existence in the human being in an inextricable way.

In relation to the issue of dualism, in so many ways close to the accusation of determinism, the insistence is that under the doctrine of captive will the human being would be found cut down at the very center of its existence by two opposing realities, and contending for his will - here the good, there the evil - Luther's first option, as it is known, had been to dispense in the Christian language from all allusion to free will considering it as both an empty term and the last bastion of the rebellion of the human being before God. However, Luther understood that to deprive the human being of any capacity for decision would be neither right nor feasible, then he points out how the possibility of a free will in the creature should be understood. Thus, it can be said that the human being has been given a certain freedom not in the higher order but in the lower. Of course, it is a freedom in which the free and sovereign will of God continues to carry out its purposes, but at the same time allowing the human being the ability to use, do or not to do in the temporal order and contingent. To the human being is granted a space of psychological freedom that confers on it the capacity to choose among several options, so that he can become a subject who is morally responsible for such choices. And yet, as we have said before, not even in this order can the human being claim a completely autonomous and total freedom, since his freedom

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223 Ibid., 216.
224 La voluntad determinada, 90.
of choice is never an absolute or neutral freedom, which may exist in vacuo, but always a freedom in context and conditioned by multiple factors, which they could be consigned гросо modo in the broad spectrum of what is usually called heritage and environment. Now, in the face of God or in regard to salvation or condemnation, human free will is captive and subject either to the will of God or to the devil. This latter, the will of the human being, Luther will say, is comparable to a horse mounted by two horsemen, now Satan now God, those who pull this one in opposite directions.

In this comparison lays the greater accusation of metaphysical dualism which the doctrine of the captive will of the Reformer would incur. Obviously, such an illustration - not entirely a happy one - leaves some space to think like this, even more so when it is taken out of the total context of the work. In response to that, this would say, in the first place – and surpassing what is strictly concerned with this imputation of dualism supposedly present in De servo arbitrio - how dangerous to the Christian faith is the inclusion of any kind of dualism of a creational character or primeval, as in turn, the obsession to see dualisms everywhere, to the point that it was not even possible to use this literary resource, widely used in the biblical language, without arousing suspicions of Manichaeism or a dichotomist. Secondly, and what is really decisive, is to attend to what Ebeling pointed out, namely, that such metaphysical dualism immediately disappears if it is considered that Satan in Luther's theology is nothing more than the mask of God's absence and that we are confronted here with the mystery of hiding and the revelation of the God that could never be domesticated.

It is a mystery, certainly, in relation to the perception of the fallen and limited human being, for God covers with his presence and with his will everything existing and created, even when his presence and his purposes vary substantially with regard to his hiding or his revelation. Moreover, Luther can affirm that God works in both good and evil, "since the will of all men is drawn by God willing and doing, whether the will be good or bad." The good is His explicit and definite will; and the evil that affects the human being as much as the evil that it produces, is the result of living in a fallen world and in antagonism toward God and following the inclinations of its splinted nature and its will subjected to sin. However, both in the one and the other, and in

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226 La voluntad determinada, 132.
a way that the human being is not able to understand God continues to carry out his eternal purposes.

Now, if the evil in man is carried out under the direction of the unfathomable sovereignty of God (which is not reduced just to a matter of foreknowledge, as Luther will insist that God’s foreknowledge of what will happen is the same as his will\textsuperscript{228}) we must ask ourselves: Is it not possible, therefore, to arrive at the logical and inevitable conclusion that the true author turns out to be neither more nor less than God himself, thus leaving the human being free of all moral responsibility before its failed and sinful acts? But, if we want to avoid such a disconcerting and conflicting conclusion, and if to the human being is granted all the responsibility for the evil of his acts, as a faculty of his own will and choice, then does this not confirm here the insistence of Erasmus with respect to the free will of the human being to take in both the bad and the good? It is, of course, an extremely complex and problematic question, and it is not surprising that in order to safeguard, as it were, the honor of God, most of the time the tendency to limit God's sovereignty has prevailed in order to avoid compromising both his goodness and holiness, even though if with it the doctrine of captive freedom has stepped back in the face of that of free will.

It is true that Luther, unlike Augustine - who, in order not to grant to the human will the freedom which Pelagius claimed, and at the same time to avoid any risk of making God the author of sin, understood evil simply as a deprivation of the good (\textit{privatio boni}) - would come to the point of seeing in evil the mask of the Deus absconditus who, despite being hidden, continues to carry out His eternal purposes. Here Luther does not avoid tension or conflict. He is aware that evil is not only the deprivation of good but part of the unfathomable and impenetrable action of God, as understood by the faith of ancient Israel (Jdg. 9, 23; 1 Sam 2, 16; 16, 4, Prov 16, 3; etc.); an act in the face of which the believer can only respond by receding before the mystery of God and consequently, in an attitude of adoration and not of inquisition. Indeed, it is not possible here to deny how scandalous this theodicy might be to anthropological, philosophical, and even religious thought of our day, and surely no twentieth-century Jewish thinker confronted with the excess of the radical evil of the Holocaust, just as the way we have seen in the preceding chapter, would concede something like that. However, for the Reformer, the evil that God uses in man and even in Satan, to carry out his unfathomable eternal purposes, has not been created by Him,

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Ibid.}, 217.
but rather God uses a will that is already splintered and inclined toward evil, from a Creature
turned completely inward toward itself (incurvatio in se ipsum) and towards its own interests,
which in its ignorance does not ask for God - at least for the only true God - and actually, by
virtue of its condition, is unable do anything but to continue in sin (Pr. 16, 4). In other words,
God does not push the human being towards sin; rather, He finds it in its state of brokenness and
slavery, and incorporates it into his inscrutable design which the creature is not capable of
exhausting or comprehending. Regarding that, we read the words of the prophet Isaiah:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the
heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than
your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Luther's solution to the problem of evil is not completely satisfactory, but, I question whether
any satisfactory solution could be formulated with respect to this matter. Would trying to arrive
at such a definite answer not constitute wanting to be nothing less than gods ourselves, wanting
to gain full knowledge of good and evil, such as the account of the fall of Genesis 3, 5 tells us?
Of course, it goes without saying that Luther's interest in this problem is not to establish a
philosophical discussion about the origin of evil as has been the case in theology and philosophy
since Leibniz to the present day; much less to attempt explaining why salvific grace reaches
some people and not others; or even more, why God does not open the eyes of the whole world
so that everyone can believe in the gospel and reach salvation. We have here, no doubt, the

229 "Then, since God does all things in all, He necessarily works also in Satan and the sinner. But He
works in them as they are; this is, are opponents of God and bad." Ibid., 206.
230 At this point, as has already been said, Luther recoils before the divine mystery, refusing to go beyond
what his argument, according to a purely rational logic, would require. His treatment of the doctrine of
predestination, moreover, does not possess nearly the systematic character attributed to it by Calvin,
preferring instead to emphasize the pastoral connotation of the subject. In this sense, it can be said that
Calvin's position with his double predestination (gemina praedestinatio) and supralapsarianism would be
precisely to bring this approach to its logical consequences. This is how we read in his Institutes: "By
predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he
wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained
to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of
these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death." (Inst. 3.21.5). In this sense,
according to Calvin, the decree of reprobation must be understood as just and as a manifestation of the
glory of God (cf. Inst. 3.21.7). For his part, the decree of predestination for Luther, as chilling and terrible
that it turns out to be, belongs, however, to the sphere of the Deus absconditus, whose act we are not
allowed to investigate and to whose essence we are not able to access. In consequence, the believer can
only turn to the God who has been pleased to reveal himself in the Crucified, and to affirm, therefore, that
he has been predestined for salvation in Christ through the grace alone that works by means of faith.
stone of scandal for reason, and specifically for religious reason; or if you will, returning to the
Kantian categories of thought as current in their day as today, for "religion within the limits of
mere reason." For this reason, Luther - aware of the scandal that such a decree provokes in
reason, as well as its limitations in trying to apprehend the mysteries of faith - can affirm that
although the latter strives with zeal to excuse God and defend his justice and goodness -and from
this we can testify from Leibniz's original philosophical theodicy to the popular version of Rabbi
Kushner- only faith and the Spirit can believe that God is good even if he would condemn all
men.\textsuperscript{231}

Even with all that, God could not be accused of being unjust, for, as Luther emphasizes, God
owes us nothing and has not received anything from us so as to be bound to us.\textsuperscript{232} Consequently,
for the Reformer there is no human criterion to judge God's election of just or unjust, since the
divine will - and not that of man - is the measure of all things.\textsuperscript{233} Moreover, the criteria of this
world are contrary to the criteria of God, for the world judges the works of God - according to
criteria that are merely human and inclined toward sin - as being lousy and condemnable. Even,
the best of them, like Christ and the gospel, are repulsive in the eyes of the human being, since
only the one who looks with the eyes of God and in whose heart lies his Spirit can come to
appreciate and understand them.\textsuperscript{234} In such a case, the most prudent thing is to let God be God,
for he knows how to fulfill his divine role much better than we do, and to continue waiting for
the day of the revelation of the Son of man in which what we believe today by faith, will be
finally visible to all.\textsuperscript{235} In the meantime, we must accept the wise advice of Melanchthon as of
Luther himself, to which we have already referred, namely, that we approach the mysteries of
God better by worshiping than by investigating.\textsuperscript{236}

Indeed, it is not of the inferior order but of the superior that Luther occupies himself in his
struggle against Erasmus; not of the order of nature but of the order of grace; not of the order of
the created but of the order of the Creator, and the participation that could fit the human will

\textsuperscript{231} \textit{La voluntad cautiva}, 204.
\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Op. cit.}, 218.
\textsuperscript{233} \textit{Op. cit.}, 211.
\textsuperscript{234} \textit{Ibid.}, 206.
\textsuperscript{235} \textit{Ibid.}, 236.
\textsuperscript{236} In Luther's own words: "This belongs to the secrets of the Majesty, to the realm where his judgments
are incomprehensible. And it's not up to us to investigate them, but to worship these mysteries." \textit{Ibid.},
211.
before this superior dimension. In other words, and as Ebeling has suggested, what ultimately concerns Luther is to demonstrate that it is not God who is obliged to carry out what the human being wishes, but that this one should fulfill the eternal purposes of God, whether he is aware of it or not. But, Luther goes a step further - a really decisive step - and puts in check the whole approach put forward by Erasmus, for he comes to discover what really underlies the insistence of the celebrated humanist in his *Diatribe*: that the will is capable of something, it can be directed, can do this and that, even prepare for and accept grace - or in its absence resist it - since the will is only weakened and sick and not essentially destroyed from the fall. If the free will that Erasmus defends is then capable of all that, then Luther will ask, what is the necessity of grace for salvation?

Or do you think that it is not a good thing to apply oneself to what is pertinent to eternal salvation – an action which your definition ascribes to free will - since there would be no need for grace if in free will there were so much good that it can apply itself to the good.  

For Erasmus, as we have seen, the spiritual dimension of the human being, in which all the cognitive and volitional faculties of the human being would be included - mind, reason and soul - constitutes the superior sphere which, though sin has weakened it through passions, low instincts, ignorance and selfishness, it has not destroyed or severed it completely. Precisely, everything that conspires against the development of the spirit in the human being - that is, his lower and abject sphere - is defined by Erasmus as flesh. In this way, the humanist does nothing more than reinforce and continue with the traditional anthropological dualism of Greek philosophy, so widespread, moreover, in the scholastics of his time as in the posterior centuries of Christian theology. Luther, on the contrary, ponders and understands the human being on the basis of biblical anthropology. In this sense, for the Reformer flesh is as presented by the Scriptures, (primarily Hebrew), as is the human being as a whole, without digression or dichotomy, both in his inferior and superior faculties, both in his natural and spiritual dimension. The individual and concrete human being, in addition to race and gender, brings with him not only his natural limitations or his lower passions, but also all that is exalted and good, as certain individuals in certain times of history have been able to masterfully demonstrate, arousing thus great admiration for their acts.

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237 Ibid., 218-219.
238 *La voluntad determinada*, 133.
These are the factors which show that the most excellent virtues of the gentiles, the best of philosophers, the most excellent of men, that all this can be called before men, honest and good, and so it will be by their appearance, but before God is irreversibly flesh and serves the kingdom of Satan, that is, it is impious and sacrilegious and from all evil point of view.\(^{239}\)

The human being, is seen and defined simply as flesh (\textit{sarx}); and that is not exclusively in reference to his physical or corporal existence on this earth, but also speaks of an attitude, a tendency, a drive that reveals a state of excision, finitude and continuous rebellion before God and which, therefore, accounts for his absolute inability to turn on his own impulse to God and to fulfill God’s fair, holy and good demands. But then, if such is the understanding of flesh in Luther, what should we understand in his \textit{De servo arbitrio} by “spirit?” In the same way, the human being seen as a whole being, as an integral unit, but reached by grace and, consequently, restored in his communion with God. Spirit is not enlivened by a gradual process of intellectual perfection and spiritual ascension in the way of Pseudo-Dionysian’s mystagogue, but as the act of dying to sin and resurrecting for new life in Christ.

Sufficient, then, these brief explanations with respect to the anthropological understanding of Erasmus, taken ultimately from the dualism of Greek philosophy - and not biblical understanding - and that which Luther specifically affirmed with regard to it, to return once again to the question which the latter would present to the first, and that we judge to be decisive in order to grasp what each one has understood by concepts such as sin, grace, redemption; and finally what we can gather from there in order to understand how the \textit{theologia crucis} of the professor of Wittenberg could speak to the problem of human suffering and of theodicy.

Indeed, if we go deeper into the logic of the dichotomous anthropology of Erasmus, which would practically render irrelevant the saving grace for a human will sufficiently qualified to accept or reject salvation, would this not have the inevitable consequence, as Luther will insist, that

\(^{239}\) \textit{La voluntad determinada}, 259. It must be remembered here that the discussion of Luther against Erasmus revolves around the superior order, that is, around the order of grace and salvation, and not of the inferior, in which the human being has freedom of choice and action and can respond to both in the order of morality, skills and intelligence with great dexterity. Therefore, it is not denied that God acts through his creative Spirit in humanity without God of all times, and for the benefit of this. And in this sense, Luther, see, op. cit., 286, does not completely reject the principle of the \textit{logos spermatikós} to which Erasmus appeals in his \textit{Diatribe}, that he would take from Justin Martyr. But he remains firm in his position that it is not possible to adduce such notable examples in a way that idealizes the position of the human being before God, since such actions, as useful, noble and admirable as they may be, are nothing more than external works that tell us nothing of man's heart, whose condition, without the regeneration of grace, is the darkening and continual opposition to God. See, \textit{op. cit.}, 285.
Christ's sacrifice and blood were actually so poor that they were only able to redeem the carnal or lower sphere of the human being, that is, his more abject and rude impulses, while his spiritual dimension, according to Erasmus himself, insofar as it constitutes the most noble and incorrupt in the human being, which really confers him his real value and the basis for the idea of his free will, does not then have need of Christ and his sacrificial work?\textsuperscript{240} And though the word redemption is still used, would it not be simply the liberation of all those low and ignoble impulses that weaken and obscure the superior sphere of man, so that Christ and his work would be nothing more than the catapult or impeller of those internal powers, which at the moment lie dormant in the human creature, and that once liberated would make of man an almost divine being, deified, beyond good and evil, God and the devil, the Üblemensch prophesied centuries later by Nietzsche?

If the noblest part of man is incorrupt, it does not need Christ as redeemer. If it has no need of Christ, it surpasses it in glory, since it, the noblest part, takes care of herself, while Christ cares only for the part of lesser value. Moreover, the kingdom of Satan will also be a nothingness, since it reigns only over the vilest part of man, whereas as to the noblest part, man governs himself more well to himself (\emph{a potiore vero parte per hominem potius regnetur}) Thus, the dogma that of the main part of man will lead to man being raised above Christ and the devil, that is, will become God of gods and Lord of lords.\textsuperscript{241}

4 Conclusion

We arrive, thus, at the end of our review of the doctrine of the captive will in Luther's thought, both in \textit{The Heidelberg Disputation} as precisely in his \textit{De servo arbitrio}, inasmuch as such an article on the bondage of the will is demonstrated to be fundamental for a correct understanding of the treatise on the theology of the cross. In accordance with the previous statement, therefore, we only need to speak about how such a condition of slavery that weighs on the will of the human being opens the way when we come to the moment of configuring a more complete and definitive response to the problem of human suffering from the treatise on the \textit{theologia crucis} of the Reformer. Nevertheless, before entering directly into this matter, it is expedient to make two important clarifications about the doctrine of captive will: The first of these clarifications is that the doctrine of the free will no longer has to compete – as in the past - with the human will in its

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Op. cit.}, 259.
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Ibid.}, 260.
Pelagian, Arminian, or humanist form, but with an idea of divinity which in reality is nothing more than the expression of the most intimate longings and desires of the human being, as Barth has said, and cultural projection, nothing else of a society that since long ago already constructs its gods with the criterion of supermarket purchases, that is, picking and choosing products from here and there that serve for the creation of a divinity that suits them.

In these circumstances, there is no doubt that a God who, through his written revelation and the correct exposition and preaching of the church, tells this human being who creates his own gods and forges his own destiny; who is found to be in both his own and inherited sin, under judgment and condemnation; and who is therefore separated from the true knowledge of God; that his will is not free as he imagines, but captive to this same sin, which neither builds nor collaborates in its own salvation, since that is the prerogative only of the grace of the sovereign God, the only one who possesses a completely free will; there is no doubt, we would say, that a God who posits all of this and much more to the human being, ceases immediately to be a part of all the pleasant and functional divinities that compose his pantheon, to become an abhorrent, patriarchal, tyrannical God who must by all possible means be overcome, gagged, even eliminated, for the sake of the "Christian church."

The second clarification that we must realize is that in the light of the doctrine of the captive will, the treatise of *theologia crucis* - understood in its correct sense and according to its original formulation - evidences with absolute clarity - despite the fact that a great part of the current theology presents it in this way- that it cannot be reduced to a postulate of general love for the world that leads without further ado to universal salvation. In other words, as Bonhoeffer would say, the love of God and the love of the world are not equivalent. One can love the world without needing to love God, but everyone who loves God must love humanity. On the contrary, in the light of this doctrine, the first thing the treatise of *theologia crucis* reminds us, as Forde masterfully has endeavored to emphasize, is that the cross of the Crucified constitutes primarily

242 "It is theological error of the first magnitude to exploit the doctrine of Christ the Mediator so as to justify direct relationships with the things of this world. It is sometimes argued that if Christ is the Mediator he has borne all the sin which underlies our direct relationships with the world and that he has justified us in them. Jesus has reconciled us to God; we can then, it is supposed, return to the world and enjoy our direct relation with it with a good conscience -although that world is the very world which crucified Christ! This is to equate the love of God with the love of the world. The breach with the things of the world is now branded as a legalistic misinterpretation of the grace of God, the purpose of which, we fondly suppose, is to spare us the necessity of this very breach." *Op. cit.*, 97.
the great judgment of God against the sin, rebellion, and self-divination of this world, and a statement that God is sovereign to do whatever pleases him with his own, without anyone being able to accuse him of being capricious or unjust; that is, to leave the human race in the state of condemnation which its sin and rebellion certainly deserves or, from that very state and by an act of sovereign grace, to save whomever he pleases by means of the preaching of the scandal and the madness of the cross. To the extent that the foregoing is assumed, one can well conclude - without fear of distorting the treatise on the theology of the cross into mere maudlin speech or the almost magical emblem for justification of any political, social, cultural or whatever kind claim - that we find here not only the trial against sin, rebellion and self-divination of the world, but, at the same time, the uncontainable overflow of God's costly grace, that, of course, has cost the life of his own Son. Behold, indeed, the dialectic consubstantial to the theology of the cross.

In light, therefore, of the respective clarifications, we are now in a better position to be able to affirm that the doctrine of the captive will in Luther, and in the total framework of his treatise on the theology of the cross, is more a response to Christian suffering than to human suffering in a purely general sense. Even more, we can argue, as we shall clarify in the two paragraphs that remain, that the same theologia crucis of the Reformer, insofar as its contents can only be apprehended by the grace alone that operates only through faith, fundamentally respond to Christian suffering and only derivatively to the suffering of the world that does not know God. The latter, as has already been said, declares to the human being by means of the exposition of the law that a large part of his suffering is the inevitable consequence of having rebelled against the original plan of life established by God, and instead to have chosen his own ways of redemption and affirmation, causing, due to such stubbornness and rebellion, the disorder of all the orders of creation. Likewise, it manifests to him, and through the negative face of the doctrine of the captive will, that he himself is responsible for continuing and deepening such suffering, since his will which is captive and submitted to sin can do nothing more than continue to sin and, consequently, continue to reject the only one who can ever destroy death forever and wipe away every tear from our eyes (Isa. 24, 8).

Having said that, what then can we extract from the positive side of the doctrine of the captive will in relation to the believer and especially to the suffering that afflicts him? First and foremost, and this is something that Luther has openly emphasized in his De servo arbitrio, such doctrine gives the believer the full assurance of his election and salvation. This is a certainty that in the
midst of the afflictions, anguishes, losses and sufferings of every day, even in the midst of that excess of unnecessary evil that suddenly and without warning pounces on life, reminds the believer, as a firm and secure anchor for a small vessel in a terrible storm, that his salvation is assured, that no one can take it from him, even if all forces of hell be loosed against him, for it rests in the eternal decree of God. In other words, and in the words of Luther, it confers on him in the midst of all these circumstances of pain and tribulation the greatest consolation, that the God who does not lie has secured forever his salvation:

For this is the only and supreme consolation of Christians in all their adversities: to know that God does not lie, but does everything immutable, and that no one and nothing can resist or change or impede his will.243

Likewise, it declares to him that this salvation does not depend on the quantity of his works or the excellence of them, much less is it subject to his perfect obedience, because if this were the case his salvation could not be assured for even a single minute, in view of the human weakness and the fallen condition that weighs on him. In consequence, such certainty of his salvation cannot lead the believer other than to the deepest humility and gratitude, because he has nothing to boast or brag about. Indeed, nothing has been meritorious or worthy in him that God has previously considered to decide to extend him his redemptive grace. Moreover, his propensity has been the constant rebellion and disobedience to God's plan of life, under the impulse of a subdued and enslaved will to sin and, consequently, has shared the same destiny that every human being, that is, to be destitute of the glory of God (Ro. 3, 23).

243 *La voluntad determinada*, 62-63.
Chapter 4
The Deus Absconditus in the Framework of Theologia Crucis

1 Preliminary aspects

In the doctrine of the Deus absconditus - the hidden or concealed God - we find one of the most profound passages of Luther's theology, and, at the same time (along with the doctrine De servo arbitrio) with one of the fundamental keys for the correct understanding of the treatise on the theology of the cross. The idea of the hidden God finds its origin in the book of the prophet Isaiah, in 45:15, in which it expressly refers to God this way: “Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself”. In his commentary on this passage, Luther points to the prophet's astonishment about the strangeness of how God treats his own people. It is a divine act that goes beyond reason, which could never be scrutinized or reached, because his plans are unfathomable and incomprehensible for the human being. Consequently, it must be recognized that with the idea of Deus absconditus we are not faced with a new or capricious idea in the theological thought of the Reformer, or of a formulation simply created ad hoc on the occasion of the dispute with Erasmus, but of an affirmation that, on the basis of the passage already quoted from Isaiah - to which we must further add the story of Joseph from Genesis, and the book of Job - has accompanied Luther from the very beginning of his theological musings. This does not mean that Luther’s understanding about the Deus absconditus does not demonstrate a clear progression and even tension in the chronology of the writings in which it appears clearly and sharply contained, that is, Heidelberg's Disputation and, of course, De servo arbitrio.

Precisely, such progression or tension, if you will, has led some specialists to question whether the later Luther had remained faithful to the first and, therefore, if the later had not definitively renounced the concept of Deus absconditus. Certainly, it is about a discussion to which we could not give detailed attention here, but that we believe has already been clarified by von Loewenich in his great work on the theology of the cross, in terms of whether such a

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245 Thus, for example, already in his Lectures on Romans (1515) 4: 17, in Luther’s Works, Vol. 25., ed. H. C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 257, Luther could distinguish between the Deus intrinsece and the Deus extrinsece.
development of the concept is to be admitted, including its evident digressions; if it has not been abandoned by the old Luther, but rather approached from different angles. In in relation to the doctrine of the hidden God, we might agree with von Loewenich that the later Luther has remained faithful to the first.

2 The Heidelberg Disputation

In *The Heidelberg Disputation* the concept of *Deus absconditus* appears in close relation with the treatise on the theology of the cross: The hidden God is none other but the Crucified, and the Crucified reveals himself as God only through his opposites and by means of faith. It follows explicitly from the foregoing that anyone who strives to apprehend the invisible things of God by means of the works of creation - excluding the only authorized access, the crucified Christ - cannot properly be called a theologian, but rather one who calls evil good and good evil (Thesis 21). Regarding to the first, we read in Thesis 19:

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.247

In effect, the Gentiles as much as the theologian of glory - and this, despite appearing to be antithesis to one another - constitute, nevertheless, highlighted examples of the effort of the fallen creature to accede to the knowledge of God, but by means of the works of creation or, in its absence, of reason. What follows is, therefore, inexorably, the construction of a path from these sources - creation and reason - that allows access to the knowledge of God, and which can only conclude with the discovery of the majestic attributes of that *Deus gloriosus* that already *a priori* has been established with regards to how to be and act, as if between the divine prefiguration forged by human reason and God there was complete continuity. Now, this analogical prolongation, as has been pointed out by McGrath,248 remained particularly in Christian theology around the concept of *iustitia hominem* and *iustitia Dei*, succeeding in surviving even - albeit ostensibly weakening of its epistemological presuppositions - in the radical theology of Ockham, and even among theologians of *via moderna*. In this respect, according to McGrath, the *theologia crucis* would represent a radical programmatic critique to the analogical nature of theological language, as well as the concept of *absconditas sub

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contrario, an element that is consubstantial to this treatise and only comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to dialectical theology of the twentieth century.

By virtue of that, such a course, forged from reason and contemplation of the visible works of God, can only lead to the apotheosis of the theology of glory, inasmuch as this *Deus gloriösus* ends up always being the glorification of the sublime, the majestic, and in general all that can fit under the idea of the "divine" according to the judgment of human reason. Said in a more direct way, it ends up confusing the essence of God with the essence of the human being and, therefore, divinizing the creation and the human being. It ends, ultimately, as Luther will insist in Thesis 20 of the *Disputation*, "calling evil good and good, evil." That is, calling God what is not God, and refusing to call God what is really God, that is, the Crucified Christ. Hence such a natural knowledge of God through reason is not simply an erroneous adiaphoron, a nebulous but necessary anteroom for the true knowledge of God, but, as Ebeling\(^{249}\) will say, a course whose inevitable consequence cannot be more than atheism, inasmuch as it denies and despises the true God, who only wants to be known in the crucified and rejected Christ. Thus, and said in Luther's terminology, God's *opus alienum* constitutes the destruction of all human presuppositions about what God is or should be, the elimination of all our idols to which we give the title of divine, though they have pious and sublime names and attributes, meanwhile his *opus proprium*, the restoration of what is God, the Christ hanging on a tree and abandoned.\(^{250}\)

Consequently, the hiding of God in the Crucified one constitutes the greatest offense and grievance that there might be to the wisdom and reason of this world, as an effort of the fallen creature from its own resources to access the knowledge of God, since not only does it tell the human wisdom and reason of which the living and true God cannot dispose\(^{251}\) - as if it were one more piece of data of this world, something that can objectify, to calculate, to measure, to quantify - but in turn he destroys them in their very center, exposing all their fallacy and foolishness (1 Cor 3:19), and denouncing at the same time the fallen and futile origin of their


\(^{250}\) See, A. E. McGrath, *op. cit.*, 156.

\(^{251}\) With regard to this specific attempt of the fallen creature to apprehend the invisible things of God, from the visible things and its human reason, one could reverse the argument of Luther used in the colloquium of Marburg against Zwingli and Oecolampadius, *finitum est capax infiniti*, to say, *finitum non est capax infiniti*. 
efforts (Jas 3, 15). It is a question on the part of the creature of an uncontainable, inextinguishable, insatiable effort to come to know, to dominate, to control, to possess\textsuperscript{252} that dimension of the divine mystery that, as Forde\textsuperscript{253} recalls, not even to Moses was granted, since no human being can be able to contemplate the unfathomable and inscrutable \textit{Deus absconditus} and remain standing, allowing him instead to see only the back of God (Ex. 33, 18ff). Now, according to Forde, the back of God (\textit{posteriora Dei}), in Luther's thought, would be occupied by the sufferings of the rejected and crucified Jesus on the cross, the only God we can see and to whom we must pay attention.\textsuperscript{254}

In radical contrast to the above, the \textit{Disputation} will insist that the only possible and true knowledge of God occurs only when God himself in sovereign determination decides to take away the veil that has kept him concealed, and this he has done in the Crucified and his cross. In this sense, it may well be concluded, according to the \textit{Disputation}, that the doctrine of the hidden God is also a theology of revelation, but under the paradoxical and dialectical scope with which Luther always understood revelation, that is, \textit{sub contraria specie}. Such a paradoxical and dialectical character of revelation - God concealed in the sufferings and humiliation of the Christ rejected and nailed to a cross, and who also calls each believer to follow him taking his own cross, to share the same fate of the Crucified - represents without a doubt the greatest disappointment and stumbling block of scandal for the theologian of glory that we all carry inside in an inveterate form after the fall, and who only wants to see God in the majesty of his works and in all that which does not put him at risk or what does not cause discomfort to the old self who keeps alive it and nourishes it. We talk of that characterization that Luther defined as \textit{Theologus gloriae}, as of that indelible mark that weighs on the \textit{homo religiosus} after the fall, and of which not even the believer, as a participant also of that condition, can be completely

\textsuperscript{252} Forde even goes so far as to compare the desire of the theologian of glory for this knowledge to the addictive impulse of the alcoholic, the drug addict, or the greedy one who is never satisfied, who always wants more and more. Thus, according to Forde, the theology of glory as the religious addiction of the old Adam by access to knowledge of God or even to the concealed form of him, independent of revelation, cannot only be considered in terms of an abstract doctrine, but rather as an active tendency in the human being under sin; not a characteristic, but his condition; not an option but his constant temptation. Consequently, it is an addiction that, likewise to all addicts, is not resolved with optimistic speeches or self-help messages, but with the recognition of such condition; and, secondly, with appropriate treatment and intervention, in this case, the exposition of the law and the gospel included in the treatise of the cross. \textit{Op. cit.}, 94s.

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{Op. cit.}, 78.

\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Ibid.}, 78.
detached. It is an impulse that constantly threatens to emerge, and that tempts him to seek and see God independently of faith, sufferings and the cross, that is, through his senses and reason. Thus, it was not enough for Philip to know and see God through Jesus, so that he asks this one to show the Father directly for him to believe (Jn. 14, 8-10); Peter could not accept that the destiny of Jesus was the way of suffering, rejection and death on the cross (Mk. 8, 31-33 and parallel texts).

Now, the inscrutable God - unfathomable and numinous otherness in relation to his creation - in order not to leave the human being in complete ignorance and darkness regarding his condemnation and regarding the only way and mediator who can grant him forgiveness, salvation and restore him to his communion, has decided by an act of his pure and sovereign grace to draw back the veil of his inaccessibility and reveal himself to humanity. Such a revelation has been carried out in the first place through the word, as an act of self-limitation on the part of God himself to this written record, which directs all of it to the person and work of Christ, this being the thread that crisscrosses from beginning to end. And yet, this God who has revealed himself in the word and in the Crucified, remains at the same time the God concealed there, perceptible only through the eyes of faith, because there, on the cross, where the world sees nothing but suffering, defeat, misery, shame, stupidity, poverty, death, scandal and madness, in other words, denial of the divine, faith can see hope, salvation, eternal life, and restoration to communion with God. Thus, as Forde notes, commenting on the thesis of the Disputation: "Suffering and the cross becomes the key to the comprehension of one who deserves the title of theologian."

But if the one who properly deserves to be called theologian, that is, the theologian of the cross, knows that he can only see God concealed in the sufferings and cross of the Crucified and Rejected, then the theologian of glory, for his part, resists any idea of recognizing him and finding him there. Of course, he can still continue to use concepts such as "theology of the cross," "concealed God," etc., but their meaning appears distorted, insofar as they have been deprived of their essential contents in order to romanticize them, indoctrinate them, politicize them, or convert them into instruments for protest and denunciation, ceasing to be that "word of the cross" which always inflicts suffering, either to the old self who still exists in the believer (Jn.

6, 60), or to this very one for opposing the theology of glory and preaching the crucified Christ (Gal. 5, 11; 1 Cor. 1, 22-23), or, for the simple fact that the word of the cross is always a call to deny oneself to take up one's own cross and follow after the Crucified one (Mk. 8, 38). Having said all this, one must then ask whether in fact suffering must always and under all circumstances be rejected and demonized, and consequently sentence Luther's statement that God is concealed in the sufferings of the rejected and crucified Christ, and that only the one who sees him there may properly be called a theologian of the cross, as a true ode to masochism and to the denial of life.

Regarding this disturbing question, Forde\textsuperscript{256} - and with fully justified reason - has drawn attention to the fact that in theology as in the philosophy of today one tends quickly to include suffering, without nuances and precision, within the general category of what is understood as evil. Obviously, and beyond the considerations of theology and philosophy regarding suffering as a category of evil, we live in an age in which not only is suffering avoided at all costs, the pursuit of pleasure, comfort, and safety is exacerbated by all possible means. Under this marked cultural trend today, it is not very difficult to see that any experience linked to suffering, even if it is only that which affects our space of comfort and personal esteem, is immediately seen as something that must be assigned to our idea of bad or of evil. For this reason Forde insists that although no one could object that evil is perhaps the greatest source of suffering, as we have broadly developed in the first chapter, not all suffering is always a direct consequence of evil.

In a purely human sense, for example, love can cause suffering - likewise honor, correction, etc. - and such suffering cannot be directly attributed to evil. But also, and speaking specifically of the divine work, contact with the law causes suffering, insofar as it destroys our human pride and self-sufficiency, and leads us to the recognition of our sin and our spiritual bankruptcy (Rom 3, 20; 7, 7). The correction and discipline of God also causes suffering which at times could be intolerable, as long as the believer's heart resists it (Ps. 94, 12; 119, 75; Heb. 12, 6-11). However, no believer could claim that such suffering is a product of evil or something that should be catalogued within the idea of evil. Rather, it is a suffering inflicted by God to lead to repentance for salvation; it is to avoid precisely that the believer is tempted to take the shortcuts of life and thus go astray from the plans of God. Without the experience of that suffering that God himself

\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 84.
inflicts, in its various manners and manifestations, the human being would have no need of God or would continue to affirm the divinity that underlies the theology of glory, and call God what is not God, and not call God what God really is. In conclusion, such suffering inflicted by God is sadness, pain, agony, and the dark night, but for life and salvation, not for bad or evil (2 Cor 7, 10).

Precisely, this would be the suffering, according to Forde, that Luther would have in mind when posing it as that which would identify, along with the cross, of course, the one who properly deserves to be called a theologian or, even more, a theologian of the cross. The way the Reformer uses it here, the idea of a “theologian of the cross,” far from alluding to a theologian in the technical and professional sense of the word, refers to every believer who is capable of seeing God hidden in suffering and in the cross and of recognizing suffering as the result of God’s work in the sinner. Of course, Luther does not ignore the physical dimension of pain, which he himself experienced throughout his all life by means of multiple ailments and diseases, and which in the last years undermined his health, eventually leading to a premature death; or the moral and psychological suffering caused mainly by the tragedy of the insurrection of the peasants, and that would leave an indelible mark on his person until the end of his days; or knowing what it means to carry a life full of risks and uncertainties in his own condition of heretic.

And, yet, as concrete and devastating as such sufferings might be, for Luther they are not comparable to the agony provoked by the work of God in the sinner by means of the law. That is, suffering as a result of the direct attack on the old self, his stubborn desire to seek his own glory and not that of God; of his inveterate tendency to establish his own ways of affirmation, despising God's way of life. It is, in a nutshell, the suffering that leads to the death of the sinner, since it is through the torment of the cross, death and hell that true theology and the knowledge of God come about. Certainly, for much of today's Christianity - especially that of the most developed and affluent societies, where the worldview of postmodernity has almost unreservedly been incorporated - such an understanding of suffering because of the law could result in something completely unknown, irrelevant, antiquated, a spiritualizing and alienating abstraction that can only lead to distorting the focus on concrete and real suffering - almost always

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257 Ibid., 86ff, and especially, note 17, in which various passages are presented in the writings of the Reformer to support the motion that this would be primarily the meaning that would underlie under the term suffering.

258 Quoted from A. E. McGrath, op. cit., 152.
understood in structural terms or claims of certain patterns or references cultural- in addition to a completely insane exercise that can only encourage guilt and atrophy the development of people's self-esteem and spirituality; something, moreover, typical of fundamentalists, charismatics and the so-called Illumined; something, finally, that must be directly associated with our postmodern or present idea of evil, of bad.

In this sense, Forde\textsuperscript{259} concludes that the identification of suffering with "evil" would lead to the establishment of a kind of theodicy that, based on the theology of glory, would simply seek to absolve the "good" God - quick to reward all our "good" works - of any charge of causing suffering and, ultimately, of being associated with evil. Such a theodicy posed in an explicit form or between lines, purposely or in spite of, can be undertaken, sustains Forde,\textsuperscript{260} from the open accusation that the cross of Christ has served in Christianity for the glorification of suffering, such as it has been the constant emplacement between a good part of feminist theology or, in its absence, of exacerbating the idea of God's vulnerability, so that it is no longer God who is hidden in the sufferings of Christ, but suffering for love of the suffering itself. It would be perfectly fulfilled here, therefore, the saying brought out by Forde himself, namely: "Misery loves company."\textsuperscript{261}

But, is this petrified God the God of the Bible? The answer certainly does not require explanation. Again, what is sought here, despite all good intentions - as the everlasting imprint of \emph{theologia gloriae} - is the domestication of God, to make him docile and harmless, "good," according to of human wisdom. For the same reason, would this representation of God according to the theology of glory and its respective theodicy - incapable of understanding that God is hidden in the sufferings of the rejected and crucified Christ, and that he himself also can inflict suffering - not be one of the most decisive reasons why people no longer believe in the God of Christianity? Would this not be the reason, precisely, why many churches today have become nothing more than social clubs, places only for political-partisan indoctrination, spaces for the sole exposition of motivational speeches, self-help, or reinforcement of post-modern cultural

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid., 85s.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 86.
patterns, but in spite of all that, with no greater impact from the exposition of the gospel and the costly grace of God for society and of course for their own parishioners?

We can conclude, therefore, that the understanding of the *Deus absconditus* in the presentation of the *Disputation*, has to do with that God who is hidden in his sufferings and humiliation, precisely there where no one could descry even a pale glimpse of divine revelation. In this sense, and as already mentioned, the hidden God here appears intimately bound and dependent to the treatise on the theology of the cross, and expressed in a clearly paradoxical and dialectical form: God has concealed himself in the sufferings and humiliation of the crucified Christ, but at the same time in that same concealment he becomes visible solely through faith. The concealment of God, precisely there in the Crucified and his cross, would be then the *opus alienum* of God who works, *sub contrario*, for the sake of his own *opus proprium* and for the sake of the human being. For this reason, it is around the cross of the Crucified, as has been expressed by McGrath, where the dialectic between the *opus alienum* and the *opus proprium* of God finds its highest point; a dialectic that can only be solved through faith, to the point that one might well conclude that the most precise equivalent of the *Crux sola* is the *sola fide*, insofar as only faith can discover the God hidden in that cross and appropriating, consequently, of the redemptive grace that flows from there; a dialectic, moreover, that reveals the complete futility of human endeavors to gain access to the knowledge of God, and which by the same reason can only lead the unbeliever or he who believes that the reality of God must coincide with his mental or cultural projections of what he imagines must be the divinity, to confuse in a fatal way the *opus alienum Dei* with the *opus proprium Dei*, the *Deus absconditus* with the *Deus revelatus*. In this way, as Luther will insist, reason, experience, and senses can only remain in open contradiction and enmity with faith, for it alone can see God present and acting under his opposite forms. In the precise words of McGrath:

> In the cross of Christ, this tension reaches breaking point, and a near-permanent divorce between the spheres of faith and reason results. Reason is scandalized by the cross; faith embraces it with joy.  

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263 McGrath, *ibid.*, 174, highlights this double function of faith within *theologia crucis*, namely, a cognitive function that allows the correct understanding of the meaning of the cross and another existential one that makes possible the apprehension of such meaning in the life of the believer.

It is concretely within the framework of this dialectical and paradoxical thought used by the Reformer, that a fundamental idea is incorporated not only for the understanding of Deus absconditus in The Heidelberg Disputation, but likewise for the whole treatise on the theology of the cross, that is to say; the concept of the sub contrario: The works of God are neither attractive nor much less self-evident to the human being, but quite the opposite. They appear before this one as deformed and despised. Yet God always works, as has already been said, sub contrario, that is, under his opposite forms. In consequence, it is there, on the cross, as the climax of this dynamic of operating of God, sub contrario, wherein God has decided to tear away the veil that covers him and to reveal himself, precisely for the sake of that revelation, so as to safeguard both the majesty of his glory, before which no human being could stand, as, at the same time, generating the space for faith: God hides himself, yes, but in order to be sought and to be found by means of faith. Already in a sermon preached in February 1517, Luther could emphasize the central idea that would be developed later in the Disputation: “Man hides his own things, in order to conceal them; God hides his own things, in order to reveal them.”265 But both the act of revelation as that of appropriation by faith, continue to be for Luther exclusive prerogative of God, unlike the medieval mystic of the cross for which such knowledge of the revelation of God on the part of the human being, it derives, in the last instance, from the metaphysical contemplation of that same cross.

3 De servo arbitrio

In relation to De servo arbitrio, the concept of the hidden God evidences a notorious evolution with respect to what has already been said about it in the Disputation, an evolution that, despite its tension, conserves as a guiding thread the resource of faith. There, in the Disputation, we find the God whose revelation can only be possible by means of his concealment; here, in De servo arbitrio, we find the God who even in his revelation remains inscrutable and hidden with regard to his essence, acting, and will for the human being. Certainly, in both cases, it is not reason but faith that can see the revealed God in his concealment, and believe that that God who hides and seems so indescribable and distant remains the revealed. In strict reference to the doctrine of Deus absconditus in De servo arbitrio it is worth pointing out that we do not deal with one more attribute of divinity, in the sense of how we can affirm that God is love, is omnipotent or is kind,

265 Quoted from A. E. McGrath, ibid., 167.
and, likewise, he is hidden, as if with that we wished simply to describe the characteristic of his invisibility.

Rather, we are dealing here with an activity of God, with an action, in which God is not the object of this concealment but the active subject. It is about that God who is not proclaimed or preached, whose act transcends his revealed word (*Deus revelatus*), whose will and purposes, therefore, remain forbidden to the human being, as well as his glory and majesty; that is, we deal here with his divine essence. Such an understanding of the hidden God in Luther derives from statements such as those it must distinguish between the word of God (*verbum Dei*) and the God of the word (*Deus verbi*) or God in himself (*Deus ipse*), that God himself, as hidden God, is not limited to his word²⁶⁶ nor is it the material equivalent of it,²⁶⁷ and may even be in tension with it,

²⁶⁶ "For in his act as a hidden God, he did not limit himself by his word, but reserved full liberty over all things." *La voluntad determinada*, 165.

²⁶⁷ Here Luther, at least as a general principle, clearly distances himself from biblical literalism, *ad pedem litterae*, which would assume the later evangelical fundamentalism and its mechanistic, decontextualized and uncritical use of the Scriptures to the point of transforming it, as is often said, into a "Pope of paper." In this sense, as Oberman has stated, *op. cit.*, 224, the principle of *sola scriptura* in Luther, and unlike later fundamentalist biblicism, was never understood as a maxim that should be raised in isolation from the rest of the theological connotations that would make the theology of the Reformation (*sola gratia*, *sola fide*), even though these have found their justification precisely in that one. Calvin, in his Institutes 1, 9, 3, warns against the temptation to establish the certainty of the faith on the sole confirmation of the written record, and will speak in turn of the *testimonium internum* of the Holy Spirit, as the true instrument of convalidation for the believer of the inspiration of those Scriptures. However, in many of his Bible readings, Luther would not always be able to remain faithful to this principle, as would be evident in the case of his already famous interpretation of the Lord's Supper. For the same reason, it could not be ignored that the doctrine of verbal inspiration results in an almost necessary derivative of Luther's own insistence that Scripture is the principle upon which theology must take all its claims. Nevertheless, it is evident that the treatment to which orthodoxy submitted this principle suffered from an extreme radicalization that surpassed every criterion of necessity. In this sense, as has been noted by J. Dillenberger and C. Welch, *Protestant Christianity. Interpreted Through its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 230, the dogmatic structure to which fundamentalism clung in relation to the interpretation of the Scriptures, was not that of the great tradition of the ancient church, nor the of the reformers themselves, but precisely those expressions of Protestant scholasticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in their Calvinist form basically, and Lutheran tangentially. The names that will be important, moreover, for the development of the doctrine of verbal inspiration in Protestant orthodoxy, are Francis Turretin for the Reformed tradition, and Hollaz for the Lutheran, the latter going as far as to sustain that the points of vocalization of the Masoretic text of the old testament, which did not reach its final fixation until the ninth and tenth centuries AD, retained the same authority and antiquity as the consonants. However, already within this same orthodoxy, other voices such as the Lutheran theologian J. A. Quenstedt or that of his Calvinist namesake Scholder, will also begin to speak of the accommodation of the Holy Spirit to each biblical author and his particular epoch. See, for this, W. Pannenberg, “The Development of Problem So-called Prolegomena to Dogmatics”, in *Systematic Theology I* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991); and in special, R. D. Preus, “The Plenary Inspiration of Scripture”, in *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: CPH, 1970), 278ss.
or that neither such a word has as purpose to discover the veil of the very essence of God nor to provide a complete detail of his plan for the history of the world, all of which will be of continuing reference in *De servo arbitrio*.

But just as there is a risk that the doctrine of *theologia crucis*, extirpated from its original and historical formulation and presented as nothing more than a postulate of love or general denunciation, might come to make all manner of claims and acclamations that are in no way consistent with its respective theological contents, so also there is no less danger that the doctrine of the hidden God, isolated from the set of theological connotations that have proven essential in the thought of the Reformer, and especially in relation to the theology of the Cross, might tend to be the ideal subterfuge to give rise to a series of metaphysical and rational speculations, with the result of undermining God's definitive word in Christ and the uniqueness of his revelation. Luther, aware of this risk, will warn in his *Lectures on Genesis*\(^{268}\) that this eagerness of the human being to try to reach the knowledge of God through natural speculation, loses sight of the fact that Moses himself was not allowed to see the face of God directly, in order that he might not perish in his presence, but only his back, taking refuge in a rock while God walked by in glory (Ex. 33, 18ff).

In view of that, God has revealed himself in an indirect way so that the human being can relate to him, and this was made possible by taking on his word and becoming flesh, being that word and that God incarnate and that crucified one the only revelation to which we must pay attention and, at the same time, where we can take shelter and to which we may cling in any trial or affliction. In the word - whose full content is Christ- and in the sacraments, the hidden God becomes visible to the believer by means of faith. Therefore, to seek God outside of Jesus, Luther will say in his *Lectures on the Psalms*, is simply to look for the very devil (*Extra Iesum quaerere deum est diabolus*),\(^{269}\) so that every attempt to access knowledge and relationship with God beyond Christ and his word, despite all of the stunning or attractive that other means could appear to enlightened reason or popular religious piety, is nothing more than the theology of the glory, or

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\(^{268}\) “Moses, too, asked God to show him His face; but the Lord replies: ‘You shall see My back, but you will not be able to see My face’ (cf. Ex 33: 23). For this inquisitiveness is original sin itself, by which we are impelled to strive for a way to God through natural speculation.” *Lecture on Genesis. Chapters 26-30, 26: 9*, in *Luther’s Works, Vol. 5.*, eds. J. Pelikan and W. A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 44.

\(^{269}\) Quoted from, O. Bayer, *op. cit.*, 205.
said more forcefully, as Luther will again express in a passage from his Lectures on Genesis, a completely diabolical cogitation:

With regard to God, insofar as He has not been revealed, there is no faith, no knowledge, and no understanding. And here one must hold to the statement that what is above us is none of our concern. For thoughts of this kind, which investigate something more sublime above or outside the revelation of God, are altogether devilish.\[270\]

In virtue of the above, Luther continues, it is clearly concluded that God has not wished - much less ordained – to be treated by means of speculations concerning his essence, will or activity, which remain absolutely veiled for the human being, because they belong to the unfathomable mystery of God, whose direct exposure to the creature would cause immediate extermination, for the hidden God is a consuming fire and his works are terrifying. Furthermore, speculation about the essence or hidden activity of God contradicts faith and simple obedience with respect to what God has already revealed to us, so that it could be said, as von Loewenich has pointed out, that such a "naked God" (Deus nudus), not clothed of his word and made flesh, is nothing more than the "god of philosophers;"\[271\] and not only of philosophers, but of any individual or system of thought that, pretending to accede to the divine knowledge, considers that the revelation given by God is either not enough or is not the only revelation. Therefore, they suppose there must be something more about the divine, some knowledge that we have been denied, something that is hidden, something which we may access by means of reason, speculation, activism, commitment, spirituality; in other words, by human endeavor.

On the other hand, we must in no way suppose any underhanded intention on the part of Luther to introduce a sort of di-theism or opposing divinities into the doctrine of the hidden God, an accusation which Erasmus himself addressed in his Diatribe, and that Luther refuted, arguing that the great humanist has not been able to observe the slightest difference between the hidden God and the revealed God,\[272\] who, however, are the same and only God. Quite the reverse, we must emphasize that the concept of the Deus absconditus is consubstantial with that of the Deus revelatus, establishing within itself a connection between both that results, as in almost all of

\[270\] Op. cit., 44.
\[272\] “The Diatribe, however, in its ignorance deceives itself by not making any distinction between the preached God and the hidden God, that is, between the word of God and God himself.” La voluntad determinada, 165.
Luther’s theology, nonlinear and rational but paradoxical and dialectical. In other words, God’s revelation and his concealment, as von Loewenich\(^{273}\) has put it, are two inseparable aspects of one and the same divine act. Taking into account, therefore, the concept of the *Deus absconditus* in this perspective, the accusation of reason with respect to finding here nothing more than a “fatal dualism”\(^{274}\) can only be confronted and overcome by a faith that is capable of going from God revealed to the hidden God, and vice versa, knowing well that there are not two Gods facing one another, but one and the same God who has revealed of himself only what the human being needs and can know of him. A clear example to illustrate that, is his famous commentary in *De servo arbitrio* about the way in which the *Deus revelatus* and the *Deus absconditus* are related:

And to this God made flesh it is right to weep, to burst into lamentations and groan because of the perdition of the ungodly, despite that it happens according to the eternal purpose of the will of the Divine Majesty that some be abandoned to their own fate and rejected so that they are lost. And it is not incumbent on us to ask us why the Majesty proceeds in this way, but to worship with reverence the God who can and wants such things.\(^{275}\)

But such a conviction regarding the unity between the concealed and revealed God, which only faith as a divine gift can sustain, does not eliminate its evident tension, as Luther’s previous quotation suggests, and therefore the challenge to which it convenes this same faith. Of course, it is not the same tension between the *potentia Dei ordinata* and the *potentia Dei absoluta*, which is characteristic of late nominalism,\(^{276}\) which suffers from no small speculation, but from a tension given to the interior of the revelation itself and in a certain way reflected in the very experience of the life. Indeed, when Erasmus reproached Luther on the basis of the text of Ez. 33,11 that the God who did not desire the death of the sinner could not at the same time order it or allow it, without coming to find with it such an improper contradiction of his character, Wittenberg’s professor can answer that even if that could be true regarding to the revealed God, it was not necessarily for the hidden God, since his will and activity as inscrutable is not consigned entirely in his word.\(^{277}\) This is not, of course, as some critics of the Reformer have said, that behind the

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\(^{273}\) *Op. cit.*, 36

\(^{274}\) Thus, for example, von Loewenich defines the most recurrent criticism concerning the concept of the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus* of Luther. *Ibid.*, 34.

\(^{275}\) *La voluntad determinada*, 170.

\(^{276}\) See, A. E. McGrath, *op. cit.*, 167.

\(^{277}\) “Much is what God does without by means of his word showing us that he is doing it; and much is what he wants without in his word showing us that he wants it. In this way he does not want the death of
revelation given by God there is a deity, the *Deus absconditus*, who is completely different and even contrary to Christ and the word; but the same God in his inscrutable, unfathomable, and naked, essence who can’t be understood or approached by the resources of the human creature.

On the basis, therefore, of this dialectical, yet no less tensional, unity between the *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus*, it should also be clarified that the hidden God does not constitute in relation to the life of the believer a preliminary modality regarding the revealed God, with which only newly converted and novices in the faith have to deal, while mature and seasoned Christians who have already surpassed the level of his concealment deal with the God who makes himself known. It has already been said that for Luther it has to do with the hidden and revealed God of the same and only God, God in his complete unity, without any dualism, whose acting is neither linear nor progressive but dialectical and interwoven, in a way that, the one who believes in and surrenders to the revealed God must believe in and surrender to the concealed God, although, of course, he never can come to understand him. The fact is that for Luther this God, who cannot be limited by his word or by faith, let alone be domesticated by reason or experience, can only be God if he preserves his terrifying and inscrutable dimension that underlies the concept of the *Deus absconditus*.

### 4 Final words

Thus we come to the end of our exposition concerning to the *Deus absconditus* in the thought of the German Reformer, as a consubstantial element of his own *theologia crucis*. We would want to have been able to demonstrate in this section that, according to the global theological panorama of the professor of Wittenberg, under the concept of the concealed God we are not dealing with another God other than the revealed God, nor of a God that, although hidden, proves irreconcilable in the presentation given both in the *Disputation* as in the *De servio arbitrio*. It should be borne in mind that in the same way as Luther always rejected - and in an energetic manner - all kinds of speculation about the theology of the cross, emphasizing always in this, its practical, existential and pastoral character, similarly the *Deus absconditus* is not interested in the speculative and the metaphysical according to the Reformer's thought: The concealed God in the *Disputation* is the God revealed in the sufferings of Christ and his cross, and that same God and the sinner, namely, according to his word he does not want it; He wants it instead according to that inscrutable will." *La voluntad determinada*, 165.
no other - without hiding its paradoxical character and dialectic tension - is the *De servo arbitrio*, though in his stripped down nature, whose majesty, inscrutability and otherness is inaccessible to the human being; the concealed God who has a clear practical, existential and pastoral dimension with which the believer can both face suffering and understand the way that it works in the service of his own faith.

Indeed, when we think that we already have enough knowledge of God, and because we are too familiar with theological knowledge, ecclesiastical work, sensory experience, political-ecclesial activism, etc., we come to assume that we can explain God in a certain way, predict him, tame him, not only do we fall into the absurdity of attempting to exhaust the mystery of the concealed God, and therefore lose all capacity for wonder or - what is worse - of fear at his presence, but also God is obliged to blind our eyes and to expose our fallacious wisdom precisely through the terrible experience of that God who is concealed from us and even becomes an enemy, so as to teach us that he does not want to be known through the theology of glory but by the crucified and rejected Christ. Therefore, and in order not to fall into this danger, referring to the concealed God has, for Luther, its clearly assured space, insofar as, of course, human curiosity does not give rise to idle and unnecessary speculations.

Now, with regard to this devouring and unfathomable dimension of God in relation to the life of the believer, it can be pointed out that the greater the Christian's longing to seek and depend on God, the more likely he will be to go through periods in which the revealed God becomes, in his opinion, in an indecipherable, distant, indifferent, antagonistic, terrifying God, that is to say, a concealed God before whom he has to begin like Jacob with the angel, with a resolute struggle to come to understand the purposes for his life and realize that his God has not forgotten him, that he is still under God’s sovereign control of his life. In the face of those silences and concealments of God, which no doubt can be devastating and hurtful, Luther insists on persevering in prayer and clinging to the promises of God, especially those contained in baptism,²⁷⁸ so that through perseverance in prayer and faith the God who has concealed himself becomes visible; visible, of course, to the eye of the believer, for though because of the weakness of his faith he has not been able to perceive him, the arm of the Lord has always been present and

²⁷⁸ On the importance of baptism as an inexhaustible source of promises to which the believer can return, especially in times of struggle and tribulation, see, for example, Luther's pastoral words in his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in Luther’s Works, Vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. A. Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959), 59.
holding him in every moment of his valley of shadows and death. Luther expresses this beautifully in his comments on the Magnificat:

He lets the godly to become powerless and to be brought low, until everyone supposes their end is near, whereas in these very things He is present to them with all His power, yet so hidden and in a secret that even those who suffer the oppression do not feel it but only believe. There is the fullness of God’s power and His outstretched arm. For where man’s strength ends, God’s strength begins, provided faith is present and waits on Him. And when the oppression comes to an end, it becomes manifest what great strength was hidden underneath the weakness.279

Therefore, it must once again be concluded that the concealed God and the audacity of faith are found closely related, to the point that it is not possible to understand one without the other. In effect, it is only the faith that clings to the promises of God contained in the crucified and risen Christ that can safely and confidently cross the valley of tears where neither the senses nor reason can serve as guide, and see in the silences of God that they do not mean absence or indolence, much less antagonism toward the believer, but the hidden God acting in his favor. Again, we find this beautifully expressed in the Magnificat:

It is because of our lack of faith that we cannot wait a little, until the time comes when we, too, shall see how the mercy of God together with all His might is with those who fear Him, and the arm of God with all severity and power against the proud. O faithless! We grope with our hands for the mercy and the arm of God, and, unable to feel them, suppose our cause lost and that of our enemies won, as though God’s grace and mercy had forsaken us and His arm turned against us. This we do because we do not know His proper works, and therefore do not know Him, neither His mercy nor His arm. For He must and will be known by faith; hence our sense and our reason must close their eyes. This is the eye that offends us; therefore it must be plucked out and cast from us.280

As McGrath281 has expressed, this does not have to do with thoughts or good intentions which Luther has drawn up from the comfort of the university classrooms, but as one who, when speaking of the assurance that God can act in the contradictory and painful circumstances of life - in the hurtful and stormy silences of the Deus absconditus! - he does so having experienced the

mors, tribulatio, passio in all its terrifying intensity. But then, how should the believer react to that inscrutable and unknowable dimension of God, since he is not allowed to inquire into the divine secret? The only possible answer for Luther is not the nescience or ignorance of this dimension, but only the fear and adoration. Neither could it be said that this has to do, on the part of the believer, with an awe and adoration that is completely blind or by coercion. Luther never understood the freedom that comes from the God whose dimension is inscrutable and unfathomable, not even limited by his word, as detached from the ethics – or even the definition – of God in so much love.

Even though the concealed God deals with the believer by means of those terrible opposites, the believer, besides persevering in faith and prayer, must hold fast to the conviction that God is kind and loving and that he cannot deny himself. Moreover, for Luther the dreadful decree of election, by which some are left in their state of sin and condemnation, and others in the same condition are reached by grace, will make the light of glory shine on perfect and holy justice of God. Regarding the foregoing, it would not do full justice to the concept of the Deus absconditus of Luther, who interprets him in an exclusively nominalist key,²⁸² since from the inscrutable activity of the hidden God it Luther does not conclude that God acts arbitrarily or capriciously; rather this unfathomable act and will are not subject to the judgment or permission of any authority or external norm.

It is true that much of human suffering can be explained on the basis of finding ourselves in a fallen and divided world, and therefore under the law, but it could not be denied that a large proportion could not be explained in this way, remaining under the shadow of an inscrutable mystery which the revealed God has not been pleased to reveal to us. But if God uses the selfsame evil to carry out his divine purposes, and what is more, he works within it for such effects, then up to what extent does God not become a confused and deceitful entity, even fused with the same evil, to the point - as Bayer has noted - of not being able to distinguish between God and the devil himself?²⁸³ Bayer himself maintains that the very idea of a power of God working within the sinner creates a difficult task for the one who has the mission of teaching

²⁸² Thus emphatically von Loewenich, who rejects, moreover, the position of A. Ritschl who had seen in the concept of the concealed God of Luther a flagrant relapse into nominalism and the arbitrary God of ockhamism. Ibid., 44f.
about God.\textsuperscript{284} However, we must not forget what Luther himself had already pointed out, that is to say, that God works in the sinner, even in Satan himself, in order to carry out his eternal purposes, even in the state of sin and rebellion in which he finds them. Of course, the activity of evil - even more in the light of the excess of suffering evil that strikes our world each day - may seem to us to be autonomous and without counterbalance, but that same margin of power that evil enjoys for the moment, has been granted by God himself according to that dimension that is inscrutable and impenetrable to the human being. Here, we can think to corroborate the aforementioned in some very meaningful texts as Lk. 4, 6-7, in which tempter can offer Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth in the understanding that they have been handed over to him; or that of the gospel of Jn. 19, 11 in which Jesus himself tells Pilate that he would have no authority over him if it would have not been given him from above.

And, yet, one of the aspects that consumes and disconcerts us about the concealed God is not only that he uses evil to fulfill his sovereign decrees, but that sometimes the good appears so imperceptibly bound under the face of evil that we could easily see the work of Satan there where God wants to glorify himself and thus deepen our relationship with him. The God of Job could well have been the very demon, if at the end of the plot he had not decided to leave his concealment and become the revealed God. This is why Luther can point out in his customary paradoxical and dialectical language that "God cannot be God unless He first becomes a devil."\textsuperscript{285} But we should remember Luther's insistence that we have recorded in previous pages, namely, that through his strange, terrible and mysterious work, God carries out that work of grace, life and salvation that is his. Again, we refer to his own words about the passage from Isa. 28, 21, in his commentary on Ps. 2, 9:

\begin{quote}
He does His work - strange is His deed; and He works His works -alien is His work! It is as if he - Isaiah- were saying: Although He is the God of life and salvation and this is His proper work, yet, in order to accomplish this, He kills and destroys. These works are alien to Him, but through them He accomplishes His proper work. For He kills our will that His may be established in us. He subdues the flesh and its lusts that the spirit and its desires may come life.\textsuperscript{286}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{286} Selected Psalms. Psalm 2: 9, in op. cit., 335.
These are undoubtedly difficult words to digest for a good part of the ecclesiology and theology of our day, for whom God operates as a public servant or a therapist, whose main purpose is that the human being can be released from all guilty feelings and become what he longs for in his heart, under the chant of universal love intoned by a Divinity more concerned with making the believer happy than in forming in him the character of his Son. Turning, however, to the previous quotation from Luther, who could deny - as on more than one occasion we have already warned - the indissoluble way in which are interwoven here theology and vital experience? We are found here with the dark night of doubt experienced by the Reformer, which will whip him at various stages of his life, triggered by various situations including, perhaps, the experience of the monastery, the tower, or even the peasants' revolt. However, what we really must emphasize in these extremely paradoxical statements is Luther's own insistence on understanding evil not as mere privatio boni, much less as a primordial and autonomous entity in eternal struggle against good, as in the gnostic or Manichean dualism, but as the terrible mask of concealment and emptiness of God; a mask, in which not only his goodness proves sometimes hard to perceive in face of that scourge of suffering and evil that momentarily and incomprehensibly strikes the believer, but as Luther expresses, God himself comes set up under this mask in his enemy, to the point that in his desperation and confusion the believer can only exclaim: "do not know whether God is the devil or the devil is God."287

Certainly, we cannot help wondering whether, in relation to the previous exclamation, we are simply before a typical hyperbolization of a man religiously tormented according to the medieval mentality, or whether it is about a concrete experience - and more common than often it is admitted on the part of the believer - of dealing with the Deus absconditus. If we are honest enough and our understanding of faith transcends mere cultural ascription or its reductionism to the merely horizontal, it should be recognized that in the statement commonly attributed to Count Zinzendorf - that if we did not find God in Christ, we would have to consider God as the very devil - is a truth that is impossible to deny or avoid. Indeed, if we observed the world simply as it is, with all its excess of unnecessary and radical evil, with all its overflowing of sufferings and injustices both structurally and individually, and we could not - in the midst of all these hardships and avatars - return our face to the God made flesh, to the crucified Christ on a cross, should we not clearly and simply conclude either that God does not exist or that if he exists is unjust and

287 Quoted from O. Bayer, ibid., 205.
cruel? And if, in spite of everything, we continue to cling to the idea of the existence of a higher being, would we be tempted to conclude with C. S. Lewis in his book *A Grief Observed*, not “So there’s no God after all,” but “So this is what God’s really like?”288 Being more honest still, would not we have to admit that the God whom we claim to worship is not a God of love, nor mercy, nor goodness, but one who is frivolous, treacherous, indolent at times to fulfill his promises.; a cruel, indifferent God; a God who enjoys watching the suffering of people from his hidden dimension, inaccessible to his creatures? Faced with this type of God, the whole effort of theodicy becomes an obscene exercise, the whole attempt to explain him nothing more than an idle speculation.

Thus, the only possible answers under this gloomy horizon are either declared atheism, whose path has already been initiated by the great masters of suspicion -Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, among others- or, in order to be able to maintain at least a slight vestige of divinity and not have to face the reality of this world according to Luther's anguished rumination as to whether God is the devil or if the devil is God, to replace him by the limited God about whom Hans Jonas spoke, who by virtue of that condition cannot help us and, therefore, cannot be blamed nor can he be responsible for the tragedies of this world; a God who in his limitation and fragility, as Etty Hillesum, would say, needs our help himself, which is only possible to achieve, in the language of Levinas, relying on a responsible and supportive humanity.

But, is this really God, or simply, with regards to the former an open negation, and with regards to the second an undramatic capitulation, something like a consolation prize, but beyond such euphemisms a negation just as with the first? Whatever it may be, the truth is that in one or the other, we may well ask whether the cry of denial or pain of this world against God, does not actually address that hidden God; if the whole effort of theodicy is not precisely an attempt to legitimize or explain the act of that *Deus absconditus*. As far as Luther is concerned, it can be said here, and if indeed the term really fits, that his theodicy suffers from extreme simplicity and fideism. He certainly does not ignore the suffering and evil that weighs on this world, but beyond what has already been said, he refuses to speculate on its origin. The only possible path to a theodicy is paved, for the Reformer, through faith; but not a faith that is thrown into emptiness, but into the arms of God made flesh, crucified and likewise risen.

Chapter 5
Human suffering in the light of the *Theologia Crucis*: An Effort of Conclusion

1 The gaps of *Theologia Crucis* in the original formulation of Luther: Voluntary and feeble omissions or inherent limitations related to the epoch, and in need of further development?

After the successful publication of Moltmann's work, *The Crucified God*, with the critiques on Luther's *theologia crucis* contained therein - even though they may have been nothing more than a few lines of general observations - it has practically become a common habit among a segment of the current works on the theology of the cross, particularly among those who in one way or another continue in Moltmann's passibilist and political understanding of the cross, to point out the sensitive ommissions found in the treatise of the Professor of Wittenberg. Among them, it is accused, are the Trinitarian dimension, the eschatological opening, and, especially, the notorious lack of a political or social vision. With respect to the first two omissions, if by this critique it is meant that there is a complete absence of such matters this does not seem to be a sufficiently grounded accusation. It is true that there is no explicit or detailed development of both themes in the treatise on the theology of the cross as it was formulated by Luther, but both the Trinitarian and the eschatological are fully assumed within it, although they appear to be at the beginning of their development, and do not achieve all that they could. With regards to the first, the Trinitarian dimension is assumed to the extent that the God who died on that cross was the God who is Triune and One; and the second is assumed because it is only in the light of the resurrection that the cross of Jesus becomes the foundation of all the promises for Christians, and the irrefutable proof that neither sin nor death will finally have the last word. However, most of the criticisms of Luther’s classical *theologia crucis* are directed at the absence of any socio-political perspective, and therefore in its reduction to, allegedly, an interior and spiritualizing program which ends up simply reinforcing the *status quo* and leaving all the structures of social injustice and oppression in place and not extracting, therefore, the critical-liberating potential contained in the message of the cross. Thus, for example, Moltmann, and in specific relation to the War of the peasants, can point out:
What he wrote to the peasants did not express the critical and liberating force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame, nor the polemic of the crucified God against pride and subjection, domination and slavery, but instead a non-protestant mysticism of suffering and humble submission.\textsuperscript{289}

Such issues, that partly find support in some unfortunate statements of Luther - even more when taken out of context and extrapolated to the political and social norms of our modern world - could substantially affect the way in which we believe Luther’s doctrine on the theology of the cross relates to human suffering; that is, how much could it contain -as we are convinced it does - an effective reading of the condition and reality in which the human being finds himself - namely, under the condition of sin and separation from God - and from that point direct him to the only mediator who can reestablish his communion with God and someday end all suffering, tears and death: Christ and this Crucified? Or could his doctrine justify submission to, or even sacralization of, a structural order that is marked by injustice and abuse from the powerful towards the most vulnerable in society, at the same time obstructing any hint of opposition or revolt against this painful reality, precisely in the name of the cross and its suffering?

It is not, therefore, capriciousness that the fateful episode of the revolt of the Swabian peasants in 1525 is the event that is most recalled when trying to give weight to this second vision, which strives to see in the theology of the cross an instrument of control and legitimation of the \textit{status quo} rather than of liberation, at least from temporal oppression. Here we must not forget - precisely to avoid ignoring the historical and social conditioning that we believe indispensable for not arriving at decontextualized and precipitated conclusions - that the disastrous event known as the peasants' war arose at the very moment when the brief text of Luther, \textit{Admonition to Peace} (1525), was published as a concrete call to appease spirits and thus avoid the confrontation between the peasants and the nobles. But even in this brief manifesto, the call to the peasants is to renounce any attempt to rid themselves of the heavy yoke imposed on them, if in doing so violence is committed and then legitimized in the name of Christianity. Rather, if they seek to honor the name of Christ, Luther will say, then the way is to bear “Christianly” the

\textsuperscript{289} \textit{The Crucified God}, 72. Precisely, in this particular context of the War of the Peasants, Moltmann, as already clearly expressed in this quote, claims to put into practice the critical-liberating praxis of the cross against the oppressors and the powerful, in favor of the oppressed. However, beyond the sensitive lyricism, it is not clear how this could have been carried out in that specific situation. Indeed, recognizing Luther’s unfortunate handling of this matter, the "critical-liberating" solution of Müntzer does not seem to have been nearly the appropriate solution.
sufferings that beset them\(^{290}\) insofar as the ultimate concern of the gospel does not consist in the things of the earth but in those of above (Col. 3, 2).\(^{291}\)

\(^{290}\) “I say all this, dear friends, as a faithful warning. In this case, you should stop calling yourselves Christians and stop claiming that you have the Christian laws on your side. For no matter how right you are, it is not right for a Christian to appeal to law, or to fight, but rather to suffer wrong and endure evil; and there is no other way (1 Corinthians 6: 1-8).” *Admonition to Peace. A Replay to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia*, in Luther’s Works, Vol. 46., ed. R. C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 31.

\(^{291}\) “The gospel, however, does not become involved in the affairs of this world, but speaks of our life in the world in terms of suffering, injustice, the cross, patience, and contempt for this life and temporal wealth. How, then, does the gospel agree with you?” *Op. cit.*, 35-36. Moreover, such exhortation of the Reformer to the peasants in order to avoid any attempt at revolution and uprising, rests, ultimately, on his intimate theological convictions regarding the creational order, a creational order according to which God himself would have established three clearly defined states but, at the same time, under the reference of the first, in order to procure the preservation of the world, namely, the *status ecclesiasticus* to provide the teaching; the *status politicus* to guarantee the defense and the order; and the *status oeconomicus* to confer sustenance, and that they could be objects of intervention solely when one or some of them fail to fulfill their function in a clear way, or unduly cross the limits of the other, thus causing a serious deterioration of the divine order. This is highlighted, for example, by Thomas Kaufmann, *A Short Life of Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 77f. Under such an understanding of the creational order and its established states, any uprising or rebellion against civil or political authority has been seen for Luther simply as chaos, anarchy and, consequently, a sin that perverts the system conferred by God for the preservation of life on earth, even worse than that of the popes and infidels, since such authorities comply correctly or not with their investiture, which has been imposed not by man but by God. The anterior clarification, not always sufficiently taken into account at when distributing responsibilities regarding to that enormous tragedy that signified the uprising of the peasants, their initial vandalism and excesses, as well as the subsequent brutal repression by some of the nobles, would simply suffice to balance that projection of the Reformer as a subjugated and servile character toward the princes, as has been insisted time and time again, mainly from left-Marxist readings, including, of course, their theological modalities. In these, as will be known, while Luther appears as an opportunist and servile character, who miserably and cowardly turns his back on the working class, in turn securing the establishment, both social and political, in order to obtain the benefits of the powerful and oppressors, Müntzer, meanwhile, is elevated as the ideal of the good revolutionary and the altruistic and disinterested defender of the rights of the most needy, although all the historical evidence attributes to him a huge responsibility in the debacle that happened. First, he instigated the violent uprising of the peasants by means of virulent apocalyptic preaching and, second - and doubtless more deplorable still – he abandoned them to save his skin when the "revolutionary cause" was lost. Not in vain - and we believe with reason - Bainton has been able to affirm that: “In Saxony there would have been no Peasant’s War without Müntzer.” *Op. cit.*, 277. In this sense, and as lucidly has been posed by Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, it would rather have to speak of a realistic conservativism of Luther, which from his own theology of creation -and how much more from his theology of the cross!- has led him to deal with the world and the human being, such as they are, without idealizing them under the siren song of any social utopia so typical of those days and ours. Otherwise, beyond this caricaturing of Luther as that character who always flattered the nobles in order to get their protection and royalties and who was, consequently, completely subject to their interests, the truth is that he did not lose the occasion to confront the landowners vehemently, and make them largely responsible for the state of despair and growing exacerbation of the peasants’ anger, because of usury and other abuses to which they subjected them, and in turn he called them to alleviate their burdens, as recorded in his written, *Temporal Authority: To what Extent it Should Be* (1523), published just a year before his call to the *Admonition to Peace*. 
In view of all the foregoing, it is not possible to dismiss Moltmann's observation lightly - which others have taken up, perhaps even more vigorously - that the cross, at least in this particular case, loses its critical-liberating strength for the temporal order, only to be reduced to a mysticism of suffering typical of medieval religiosities. Of course, it would go against historical evidence to ignore the fact that such declarations by the Reformer represent an understanding of the gospel with an eminently apolitical character, almost verging on the spiritualizing, or that in his response to the violence and unruliness of the peasants, *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants* (1525), is found some of the most regrettable statements of Luther, which would leave an indelible stain both in his spirit as in the judgment of history. Once again, though, the recommendation here is that before we venture any judgment we should ponder each of these statements in light of the historical and social situation in which they have been issued, taking likewise into account the considerable gap of both time and culture between the medieval context and our modern society, the latter with its evident social development and greater awareness of the rights of the human being especially in relation to the marginalized sectors, although even in modern society there is no guarantee of not eroding the advances in justice and equity from time to time - in the many and lamentable ways already mentioned – to the extent, of course, that we continue to live in a fallen and divided world in which neither the "new humanity" appears, nor have we seen the fulfillment of the vision of a perfect society, and the heart of man continues to be evil and perverse since his youth. (Jer. 17, 19).

Therefore, any attempt to project our modern norms and social demands for the working classes – not always entirely consistent or efficient – onto the context of Luther’s day cannot result in anything other than an obtuse anachronism. The same is applied, precisely to that reiterated accusation that is addressed to the *theologia crucis* of the Reformer, in terms of lacking any program of a political character and denunciation of the structures of social oppression. Indeed, if this were the case, it would have to be recognized in the same way that the Gospels, the Epistles, and even the very message of Jesus lack any program regarding these themes. Yet, who could not recognize that within some essential postulates based on the option for Jesus – the call to follow, the gospel of the kingdom, life in community, eschatological hope, etc. – it has been possible to find the fundamental bases – or at least the elemental inspiration – for developing pathways to a political theology, a Christian ethic, in dialogue with the various forms of human thought.
This does not suggest that we cannot recognize - even with all the lucidity, depth and perennial timelessness of Luther's treatise on *theologia crucis* - that he was never able to fully extract and develop all the consequences that seem implicit in such a doctrine, especially in their socio-political relations, insofar as, of course, the man Luther was also a man of his time: a monk, a teacher, a pastor, a reformer of sixteenth-century Germany. Along the same line as pointed out above regarding the Scriptures – the theology of the cross being a doctrine that is deeply rooted in them – we can also affirm that within the Reformer's treatise of *theologia crucis* are found the fundamental principles needed to develop and deepen those subjects that, although clearly implied, were not extracted or developed by the Professor of Wittenberg himself. There exists, therefore, an urgent imperative to address them in our time. Nevertheless, within this same imperative to develop such themes lies the obvious risk and problem of the task, since the urgency for taking charge of these – in order to break free from the accusation regarding the passivity of Christianity toward the urgent political and social problems, or its tendency to legitimize the established order and, consequently, constitute a discourse that is practically irrelevant to the world today – threatens to turn the theology of the cross into a mere ideological instrument, be it the revolutionary cause, the lyricisms and the utopias of discourse, the claims of minorities – which, in fact, work rather as majority – etc., in which the fundamental contents of *theologia crucis* serve only as an excuse or pretext for the ends already established *a priori*.

2 Christian Suffering, Human Suffering

Having made, therefore, the pertinent clarifications, we are finally left to elucidate what it is that the doctrine of the theology of the cross has to say in response to the problem of the suffering and evil that afflicts the human being. As we already anticipated, such a response could prove highly disappointing and scandalous if what is expected here is a theology of universal salvation or the promise of redemption of human suffering as such, without direct and exclusive linkage to Christ, as a large number of theologies of the cross – especially those inspired by the work of Moltmann – currently propose. In other words, it must be affirmed that Christian suffering in the light of the word of the cross is found to be in a completely different position from human suffering that is not mediated by faith in the Crucified, and that the *theologia crucis* makes a clear distinction between the suffering of the believer because of that faith, and the other that is not. In the precise words of Thomas G. Weinandy:
Moreover, because much contemporary theology has failed to recognize the Christological and soteriological significance of Christ's suffering, that is, that those who now suffer in Christ, as members of his body, suffer and experience in a radically different manner than those who have not come to faith in him. The Father's response to sin and evil and the suffering that flows from it is Christ, and only those who fully live in Christ share fully in the Father's response. Thus, the singular evangelistic import of Christ's suffering within a tortured world which cries out in hopeless anguish is completely lost.  

This does not mean, of course, that the doctrine on the theology of the cross has nothing to say about human suffering in general, but the answer here could be even more disconcerting still, particularly for many of the more recent efforts in the area of theodicy. Indeed, even though Luther never tried to explain, or even speculate, in his *theologia crucis* regarding the metaphysical or structural causes that give rise to the evil and suffering of the world, leaving much under the umbrella of unfathomable divine mystery, the truth is that we can venture to conclude from what we have already reviewed of his writings that the suffering and evil that weigh on humanity and creation alike are ultimately the direct consequence of humanity’s rejection of God’s original project of life, and his obstinacy in paving his own ways of redemption and realization, excluding God from this and elevating himself as his own god. All this, of course, has a dramatic result which is, to this day, the upheaval and perversion of all humanity’s fundamental relationships, namely, with God first, but also with neighbour, with himself and with creation.

And since *theologia crucis* in the Reformer's thought is a theology directed mainly to the believer – inasmuch as only faith can see God revealed in that which to the world is nothing more than madness, stupidity, an excuse to justify an ideology or to exploit a theological fad what does such a doctrine have to say, then, in the face of the suffering and sorrow that afflicts this person? In the first place, it tells the believer that his faith is not tested, purified and increased in times of prosperity, abundance, peace, or absence of discomfort, that is, when all his needs seem to be relatively satisfied and he has nothing to risk for the faith he claims to profess; or the "risks," if any, consist of high-sounding statements and flashy poses of minor rebelliousness that, in the social and cultural context in which they are pronounced and

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performed, generate applause and recognitions, rather than something concrete and real. Rather, this doctrine says that faith is perfected when all these human securities and aspirations are withdrawn from him and his space of comfort and stability is shattered, leaving him with no human resources with which he can support himself; when following the Crucified one is much more than a simple contemplative exercise, a mere intellectual affirmation, or simply fashionable activism, but rather something that calls him to crucify his old self every day, giving up control of his own life and giving it to the Master and, given the circumstances, experiencing greater suffering or even death itself because of this confession and following. It has rightly been said that the value of a belief is measured by what we are willing to risk for it. In this case, by the way, Luther is a worthy example.

Now, if according to De servo arbitrio all objects of faith are hidden under their opposites, including, of course, the faith of the Christian, then this would be contained and manifested, not necessarily in great and visible works, but precisely in suffering; suffering, of course, which is not intended as a masochistic pleasure or self-martyrdom demanded by the divinity – which can hide nothing more than the stubborn will of the human being by the imposition of arbitrary flogging – nor which it is sacralized or glorified as if it were simply an ideal, a meritorious work or a prerequisite to give rise to faith and thus obtain salvific grace; and not suffering that is the result of being in the midst of a fallen and wounded world, with a human nature that is also wounded and fallen, and consequently with all the burden of imperfections, sorrows, frustrations and evils which that tragic condition brings with it, namely, as Bonhoeffer says, the "daily evils," and that it may well constitute by assigning it without further the condition of "Christian suffering," a powerful refuge for cheap grace and the covert rejection of following the Crucified.293

On the contrary, it is about that suffering which is not arbitrary, nor the object of idealization, nor the result of all the burdens and calamities of this world, but the inevitable consequence of confessing and following the crucified Christ, and submitting oneself without any reservation to his lordship, awakening on account of that all the hatred of this world and its powers (cf. Jn. 15,

293 “If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life.” Op. cit., 88-89.
18-19). By virtue of that, it is not any suffering, but “Christian suffering.” It is to suffer, by carrying, as well as the Master, our own cross. Again the words of Bonhoeffer are highly explanatory:

To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. It is not the sort of suffering which is inseparable from this mortal life, but the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life. It is not suffering *per se* but suffering-and-rejection, and not rejection for any cause or conviction of our own, but rejection for the sake of Christ.\(^{294}\)

Therefore, if to follow the Crucified does not generate any tension with the ideological currents of this world, if there is no price to pay, or nothing to renounce because of our confession of Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One as Lord of our lives, we would then have to ask whether the cross remains our daily and inescapable hallmark as Christians, or rather a mere fact of the past, a mere theological treatise, nothing more than an excuse for an ideological agenda. Said in another way, we would need to ask ourselves whether we are able to confess along with the other great theologian of the cross, the Apostle Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2, 20). However, does this call to take an open and definitive position for the crucified Christ, to carry the cross and follow him under his complete lordship, not awaken among many who call themselves Christian, as well as their churches and communities – such as happened in the days of the incarnate Christ with many of the people who initially followed him – an open rejection and reluctance to the extent, of course, that taking this position, that carrying that cross, that unconditional following puts at risk our sphere of comfort and threatens us with social stigmatization when resisting the world’s ideological and cultural guidelines are contrary to the message of the cross; does it not ask us to deliver, without reserve, the complete dominion of our lives to the Crucified, and even be willing to hand over our very own life for him? But the theologian of the cross - understood here not in a technical or professional sense, but as every believer who follows the Crucified and confesses him as Lord - knows well that the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head (Mat. 8, 20); and that the servant is not greater than his Master (Mt. 10, 24-25). He also knows that although the Lord's words may be hard and fatal for the old self (Jn. 6, 60) - because they imply the denial of oneself - it is no longer possible to go back (Jn. 6, 66) to the old form of existence, since only the crucified and

risen Jesus has the words of eternal life (Jn. 6, 68); and although following after this one exposes him to discomfords, risks and sufferings - even up to the destiny of his own Master, the cross! (Mk. 8, 34) – he also knows that whoever loses his life for the Lord and the gospel will save it (Mk 8, 35), insomuch that if we suffer with him we will also reign with him (2 Ti. 2, 11).

It is, then, through the suffering provoked by the simple fact of being part of a fallen, wounded, imperfect, and deteriorated world that is in rebellion against God or, failing that, and more appropriately, by the open and definitive position-taking by the crucified Christ, that God carries out his peculiar work in the believer, so that once he would abandon himself – even in the midst of this difficult journey – completely to the grace of his Lord, God can perform his own work in him. This is the opus proprium that does not necessarily have as a final goal the comfort of the Christian, free from all his problems and pains, or his prosperity, or the fulfillment of all his dreams and desires, that is, his "happiness;" but absolutely and specifically to create in the Christian the image of his Son (Ro. 8, 29; 2 Co. 3, 18; Gal. 4, 19), which, of course, is not achieved through all of the previous, but only through the purifying experience of suffering.295

295 Such a purpose for suffering, ultimately pedagogical, is something almost completely unknown to Dorothee Sölle in her peculiar work, Suffering (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), to the point of seeing in it nothing more than the affirmation of a sadistic and indolent God, which only awakens a sense of scandal and resistance, since the God Sölle thinks of is a God who only tends to the "happiness" of the human being: “The God who is the lover of life does not desire the suffering of people, not even as a pedagogical device, but instead their happiness.” Op. cit., 108. But, is it really the purpose of God to rid the human being of all pain and to tend solely to his happiness, as if God existed only for the service of the human being, and not the other way around, and how much more considering that this one is in the midst of a fallen and deteriorated world, including himself in that condition? Is it not, perhaps, the purpose of the human being, through his surrender to Christ, to develop His image in his life, to live for the glory of God, and as a consequence of this surrender to find true joy and happiness, while fighting at the same time against everything that undermines justice and the dignity of people and society? In honor of the truth, the God configured by Sölle is more related to the anthem of the Socialist International and its slogans than to the God of the Bible, and hence perhaps her precarious effort at biblical foundation for her rejection of all ideas of suffering in connection with God. For the same reason, it seems to me that she results absolutely incapable of understanding the paradox of faith in relation to the suffering of the believer, insofar as her understanding of the faith shows signs of lacking any vertical dimension of faith, since a faith understood in this way, according to Sölle, not only would be privatized for the exclusive use of a small bourgeois Christian world and their respective "private little woes," ibid .., 5, reducing, therefore, the real evils of this world to a mere matter of a metaphysical and private character, which would prevent the launching of the liberating action or revolutionary praxis (Marx) in relation to these, the only useful and non-cynical dimension of faith. We have already referred sufficiently, and in specific relation to the treatise on the theology of the cross, about the duty of the Christian faith in relation to the exercise of criticality and denunciation of such networks of social dehumanization, on the basis, of course, from what makes it distinctive in front of any other worldview of this world, that is, revelation, Christ and the Word, as well as the fact that following after the Crucified does not have any relationship with the denial of life or with suffering piously or arbitrarily sought, but with suffering specifically
Indeed, only the one who has passed through the valley of shadow of death and suffering, experiencing its consuming fire, and in the midst of this dry and wounding path - the strange work of God! - has clung against all evidence of the senses, against all logic of reason, completely to the promises of his Lord, to the point of being able to say: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job. 13, 15); only this one will finally be able to declare, giving testimony of the work of God: “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job. 42,5). Said in Luther's particular language: suffering, pain, adversity, and even death itself are the resource that God utilizes to lead us to invoke his name and turn us back to him:

God considers his name hallowed and honored when we name it and call upon it in adversity and need. And in the final analysis this is why he sends us much trouble, suffering, adversity, and even death as well.296

It is about, of course, words that only faith can understand without being perturbed or scandalized by them, avoiding seeing in these nothing more than an insane apology for suffering or the bitter denial of life. But, after all, what is the theology of the cross but basically a theology of faith, which can see the revealed God, power for salvation, precisely where the human eye sees nothing but madness, stupidity, weakness, sentimentality, opportunity for profitable and fashionable theologies? Far from joining the foregoing description, suffering will be to Luther that which makes the believer holy and that unfolds, stretches, exercises and affirms his faith, and separates him from his natural functions for the service of God:

In so doing he declares that there is nothing more precious than suffering, dying, and all manner of misfortune. They are something sacred, and set a man apart from his own works for the works of God.297

"because of Christ", without ruling out much less that the believer can and should also see in those sufferings that likewise to him they afflict him, as evils caused by the fallen structure of this world, to that God who even through them performs his opus alienum to carry out his opus proprium in it. Undoubtedly, such an understanding of the faith and of the very act of God cannot be more than monstrous and scandalous for the one whose configuration of God and his work does not start from revelation – a contradictory element for that same configuration – but basically of secondary resources. We would say here, this is not on the basis of the theology of the cross, but according to the theology of glory. Precisely in this scenario, it seems to us, is situated the analysis of Dorothee Sölle.

297 Treatise on Good Works, in op. cit., 78.
I believe that no one has been able to interpret in a more exact sense the meaning of these words than A. W. Tozer when he says: “It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.” It is that, what greater honor, privilege and blessing could a human being choose, than to be a useful instrument for the glory of God? Therefore, because suffering is and will always be the most genuine seal and mark of the true church and the believer – inasmuch as it is suffering for Christ and his gospel and by that very fact the most precious of all treasures for the Lord - it cannot be dismissed or simply converted into mere ideological or literary resource. It is true that, like all works of faith, as Luther insists, suffering remains both hidden and visible only by this same faith, being there, in such sufferings that are understood by Christ, where the church and the believer are hidden for the world. Nevertheless, the fact that such Christian suffering remains hidden and revealed only in the eyes of faith – that is to say, that it does not need to be publicized, or transformed into a marketing strategy, or theorized, and much less instrumentalized for ideological purposes – does not mean that it ceases to produce impact and consequences beyond the private sphere, to the extent, of course, that taking an open and definitive position for the Crucified one transcends to believer and his confession.

In this sense, we should nuance the words of Moltmann when he states that: “It -the theology of the cross- does not state what exists, but sets out to liberate men from their inhuman definition and their idolized assertions, in which they have become set, and in which society has ensnared them,” because, although nothing can be more certain than that the message of the cross will always have an impact on the listener and his personal and structural relationship network - whether he is open to it or denies it, since the word of God never returns empty without fulfilling its purpose (Isa. 55,11) because it is alive and effective, and sharper than a double-edged sword to auscultate and discern the intimate details that are in the heart and intentions of man (Heb. 4, 12) – yet it is no less true that this is carried out, first, by convicting the human being by means of the operation of the law [the condition in which he finds himself, that is, under the judgment

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299 “A theologian of the cross (that is, one who speaks of crucified and hidden God), teaches that punishments, crosses, and death are the most precious treasury of all and the most sacred relics which the Lord od this theology himself has consecrated and blessed.” Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses, in Luther’s Works, Vol. 31 ed. H. J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957), 225.
300 “In so doing he declares that there is nothing more precious than suffering, dying, and all manner of misfortune. They are something sacred, and set a man apart from his own works for the works of God”. Treatise on Good Works, in op. cit., 78.
301 The Crucified God, 72.
of sin, separated from the glory of God, split in all his fundamental relationships and, therefore, incapable of returning by virtue of his own faculties to salvific grace (*homo incurvatus in se*) and then, through the gospel, pointing out to him the only path that can lead to the restoration of all his relationships - with God first and foremost, and then with all his horizontal connections - namely, Jesus Christ, crucified and exalted.

Consequently, we can affirm that the believer is a μάρτυς in the double sense that fits the term: He suffers owing to the following of the Crucified One and his Gospel and, at the same time, he is a witness and living testimony of his Lord before humanity because of that suffering. Because of this, Luther will rightly say that the true church is and always will be the church of the martyrs, that is, those who suffer pressure, opposition, harassment, discrimination, violence and even death itself, not just for any reason, but for their confession and following of the crucified Christ. Therefore: “Only that Church has the full right to call itself the Church of Christ which follows her Lord in all things.” It is true that Luther would have used the principle of the cross and suffering as a critical criterion against the papacy of his time, but, also -and we cannot ignore this or reduce it to a mere conjectural discussion- as von Loewenich emphasized, as the truthful judgment against the history of the church of all time. It is a judgment, of course, that we cannot dismiss or conceal just because it could reveal, as Bonhoeffer already expressed, the terrible reality that in most of the course of history the church has been scandalized by the suffering Christ, and perhaps much more that he imposes the stamp of suffering as the distinctive mark of his true people.

In light of this sad but undeniable reality, there is always, therefore, cause to be suspicious about whether the suffering of which the church often boasts in our day is really suffering because of the cross of Christ, or suffering that needs to be publicized as an institutional strategy, an ecclesiastically correct discourse, and that, rather than being unity with

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302 Quoted from von Loewenich, *ibid.*, 127.
304 “Suffering and rejection are laid upon Jesus as a divine necessity, and every attempt to prevent it is the work of the devil, especially when it comes from his own disciples; for it is in fact an attempt to prevent Christ from being Christ. It is Peter, the Rock of the Church, who commits that sin, immediately after he has confessed Jesus as the Messiah and has been appointed to the primacy. That shows how the very notion of a suffering Messiah was a scandal to the Church, even in its earliest days. That is not the kind of Lord it wants, and as the Church of Christ it does not like to have the law of suffering imposed upon it by its Lord. Peter’s protest displays his own unwillingness to suffer, and that means that Satan has gained entry into the Church, and is trying to tear it away from the cross of its Lord.” *Op. cit.*, 87.
the Crucified, is confused with the ideological and cultural claims of postmodern society. In the face of such instrumentalization and ideologization to which the idea of the suffering of the church seems to be exposed, now more than ever – at least where Christianity is more a matter of cultural and institutional character than of following the Crucified, including all its risks – the warning of von Loewenich remains fully valid, precisely in relation to this subject: “In Luther’s eyes a church that is all too militant and vocal in its politics is suspect,” so as to be able to separate the chaff from the wheat, and continue proclaiming, without such lamentable additions and confusions, the message of the madness of the cross for a world set on constructing its own paths of redemption, security and self-divinization, which is the original and primary source, in effect, of all the sufferings that weigh on this fallen humanity: CRUX sola est nostra theologia!

This does not mean that the cross should be reduced to a pure locus theologicus of judgment and redemption, disconnected from all the political and social implications that ultimately led to the death of the man Jesus. What is more, a theology of the cross that seeks to quickly pass over the contradictory and dreadful event of the death of Jesus on the cross to highlight almost immediately its theological significance or, failing that, exploit almost unilaterally the revolutionary and transforming character of this event over the structural dimension of life, runs the clear risk of forgetting in its haste to emphasize the following contents and implications: that all allusion to the cross of Jesus, the Christ, be it theological, existential or structural is first and unavoidably a reference about the historical event of the horrible and degrading death on the cross of a concrete human being of the first century - a man named Jesus - and only later a theological doctrine, a symbol, or a critical criterion for a liberating praxis. Indeed, of all the facts recorded in the Gospel story there is no other in which the approval of the historian and the faith of the believer share a greater margin of solidarity and consent than the death of Jesus, that is: Jesus, declared blasphemous by the religious leaders of Judaism and condemned, then, under the charge (very possibly) of zealous by the Roman authorities, executed on the wood of a cross, the most abominable and perhaps painful death sentence administered in those days.

Certainly, such a reminder, as the current theologies of the cross tell us, should be applied specifically to the traditional interpretations of the cross, in which a disproportionate interest of a theological-metaphysical nature tends to impose spiritualizing and reductionist categories to the

305 Ibid., 127.
historical event of the cross. However, although such gaps cannot be denied, especially on the part of a certain orthodoxy that has refused to incorporate the illuminating contributions of the study of the historical Jesus to its dogmatic structure, the truth is that a large part of these (post)modern expressions of the theology of the cross are not always free - in their excessive desire for relevance - of notoriously reducing the theological meaning of the cross, in light of the same testimony of the historical Jesus, by an almost obsessive fixation on the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion or of deconstruction, by the critical-transformative implications in the structural dimension or, by being trapped in evident speculations - as creative and attractive as they may be - but that only by force could find a point of support in the gospels, such as to expand on the subject of the internal suffering of God\textsuperscript{306} and the Trinitarian dialectic of the cross.\textsuperscript{307} Consequently, and in accordance with the above, it should be remembered that the work regarding a theology of the cross is not entirely complete with the mere overcoming of an old ideology in relation to it, in this case the theological-metaphysical reductionism, by replacing

\textsuperscript{306} As is well known, it was mainly Moltmann, with the publication of \textit{The Crucified God}, who was responsible for giving form and content to that theory of the ability that God would have not only to experience pain, but to make this pain a consubstantial part of his nature. It is a theory, it cannot be denied that has been widely accepted and followed specifically by those currents that subscribe to visions of the theology of the cross and their respective theodicy, oriented around their practical emphases and toward the critical-social character of them. Of course, there have been those who, from the very beginning of this proposal, have highlighted the radical nature of Moltmann's position and the danger of opening such a large number of doors that cannot be closed afterwards. Thus, for example, H. Gollwitzer posed the difficulty of whether "the pain of God would not be given here a lasting eternal, instead of being, as in K. Barth, a 'setback' overcome by God." - Quoted from H-G. Link, \textit{Problemas actuales de una teología de la cruz} in, Chr. Duquoc; K. Rahner, J. Moltmann; W. Kasper, H. Küng, \textit{Teología de la cruz} (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1979), 232-. And, likewise, in the present, mainly Catholic authors like, Th. G. Weinandy and P. Gavrilyuk, among others, have once again revealed the dangers and vacuums of the Moltmannian theory of God's internal pain, as a condition permanent that would practically define God.

\textsuperscript{307} It can also be attributed to Moltmann himself the insistence on trinitarian participation in the event of the death of Jesus on the cross, with his famous sentence also contained in \textit{The Crucified God}, 245: "The Son suffers in his love being forsaken by the Father as he dies. The Father suffers in his love of the grief of the death of the Son. In that case, whatever proceeds from the event between the Father and the Son must be understood as the spirit of the surrender of the Father and the Son, as the spirit which creates love for forsaken men, as the spirit which brings the dead alive.” It is about an insistence that, as with his theory of God's internal pain, has not stopped awakening varied and passionate reactions to this day. Without being able to enter here in a detailed evaluation of this position of Moltmann, and recognizing, of course, the highly creative and challenging character of it, along with the little acceptance that it has had in some circles, particularly those mentioned in the previous note. However, there remains the feeling that it is not after all an eminently speculative, if not scholastic, that finds more correspondence in the Hegelian dialectic than in the simple and plain reading of the Gospels and of the historical Jesus' own itinerary. A brilliant speculative exercise that, however, as H-G. Link has expressed it, \textit{Problemas actuales de una teología de la cruz}, in op. cit., 182, runs the risk of diluting God in an event or process in which God becomes God and is not God because he already is.
such an old ideology with new ones, just because they may be attractive for the times, whether they be emphases of postmodern or ideological-partisan.

3 Theodicy from the *theologia crucis*

Finally, we must ask ourselves after all that has already been discussed, whether it is possible to think in terms of an actual outline of a theodicy, even one starting from the theology of the cross, or whether the mere mention of it is an exercise that has been previously unsuccessful, illusory, and which must, therefore, be abandoned or reduced solely either to its theoretical or practical, metaphysical or structural, transcendent or immanent emphases. In the first chapter we dialogued with those illustrious Jewish thinkers (Adorno, Levinas, Jonas, Arendt, Fackenheim, among others), who - having directly experienced the ravages of Auschwitz both as a symbol and figure of the overflowing of radical and diabolical evil in the past century, and likewise the pointless suffering which human society is capable of inflicting by the liberation of its demonic and destructive instinctual forces (Freud) - concluded the absolute impossibility of all theodicy, be it religious or secular. Indeed, the overwhelming experience of unfathomable and brutal evil, from these types of events and many others that would later be seen in the world, and along with it the dramatic confirmation of the insufficiency of human progress - be it technological, economic, cultural, and even religious - to prevent and counteract them, not only leads one to think that the Nietzschean aphorism of the death of God has begun to acquire from thereafter a harsh empirical reality, as the final triumph of nihilism and absurdity, and not only leads one to abandon faith in one's own humanity or, what is worse, to conclude that in this humanity and in its idea of progress the machinery and the propitious instruments for the annihilation of everything human

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308 Thus, for example, T. W. Tilley, *op. cit.*, 5, who openly maintains that theodicy as a theological exercise must be abandoned, since it tends both to obscure evil and to marginalize the agents of reconciliation of that evil, with the result not only of not solving the problem of evil, but creating new evils. Much more radical seems to me A. Plantinga, who claims that theodicy, in its effort to explain the reasons why God would allow evil, not only results in a petulant attempt, but also one that is superficial, shallow, and even frivolous. See, *Epistemic Probability and Evil*, in K. J. Clark (ed), *Our Knowledge of God* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1942), 40. In this sense, and as we have already seen, the believer can only aspire, according to Plantinga, to establish a defense of theism, consisting of demonstrating through rational discourse, and that against the objections of the atheist, that this one does not have any logical reason to reject the postulate of the existence of God given the evil in the world.
and creational would be contained, but, furthermore, and as a consequence of all that, the inadmissible possibility of reconciliation with radical evil and pointless suffering.

Not in vain, the existentialist literature of the last century - and we think here of that distinguished French existentialist thinker, Camus - has been able to refer to the myth of Sisyphus as the tragic destiny of the human being faced with the reality of suffering, evil and the absurdity of life, from which, despite all his efforts, he cannot escape. According to Camus, the human being is in a world that in its deepest essence reveals that it is not good, with neither justice nor harmony having the final word, but rather nothingness and absurdity. Of course, a person can use all their efforts and resources to assign to this world some margin of meaning or purpose, trying to ignore that feeling of discomfort and the banality that fills him, but at the end of all this effort Sisyphus knows that as soon as he believes he can achieve that peak, then life, the world, and the mundane will end up showing themselves as they are, and all his efforts will roll down the slope. Faced with this inescapable destiny and reality, honesty leads us to consider (the French thinker will say) that: "There is only one philosophically serious problem: that of suicide."

Because of this, an impossibility of theodicy which certainly makes all efforts to justify suffering and evil in the light of a superior harmony, a transcendent purpose, the formation of character, the development of the human spirit, or whatever it may be - whether articulated from popular or academic theodicy, religious or secular, practical or theoretical - is a task that, in the best of cases, is vain and absurd and, at worst, pathetic and obscene. Efforts at justification, however, constitute the great and recurrent, hidden or declared, temptation – whether conscious or latent - to trivialize such evil and tempestuous realities in their eagerness to redeem the irredeemable, to explain the inexplicable, to smooth the self-destructive impulses that underlie the most intimate sphere of human nature and that threaten at any moment to re-emerge and burst. These efforts are consistent with the longed-for aspiration, sustained already by Kant, and which will be openly challenged by Levinas with his proposal of the "transcendence of evil:" that evil, even radical evil, is susceptible to synthesis and, therefore to conceptualizing and categorizing, in other words, to understanding. And, all that, of course, insofar as all these theodicycal efforts appeal in some way or another to the narrative of a "happy ending," be it in the here and now of concrete history or in an eschatological dimension or supramundane.

But, then, if we accept this shocking diagnosis, which we could not judge as phantasmagorical or exaggerated, how much more, as has already been said, if one takes into account the plethora of sinister and devastating events that have been happening since the end of the past century until the present - not including the multitude of evils and suffering that have made up human history - and with it the confirmation of emptiness and ethical nihilism, prefigured by Nietzsche, and sadly verified by authors like Levinas and Jonas, then what would be the point of continuing to insist on a theodicy in perspective of the theology of the cross in response to the mystery of human suffering and evil in the world? Will it not be that the mere fact of anticipating a response is already an attempt to explain these realities and, consequently, an effort to reconcile them in the light of a meta-narrative of a "happy ending" that is typical of the Christian faith? Or, on the contrary - and this, of course, must be said in the same way: Is not this dramatic diagnosis, which is only possible to disregard or despise at the risk of repeating the discourse of the Volterian Pangloss or of living in a parallel world, the historical conjuncture, the propitious kairós, the irreplaceable instance to arrive not at the final conclusion of the futility of theodicy itself as a theological exercise, but with respect to the insufficiency of the terms in which it has been understood, that is, using the terminology of Kierkegaard, in the terms of Either/Or, of theodicy with theoretical emphasis or theodicy with practical emphasis, of transcendent or unmanned character or, in the words of Adolphe Gesché, in the form of "God in himself or for himself," or of the "God-for us, for the human being," and a fortiori, in the need to transform it, re-found it, understand it in a radically different way, even more so when the same has proven to have absolutely failed both in its purpose to save God and, at the same time, the human being from the sufferings and evils that weigh on history and, why not, on himself too?

3.1 Beyond the practical and theoretical dimension

3.1.1 The aporism of the theoretical dimension

In effect, the traditional efforts of theodicy have failed, as Gesché himself points out, in its dual theodicycal function, namely as a theodicy project as such, but in the same way, and in a derivative - although not less crucial – way as an anthropodicy program, since, as Bultmann will

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311 Ibid., 182.
say, all talk of God is also talk of man. It has failed as a theodicy project because they have not been able to discern that this God-scheme, this God of the prepositional formulation or even this God that seems to be evident through the mere observation of history – inheritance, to a large extent, of the first modernity and rational discourse; as well as the schemes of natural theology and historicism, whether the old or modern schemes, which they are still trying to defend and legitimate in light of all this “excess of evil” and useless suffering – has already left behind its time of glory and popularity, and it says little or nothing to the human being of today who lives immersed in the radical antagonism between pluralism and unique thought, in the deep split between the dimension of identity and relevance, and this in practically all areas of life. As an anthropodicy program it fails because it also ignores the mortal agony in which the human being finds tension, faced with harrowing autonomy and immanent solitude in face of the challenge of both the experience of human suffering as the creational evil.

312 “If theology is not to speculate about God, if it is not to speak about God – not the concept of God but of the real God – then in speaking of God theology must at the same time speak of man.” The Significance of ‘Dialectical Theology’ for the Scientific Study of the New Testament in, Faith and Understanding I, 148.

313 What we must recall in the face of such theodicies in light of the theology of the cross, is that the clues or signs of God that according to them would reveal his existence in nature, in intellectual reflection or in history itself, are not as explicit or obvious as they suppose. It is about, of course, rational arguments that, ultimately, as Luther will say in Thesis 19 of his Heidelberg Disputation, try to apprehend the invisible things of God through the created. Of course, we will not discover just now that the theodical efforts of Pannenberg, with his theology of history, constitute a huge contribution to theological thought and to the understanding of revelation as history; or the very efforts of R. Swinburne, with his modern natural theology, serve in some way the purpose of sustaining that the affirmation of the postulate of the existence of God does not result intrinsically contradictory or antagonistic a priori to logic and science. However, and with all the suggestiveness of such schemes, it must be recognized that they evidently have no more than that – a suggestive but not definitive character – since only the cross of the Crucified manifests the definitive revelation of God. It is there and only there where God wants to be found and where also the evils and suffering that weigh on this humanity and creation find their reason, their judgment, but also their opportunity for redemption. And this, only through faith, as a gift of God and not a natural human quality and, as Luther will emphasize, sub contrario specie. In this sense, any theodicy effort that presumes to be a definitive answer and not only a suggestive contribution, seeking for it paths of support and certainties beyond the revelation of God on the cross of the Crucified or even not taking it into account, that is, trying to apprehend the invisible of God through the created, can only be seen as the everlasting insistence of the human being fallen in the path of the theology of glory and, therefore, in the tireless mania of his heart for the sake of construction of idols, although these are covered with the cloak of progress, tradition, erudition or piety.

314 We take the term "excess of evil" from the excellent philosophical treatment of the book of Job by Philippe Nemo, Job y el exceso del mal (Madrid: Caparrós, 1995), celebrated by both Gesché and Levinas.
In this sense, it is important to ask: Can we not, then, assume the limitations of traditional theodicies, not so much, as we have already warned, in relation to the questions that it has historically posed - constitutive as they are of all legitimate theodicy, that is, basically, the relationship between, on the one hand, the omnipotent and morally perfect God, and the existence of human suffering and evil in the world, on the other - but rather with regard to whether the answers that it has derived from them will finally direct not only to the foundation of a new understanding of the theodicy discourse, its epistemology, methodology, its scope, its objective, but, even more, to the understanding of a completely different God to this day defended by this? Perhaps it will direct us to the God crucified on a tree, foolishness for this world and for those who are lost, but God’s power of salvation for the one who believes and, all this, with decisive consequences for a new rethinking of the problem of human suffering in the light of this clearly disconcerting God that now emerges.

3.1.2 The aporism of the practical dimension

It was certainly to be expected, then, that once we recognized the gaps in such traditional theodicies – or, rather, the limitations, as no effort of theodicy could ever constitute a definitive and complete program – new steps were made possible that are capable of correcting the omissions of the previous schemes. In this way, and at the impulse of the publication of Moltmann’s *The Crucified God* (and to a no lesser degree of the political theologies of J.B. Metz and the same Moltmann) a pleiad of productions began to highlight the practical emphases of the theodicy, and by the practical we understand, fundamentally, the structural dimension: the political, social and even economic dimensions of life. This is precisely the dimension that is so often ignored by conventional theodicies which are concerned almost exclusively with the rational, speculative, and theoretical emphases of the discourse.

It would be difficult for anyone to deny the enormous value that this new shift represented in the approach of theodicies with all its theological work and the illumination of the structural dimension of life, wherein human beings concretely exist and are developed; and also for its denunciation of the networks of oppression and dehumanization imposed on them. However, and once again emphasizing that which we already warned about, that no theodicy scheme could be exempt from showing certain cracks and deviations – and even less could it aspire to a definitive character insofar as all efforts of theodicy, like all theological work, are a human reflection on the Word, its theological systematizations in time, as a history of Christian thought and, all that,
in constant dialogue and confrontation with the evolution of human history and the challenges and questions of each epoch – very soon the theodicies with emphasis on the practical will also show notorious weaknesses and shortcomings.

The first is the constant temptation to reduce faith to its purely horizontal movement, forgetting the irreplaceable vertical dimension that is unquestionably needed and that, together with the horizontal, constitutes its indissoluble dialectic in form of identity and relevance; and risking not understanding faith in direct relation with the individual, the first being an inalienable object of the latter and not interchangeable by any typology of social or structural analysis. The second, as an inevitable consequence of the first, is the danger of quickly losing the concrete individual, the one of flesh and blood, insofar as this and its sorrows seem to be diluted in mere "ideal types," avoiding almost completely the responsibility of these same concrete individuals in the construction and perpetuation of those same networks of oppression and social disintegration that beset them. It was about, in effect, a new theological and theodicycal shift, as H. Küng had already pointed out in the specific case of The Crucified God of Moltmann, which emerged openly identified – and not always in a way sufficiently capable of avoiding the replacement of an old ideology simply by a new one – with the great metanarratives of post-Second World War socialism.

This socialism, in its most extreme form, would soon experience the failure of its unique thinking project at a practically global level, and the debacle of its utopias which were not always installed – or rather, were never installed – as the idea (or by the vote) of its citizenry, but more often by means of coercion and force. Among some of these, we could not fail to mention, was the idea that access to full freedom and social development is achieved through the struggle of social classes, the conviction that after this struggle the new man would finally break in. This was a socialism that - in view of the disaster of its program at a political, economic, social level, especially in Eastern Europe and in almost all places in the Third World and, therefore, already an orphan of revolution - began quickly to shake off the dust of its defeat and turn to other causes in which it could find a new fertile ground on which to reboot such a void of radical ideology: the banner of palestinianism, indigenism, the demonization of Israel and the United States, and in

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315 Thus, for example, H. Küng wonders about the practical consequences of this work: "if theology does not tend too lightly to socialism." Las religiones como pregunta a la teología de la cruz, in Chr. Duquoc; K. Rahner, J. Moltmann; W. Kasper, H. Küng, Teología de la cruz, 232.
general, everything that seems to be opposed to the traditional, the conventional, the elitist, and the Western. It is true that such new theodicies with emphasis on the dimension of the practical which emerged in solidarity with this great impulse of structural demands characteristic of the socialism of the time illuminated, as we have said, aspects of human life long ignored by the traditional work of theology. Nevertheless – and as crucial as these illuminations are – the truth is that it tended (and still continues to tend) very lightly in most cases to the slight idealization, if not the sacralization of figures such as the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, etc., under a rather ideological and literary gaze, which sometimes seemed to touch very closely the slogan of the class struggle already mentioned, and that it further tended to a dangerously dichotomous and polarized – if not Manichean – construction of social reality: Poor-rich; bourgeoisie-proletariat; dominant science-regional thinking; oppressor-oppressed, etc.

In consequence, there is a tendency to think and write about a single type of victim, a single class of oppressor, about one form of suffering. In this way, the poor - and only to mention perhaps the most emblematic figure in this type of theodicy - is already almost a direct object of salvation and of special favour with God, for the simple fact of being poor. Thus, for example, Jon Sobrino could speak of the poor as "the instance that gives the most fundamental direction of faith and where it finds its most decisive place," and consequently virtually suggests, as one of his publications says, extra pauperes nulla salus. For this reason, and with total clarity, Spanish Protestant theologian Juan Grau asks: if we take this line of reasoning seriously, with respect to the poor automatically participating in salvation under that condition, what would be the point, then, of fighting to overcome poverty if such a struggle would ultimately mean removing the basis of their salvation? Besides this, as I have asked previously: Would this not make superfluous the only means by which the human being can be accepted before God and receive his salvation - be they rich or poor, be they from the left or from the right – that is, by means of confession and following of Jesus, the Christ? Would this not reduce biblical redemption, inalienable from the confession that Jesus is the Lord, to mere partisan politics; and biblical

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316 Quoted from Clodovis Boff, *Teología de la liberación y vuelta al fundamento* (Curitiba: Adital, 2007).
317 This is a collection of essays published under the peculiar title of: *Fuera de los pobres no hay salvación. Pequeños ensayos utópico-proféticos* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007).
ecclesiology, also founded in Christ and in the faith of the apostles, to nothing more than the universal collective of those who participate in the struggle for structural transformation?

Nor was it considered sufficiently – perhaps due to a “positive” anthropological vision of the human being that is too polarized and idealized – that this same "poor" one, exploited and oppressed and often subjected to poor working conditions possibly by a transnational company, could develop likewise into a potential oppressor and exploiter in relation to its smaller circles, its subordinates, its home, its neighbours. It must be recognized, though, that evil is never an action that, having originated in a decision within the individual sphere, maintains a radius of impact only in the personal dimension, but that it always has a relational dynamic that far transcends the sphere of the one who chooses it, and that this consequently does nothing but increase the already enormous amount of evil already shaking the world. As Etty Hillesum has expressed clearly: “Every bit of hate we add to the surfeit of hate there already is, renders this world more inhospitable and uninhabitable.”

Quite rightly P. Ricoeur has emphasized that evil is always a decision that directly or indirectly affects the relational structure of another, and the disastrous effects of which can transcend the person affected by that evil act, and even become entrenched in time, often giving place to true historical alienations responsible in good part for the evils and sufferings that touch a society. In this sense, there is no doubt that such historical alienations are clearly perfectible of liberation, and constitute for this reason the most important ethical challenge of all government and administration.

True as that all may be, there is a dimension of evil much more rooted and entrenched in the human being, which is its alienation from the Creator and, from there, from himself and from the whole created order. We could define this alienation simply as sin, from which there is no possibility of liberation, either through the human being’s own internal faculties - spiritual or intellectual - or through his political and social constructs of reparation, but only from the initiative and resources provided by the Creator himself, namely, the cross of the Crucified, because in this is laid bare all the demonic rebellion that underlies the alienation, but also its

320 “Doing evil is in fact always doing wrong to another, making another suffer, whether directly or indirectly. In its relational -dialogical- structure, evil committed by one is replicated in the evil undergone by another. … “Who knows whether, in one way or another, all sin is not the punishment of a personal or collective fault, known or unknown?”*. *Op. cit.*, 37 and 38.
judgment and condemnation, and at the same time the costly grace of God that came at the price of the blood of his son, the only source of liberation from that great split. Therefore, we can only conclude that every human being, poor or not, participates in this same condition of judgment and alienation and needs, of course, the one sufficient Reconciler before the Creator. Consequently, everything else that is added to this à propos that extra pauperes nulla salus, mentioned in the previous page, is nothing more than lyricism and poetry, although often not exempt, if the truth be told, from dividends and acclaim.

Finally, the question arose whether the designation of such a theodicy with the qualification of "practical" does not also fall into a kind of presumption of superiority, if not arrogance, with respect to traditional theodicy being occupied, according to these, with matters of little relevance for human societies and the vulnerable sectors within them, such as, for example, the interest in rational argumentation, in speculative and metaphysical thinking, that is to say, in the theoretical and academic emphases of this exercise, leading to understand that only they would offer a real commitment to entering personally into the concrete structural realities of life, namely, those places where the liberation of human beings from the networks of oppression that alienate and dehumanize them is decided and that are consequently the real cause of the sufferings and evils of this world. But again it must be said that in all this was seen a no lesser contradiction, in the sense - as already noted by Costa Rican historian Arturo Piedra - of pretending to be, on the one hand, a practical, liberating discourse specifically directed toward the oppressed and the suffering, but, on the other hand, elaborating a discourse so complex from the perspective of sociological theory that, in fact, only a few were capable of understanding it, particularly those who were already fully inserted in that same sociological technicality. And, however, in spite of the contradictions described above, it tended to believe that by the simple fact of having articulated a discourse that is "practical," "relevant," "committed," and "combative" with respect to the structural dimension of life it would produce practically, and by the power of its solo verbo, the solutions and transformations required to combat the suffering and the evils of the less favored societies, when, in fact, that had more to do with rhetoric than with empirical reality.

But, perhaps, is this not just offering another new utopia, consistent with the tendency to confuse - as José Grau\(^{322}\) has already warned - the analysis with the solutions, and likewise not to perceive that the fact that such an analysis – basically inserted into the Marxist tradition or in its epigones currents - could prove relatively effective for diagnosing a large part of the structural causes that originate the oppressive and alienating elements of a society does not mean that it offers all the necessary answers, especially in any kind of direct or automatic way? Has it not been warned -or was the warning not wanted- that this same analysis was not free from obvious internal contradictions, polarizing visions of social reality, and even a message that is opposed to the horizon of the Christian faith? Did it not take note, also, that this sophisticated sociologism and entrenchment in the common points of leftist post World War II discourse –devoid of biblical and theological background– often ended up turning such theodicycal discourse merely into a matter of good literary success and just a "thing" - to quote the opportune words of Clodovis Boff – rather than of academics,\(^{323}\) with the additional aggravation of explicitly pretending to be (and unlike those theodicies with theoretical emphasis syndicated by themselves as decontextualized and speculative approaches to theodicy) a theological exercise, theodicy committed to the praxis of transformation, the moral conscience of theology? Certainly it is not intended with these few observations to detract from their fair value or from the importance of theodicy with practical emphases, but rather to recognize that even these possess their contradictory and dissonant elements, to the extent that no theodicy of theology could be the definitive word, but the humble reflections of believers around that hurtful reality of human suffering and the evils of this world, based on their faith in the Creator, who likewise has become flesh, finitude, pain, abandonment, even death on the wood of the cross, without being held back by this reign of nothingness and nonsense, but defeating it by means of the resurrection.

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\(^{323}\) *Cómo veo la teología latinoamericana 30 años después*, in *Panorama de la teología latinoamericana* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 2001), 164.
3.1.3 The correct dialectic between the theoretical and practical dimension of a theodicy articulated from the *theologia crucis*

Indeed, only from this God who has been pleased to reveal himself in the Crucified and whose message is the saving madness of the cross it is possible, in our opinion, to take up the discredited and (for many) obsolete exercise of theodicy after that dead-end which for a long time has maintained a split between the theoretical and practical approaches, between rational and speculative argumentation, and between sociological and empirical analysis. As we have sufficiently warned, however, these demarcations are not always strictly defined and the interchange between dimensions is more frequent than often recognized. In this regard, the treatise on the theology of the cross, as already was initiated by Luther and whose contents are clearly irreplaceable for all accurate theological talk of the cross, must incorporate all the theoretical framework of research and findings emanating from New Testament studies – especially the historical Jesus which, of course, was unknown in the time of the Reformer – if it really aims to overcome the dichotomy between the theoretical and the practical and therefore maintain the vigorous and perennial message contained in the cross, and likewise the wealth of hope contained in the Old Testament tradition, particularly in the figure of the Suffering Servant, whose consummation and fulfillment finds its climax in the historical person of Jesus, and him crucified. We speak here of the incorporation of a "theoretical framework" in a clearly relative sense, because the effects of all this material could have a decisively practical impact on the believer, by illuminating a little more all the depth of meaning found in that cross, as well as Jesus' own understanding before it, against the backdrop of a hope and faith inserted into the most sensitive and longed for hope of Israel: “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Lk. 24, 26-27). On the other hand, this framework of "theoretical" information resulting from the New Testament investigation, the historical Jesus, and the background of traditions and longings of the Old Testament, would safeguard *theologia crucis* from simply transforming itself into a mere theological monument, valuable as a landmark of the Christian thought, perhaps Lutheran, but turned into nothing more than a closed, unalterable, untouchable tokenism, not susceptible, therefore, to new illumination, expansion, deepening, or even correction of its contents in light of the historical study of Jesus and the hope of Israel.
It is true that from a purely theoretical dimension of a theodicy articulated from the theology of the cross – one which has no dimension of experience - it is not possible to develop, as it were, a general theory of pain, not only because evil in its radical state, in its overflow, in its condition of excess produces a kind of suffering and rupture that is not possible to categorize, explain, justify, or much less reconcile by theorizing, but also because, although pain has a common background across the human condition, it is also a unique and unrepeatable experience that does not allow for schematization. However, as G. Greshake has expressed, it must also be recognized that the experience of pain is a reality that reaches the very center of being and the human person, without prejudice to its resistance to schematization, which also includes, of course, his intellect and his capacity to reflect around this, to elaborate it, to integrate it, to find a “why,” as Nietzsche has said, to endure its “how,” or as V. Frankl has expressed it, a framework of meaning to be able to cope with it and not be devastated by it.

Now, if we recognize the legitimate ability of reason to address from its particular presuppositions or functions the experience of human suffering and evil, as a fundamental structure of human nature, without the pretension, of course, of providing definitive answers, why should we then deny the work of theology, as a function of human understanding - though specifically around revelation, the history of thought that has emerged from that revelation, and its philosophical mediations, together with its confrontation with human life in all its historical and social dimensions – the right likewise to address and reflect on the problems of evil and human suffering? Even more, has not such theological work much more to say about the evil and suffering that weighs on this world than any other modality or current of thought, precisely because its source of reflection – the revelation of God – whose maxim and final expression is the crucified Christ, has been par excellence: “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 55, 3)? But, even, is not this revelation in its historical development – in as much as it is inseparable from the history of a people with a vivid testimony of suffering, oppression, humiliation, persecution, defamation, and of a tireless fight to survive in the midst of so many enemies who eagerly have sought its destruction and disappearance, even, if you will, to this day! - more than enough proof that the evil and the suffering that weighs on this world and on humanity is not in any way unknown to it, and can, therefore, with all propriety, be able to refer

324 ¿Por qué el Dios del amor permite que suframos? (Salamanca: Sígueme, 2014), 30.
to that, to approach it and to announce at the same time that in the light of the hope held by this same people, that this must not be the end?

In what relates to the "practical" dimension of the theology of the cross and from there to its theodicy, there is no doubt that the task that is imposed here is to develop all its structural implications not foreseen by the Reformer, particularly those that political and liberationist approaches have known and extracted. However, and this once again we must repeat it, it would be a very serious error to suppose that in the single emphasis - necessary or even urgent of these implications - everything that should be said about the practical dimension of the theology of cross would be discoverd. We emphasize this, not only because such theologies of the cross and their respective theodicies syndicated with practical emphasis tend repeatedly to delve into such an intricate and sophisticated deconstructionist and sociological technicality, that it is very difficult to discern what would be here the practical substrate of their discourse, or why such political, social, and cultural implications are not always exempt from assuming a clear ideological-partisan slant to which is then pretended to be baptized with the label of "theology of the cross;" but because without ignoring or underestimating the importance of such connotations in the structural sphere of life, the truth is that in its deepest essence the absolute and decisively practical character of the theology of the cross in relation to the human being – which is consequently not transferable or mediated by any theorization, to extent that it has to do with his eternal destiny – is to be found in the judgment against the sin of the world, against the rebellion of the human being to the original project of God's life, and his incombustible obstinacy to build his own paths of independence and realization, conducive all of them finally to the construction of the earthly city and his own self-divination. It resides, besides, in the declaration by means of the law of the split condition in which the human being finds himself with respect to his Creator, with himself and with respect to all his vital relationships and, consequently, and the inability to achieve by his own resources their redemption, either through rational capacities, spiritual sensitivity or the dream of cooperation with the saving grace of God, in other words, through the path of theologia gloriae.

And yet, the decisive practicality of this treaty could not reach its full purpose, in the manner of dialectic between law and gospel (the latter always surpassing the former) if it were not also an announcement that in the crucified Christ God has decided to reveal himself to the human being precisely in his abandonment, in his rejection, in his dispossession and vulnerability, in all those
things that no one would look at and conclude: Here is the divinity; in a nutshell, in that which still today is madness and foolishness for this world, that is, the cross. Indeed, there, on the cross of the Crucified, God announces to the human being that his grace has returned to reconstruct the only path that can lead to Him, the only source of life and eternal hope, and that humanity destroyed by means of their own rebellion and sin. He communicates likewise that, through his resurrection, life with the terrible sensation that it is not what it should be, along with those stormy "emissaries of death" that in the midst of it all cast their inopportune shadows – tears, suffering, injustice, the very deterioration of life, etc. – and mockingly whisper in his ear that no matter how much he tries to lengthen life or make it more bearable, the appointment with it – death, be it sooner or later – will be unavoidable; in spite of everything, this will not be the kingdom that prevails forever. Therefore, in the face of the harsh reality of sorrows and sufferings and of those terrifying emissaries of anticipated death which make life in this world overwhelming, if not even sometimes intolerable, the believer well knows in the light of the resurrection of Jesus, and only in the light of this event which is historical and eschatological at the same time, that neither the pusillanimous resignation to these evils nor the anticipated escape of them through the abrupt end of life by means of the terrible decision of suicide, as Camus proposed, are the only philosophically and existentially serious answers, but that there is a sure way through faith in God who can call from death to life and from what is not to what is (Ro. 4, 7), and that he has promised that the sufferings of the present time cannot be compared with the glory that must be revealed (Ro. 8, 18).

3.2 A God overcome by pain or capable of defeating?

But, then, what can we conclude from this acrimonious digression between the dimension of the theoretical and the practical that seems to characterize more than ever the current efforts of theodicy? We have already said that any Kierkegaardian option to the way of Either/Or seems simply artificial, if not perhaps even a matter of marketing strategy. Indeed, both dimensions, far from excluding one another, constitute the indissoluble dialectic of the treatise on the theology of the cross and its response to the fallen, lost, split, suffering human condition which is in need of, by that very fact, divine redemption. A theodicy that presumes to be able to resolve the tension between, on the one hand, evil and human suffering, and confession in an omnipotent and morally perfect God, on the other, based only on rational categories, but with total independence from the Crucified and its cross, would make such torments a mere mental abstraction, a
formulation practically emptied of incarnation and historicity, capable of being reconciled solely in that framework of intellectual speculation, thus converting the God who strives to justify, in light of the terrible overflowing of pains and hardships happened in this world, into an impersonal deity, if not, plain and simple, into a monster or the Satan himself.

Perhaps, this is the reason why many current theodicies, particularly those that strive to emphasize the practical aspects of this discourse, prefer to opt for abandoning the omnipotent character of God in order to safeguard his goodness and love, insomuch as confession in an omnipotent and at the same time compassionate divinity, would not be compatible with the overflowing of so much suffering and evil that has weighed down this fallen humanity since its origins. We have already seen that this has been the option assumed by most Jewish philosophers or thinkers after the Holocaust, such as Hans Jonas with his alienated God; or Etty Hillesum with her impotent God, himself in need of human help; or lately with The Crucified God of Moltmann, and the whole series of later publications inspired by this line of Moltmannian thought, openly highlighting the passibilism of God the Father. Even, the same option can be seen also, although from a non-academic treatment, in Rabbi Harold S. Kushner's best-selling booklet, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*,\(^{325}\) in which, according to his particular interpretation of the book of Job, he prefers to choose with the biblical writing between a good God who is not totally powerful to an almighty God who is not completely good. There is still left open, of course, the question based on this option, both in its academic and popular modalities, about what guarantees could a God who is absolutely overwhelmed by alienation and pain offer of finally being able to defeat evil or suffering, or to regain control over creation and its laws at the time it deems appropriate, having abandoned omnipotence.

In this regard, we should pay more attention, it seems to me, to that line of research suggested by that recent group of Catholic theologians, among whom we should mention, especially, Thomas G. Weinandy, with his wriiting, *Does God Suffer?*, and Paul Gavrilyuk, with his work, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*,\(^{326}\) who have clearly put in question the practically official axiom, and today with more promotion and popularity than ever, that from the second century onwards, Christian theology would have succumbed completely to


the influence of Hellenistic philosophy and, in consequently, it would have replaced to loving God and capable of experiencing emotions of the Scriptures, by the impassive, unchanging and apathetic God of Hellenism. According to Weinandy and Gavrilyuk, on the one hand, the concept of the impassibility in Hellenistic philosophy has been misinterpreted, as, on the other, it has been slightly concluded that all patristic authors have made it a fundamental principle, incorporating it into their thinking practically without subjecting it to any critical margin of thought. We speak here, of course, of that theory, if not practically of a dogma, known generally with the name of passibilism that, as it is known, got to acquire official recognition by means of the thesis of the great historian of the church and Christian dogma, Adolf von Harnack, according to which Christian theology after the second century has been nothing more than the growing Hellenization process of its postulates, a process in which the biblical God and the Hebrew ways of thinking, have been replaced by the God of Greek philosophy and his profound dualism.\footnote{History of Dogma I (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 227ss; What is Christianity? (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1986), 207ss.} But such a reading, as has already been said, of great acceptance by much of current theology: is it entirely correct or is it really an almost caricatural exaggeration?

In his very good study previously mentioned, Paul Gavrilyuk\footnote{Op. cit., 18ss. According to P. Gavrilyuk, such erroneous position and accusation that he defines as: “The Theory of the Theology’s Fall into Hellenistic Philosophy”, it would consist of the following points: 1) Divine impassibility is an attribute of God in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy 2) Divine impassibility was adopted by the early Fathers uncritically from the philosophers. 3) Divine impassibility does not leave room for any sound account of divine emotions and divine involvement in history, as attested in the Bible. 4) Divine impassibility is incompatible with the revelation of the suffering God in Jesus Christ. 5) The latter fact was recognized by a minority group of theologians who affirmed that God is passible, going against the majority opinion. Ibid., 176.} openly rebuts the position that the parents of the church had adopted entirely and without any analytical criterion the doctrine of Greek impassivity, and at the same time he holds that such a doctrine of the Impassibility does not even appear in Hellenistic philosophy as a completely homogeneous block, but rather it accounts for the particular nuances of each philosophical school. In conclusion, according to P. Gavrilyuk,\footnote{Ibid., 35s.} the idea that the Fathers of the Church, in the midst of all this diversity of schools and nuances regarding the doctrine of divine impassibility in Hellenistic philosophy, had only two alternatives to choose from, or either the God full of emotions of the Bible or the apathetic God of the Hellenistic philosophers, constitutes in reality a grave error.
Consequently, we may well warn how disjointed these theological tendencies are that present the process of the formation of Christian theology from the second century until well into the twentieth century as the deep and gradual detachment from the biblical-Hebrew thought form – with its God that breaks into the history of humanity, relates to creation, and is capable of experiencing emotions – in order to impose in its place an *apathic* and distant God of Hellenistic philosophy. In line with all the above, it would be impossible, then, to sustain the novel idea that the alienation of the Son has not affected the other persons of the trinity, because one could even say that the act of creation has already been a certain voluntary form of self-alienation from God long before the crucifixion of Jesus, in the sense of putting a different one before him and allowing himself to be affected by that other and that certain margin of freedom that he himself has conferred on it, as already suggested by the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas, and that Moltmann, at present, in a highly creative and suggestive way - although not always with the greatest biblical sustenance, nor free to incur in passages in which the delimitation between Creator and creation seems rather diffuse, opening thus the door to pantheistic shades - has led to its final conclusions, understanding the creation already as kenosis, such as can be seen in his work, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* and particularly in his contribution, *God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World*, in the text about this emerging theological theme edited by J. Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love. Creation as Kenosis*. It does mean, however - and this must be emphasized strongly - that the alienation and death of the Son has affected the Father in a different way or, in a broader sense, that the suffering that we can attribute it to God possesses very different characteristics than the suffering that we can attribute to humanity.

In this sense, we can point out the following: God has sent his Son to the world who has fully assumed the condition of the creature, experiencing with this an alienation of his whole being and not only of his human nature, so that we can effectively speak here of a real incarnation and not only of docetic attire. It is an alienation that not even Luther, according to his time, was able to grant, in spite of all his important advances in Christology, since it would have been unthinkable for him that Christ, the Son of God, would empty himself of all his divine attributes. He has also sent his Spirit - who by this has also experienced his own alienation - to fill his Son

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with his presence (Lk. 4, 18) and become the impeller and guarantor of his mission (Mk. 1, 12); as a guide (Jn. 14, 26) and internal testimony in the believer about the truth of God (Jn. 16, 13), and that this God is also, and in an adoptive sense, his Abba Father (Gal. 4:6); and he has sent him into creation, already separated and alienated, to preserve it, renew it (Wis. 1, 7; Ps. 104, 30), and not leave it in complete abandonment. But, also, God has sent his Spirit to convict the world of its sin, which consists of not believing, but rather rejecting the Son of God (Jn. 16, 8), and perhaps also to stop the hidden force of iniquity that acts in this world until he himself be withdrawn from the midst of this one (2 Theses 2, 7).

Obviously, given this intimate unity between the Father, the Spirit and the Son, there is no doubt that the death of the latter has deeply affected the remaining persons of the trinity, so that it can be affirmed, and in a derivative sense, that the Father has also suffered and died with the Son, as the hymn to which we have alluded already says: *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid*. But, in the same way, it is necessary to warn that in the alienation and death of the Son, the Father has not been overwhelmed or overcome by it, so that his omnipotence has been suspended or diminished by the depth of this pain, otherwise, as we have said, how could he have carried out our redemption and at the same time be a source of hope and certainty that the reign of evil, of suffering, of nonsense, in other words, of death, will not have the definitive word? Looking at the things under these implications, it is clearly adequate, then, Paul Gavrilyuk's judgment\(^{332}\) that the idea of God's suffering being constitutive of his nature, one more attribute, that is, a matter of never ending, constitutes in reality an absurd position, if not immoral, because if this divine pain becomes interminable and, consequently, overcomes him, brings him under submission, that would serve only to perpetuate misery and even worse eternalize evil. More serious still, if God's internal suffering were part of his essence, to the detriment of his omnipotence, not only would that make it impossible to guarantee our forgiveness, our redemption and the consummation of all things; not only would it make of the Redeemer someone who also is in need of his own redemption; but also, there would be nothing singularly redeeming in his suffering, the incarnation being nothing more than "a gross copy of what God has endured during all eternity."\(^{333}\) Not only this, but if God suffers and does so in the same way as humanity, continues


Gavrilyuk,\textsuperscript{334} then the assumption of human nature would have been superfluous, supposing furthermore in God the absurdity of a certain form of permanent corporeality.

Of course, we must also say, such divine sovereignty is not self-evident, as we read in the text of Heb. 2, 8; although, to tell the truth, neither is his kindness from the works of creation, as Leibniz believed. Rather, what seems to prevail here, on this earth, is the will of the god of this world and his imposition of the realm of deceit and death (2 Cor. 4, 4). Rightfully Bonhoeffer has said:

\begin{quote}
    God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Mat. 8:17 makes quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.\textsuperscript{335}
\end{quote}

It is that this - his omnipotence - is hidden from the eyes of the natural man, because it is found precisely where this one sees only weakness, stupidity, old-fashioned and useless religiosity, namely, the cross of Christ and his message of salvation, until that last day when such omnipotence becomes completely visible for all believers and unbelievers, without exception. And, nevertheless, we must equally point out that a theodicy that boasts of addressing this same hurtful reality, but from exclusively practical and empirical approaches - that is, neither metaphysical nor submitted to the traditional discourse of theology but from the transforming denunciation of all those economic and social oppression networks that originate it; or, in its place, from the critical, suspicious and combative attitude of everything that is hindrance to a society that wants to free itself of all vestiges of extemporaneous and oppressive morality, eager in to insist still on the normative and the absolute, and not to adhere to the magna carta of pluralism and diversity, as ideals of this new humanity already liberated from the tutelage of the traditional, the patriarchal, the restrictive, etc., but that in the same way, dispenses with the crucified Christ -for more, of course, the term \textit{theologia crucis} be practically an official slogan – would make of this "God" and of its "theology of the cross" nothing more than the religious-horizontal dimension of a certain political ideology, or would confuse it simply with the claims and vindications of the postmodern culture. Consequently, the only possible response from the Christian faith to all this excess of evil and suffering that plagues and bleeds humanity and the planet is that which turns to the cross of Christ and finds there not only space for the correct

\textsuperscript{334} \textit{Op. cit.}, 249.

\textsuperscript{335} \textit{Letters and Papers from Prison} (London: SCM Press, 1979), 360.
dialectic between the theoretical and practical, between identity and relevance, but the full guarantee that all suffering and evil, whose origin always goes back to the rejection of the divine project, has been in this – and only in this – already judged, condemned and overcome and, therefore, does not have to be the final destiny of the human being, because God has decided to save those who believe in him through the madness of the message of the cross (1 Co. 1, 21).

3.3 Theology of the cross and the mood of our time?

If we start from the fundamental postulate that the word of faith is never spoken in a historical vacuum, much less is it accepted by people in disconnection with their real and concrete life, we cannot avoid asking the following: What then is the particular mood of our time in which the message of the cross, its theology, must resound again? Will it be that of ethical nihilism that was described in their own flesh by those Jewish philosophers after the indescribable experience of the Holocaust, or rather that of the death of God and the eclipse of religions, prophesied by the theologians of the death of God, and which did not attract great interest beyond the small circle of North American intellectuals who formulated it? Will it be, perhaps, that of the revolutionary harangue of the class struggle and of the irredeemable dichotomy between the poor and the rich, Third World and First World, North and South, socialist workers and capitalist slave owners, fostered by the liberation theology and other left-wing theologies? It is true that beyond the moods of a certain society, culture, era, or to utilize the fortunate term of Robert. N. Bella "the habits of the heart" of these, we always deal with the same excised and fallen human being, whose incombustible tendency both yesterday and today is to make precisely this one, his heart, an untiring factory of idols, as, it is true also, which that word of the cross, in spite of its respective and necessary contextualization, but never appeasement, remains in terms of its author and its content, always the same.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that the mood of our time, particularly in light of such complex phenomena as globalization, the relativism of postmodernism, Islamic fundamentalism, just to name the presence of some of the most decisive currents of our epoch, could not be characterized simply as an era of uniformity, be it that of ethical nihilism, that of the absence of religiosity or of the class struggle or the Cold War, although, of course, certain classic and extemporaneous shadows can still be observed in such tendencies. But neither does it seem to me that the description of this time as an era of the overflow of plurality or multiple realities is
capable of unraveling and describing the true impulse that configures the mood of our epoch, pluriformity and multiplicity of realities being only a part of the manifestations of this time, perhaps, we grant it, the most notorious particularly among First World societies. Actually, it seems to me, it is about an epoch that experiences with increasing and alarming speed the disintegration of barriers against the overflow of radicalisms; that suffers the erosion of its spaces of consensus and mediation which until recently offered certain oxygenation and alternation among the irreconcilable opposites, to position itself in an increasingly entrenched and biased manner in its extremes and in the tendency of each of these to deny, underestimate and even barbarize or demonize, as appropriate, the word, worldview, and vital space of the other. It is about, in consequence, that state of mind that we could define in theological terms, as the dissolution of the necessary and well-understood dialectic between identity and relevance - impassibilism and passibilism?; transcendence and immanence?- whose most immediate effect happens to be the danger of absolutizing only one of them or, as has been pointed out by the recently deceased and prominent sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, that mood that reveals the insoluble problem between relativism and fundamentalism,336 and that in the broadest sense of its criteria, including, of course, from the political to the religious - tautology?

Regarding the religious dimension to which this state of mind refers, although recognizing, certainly, that what historical experience has shown is rather the non-possibility of some sort of aseptic separation between, on the one hand, religious experiences and affirmations, and political orientations and interests on the other, we should point out that there is currently no more privileged scenario in which to notice the radicality of this trend toward the polarization than between the evangelical faith and its diverse currents: That is, the deep gap and struggle that manifests itself between those sectors positioned around fundamentalist views of life and faith, and those others whose pre-comprehensions reveal themselves openly relativistic and pluralistic in relation to that -although, undoubtedly, we could dare to say that it is deals the same fundamentalism, only in an inverted sense- with the result of an increasingly dramatic and profound decrease in the spaces of balance and mediation. On one side, the irruption of expressions more and more fundamentalist and intemperate within evangelicalism, among which

336 In his words, such an insoluble problem would occur due to: “Fundamentalism balkanizes a society, leading either to ongoing conflict or to totalitarian coercion. Relativism undermines the moral consensus without which no society can survive.” The Many Altars of Modernity. Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age (Walter de Gruyter GmbH Berlin Boston, 2014), 15.
it is undoubtedly worth noting Neo-Pentecostalism and its explosive growth worldwide. This is a Neo-Pentecostalism that, having as its place of birth and continued reference the United States, has spread from there practically, as we have said, to the whole world; and in which we find: the promotion of the American way of life as the set of values and beliefs that would fit the type of life required by God, as the incarnation of a life determined by success, happiness, entertainment and prosperity; the adoption of the "contemporary business administrative style and the techniques of the current market," as much as to internally organize the community as to break through society; and an enthusiastic promotion of the "theodicy of happiness," turn out to be some of its most distinctive and identifiable components. On the other side is an institutionalized Protestantism, linked preferentially to the great historical currents, that has seen since the end of the last century until now a veritable stampede of its parishioners and the loss of its place of relevance in society, and that it has deemed convenient, in order not to compromise its own existence as organized religion or to see itself in the tragic obligation of transforming its temples which are increasingly abandoned by the community, if the truth be told, into places of tours, museums, or spaces simply for concerts of classical music; of making concessions with the relativist culture of postmodernism and with the agenda of the cultural left as a way of trying to reverse all that, although such a gamble, of course, has a very high cost to pay, and one could well ask if in reality, the remedy has not been worse than the disease. Certainly, we cannot go deeper here regarding all the implications contained in each of these tendencies, whose scopes are not restricted to the pure framework of the faith and the Christian church, but to that of society and all its networks. Notwithstanding that, we must still consider some questions in order to observe precisely how much the correct sense of the theology of the cross has been lost, if not

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337 It should be warned, however, that not every fundamentalist is Neo-Pentecostal, but yes, all neo-Pentecostal is fundamentalist.

338 Quoted from F. W. R. Benoit, La historia y el impacto del neo-pentecostalismo (Dallas: Obrero fiel, 2008), 11.

339 A highly recommendable work of comparison between classical Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism, and the influence of both in Latin America, is offered by the Chilean sociologist of religion, A. Mansilla, El pentecostalismo clásico y el neopentecostalismo en América Latina, Revista Fe y Pueblo, Número 18, marzo, 2011.

340 Although the term "cultural left" originally comes from the American historian and literary critic Henry Gates, there is no doubt that it has been his compatriot, the philosopher Richard Rorty, who has popularized it to the point of practically making it official nomenclature to refer to the new current left. So, for example, in his long chapter A Cultural Left of his Achieving Our Country (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 73-107 he can point out that this new left or cultural left, unlike the old reformist left, although not Marxist, characterized basically by its vocation of seriousness and lucidity, and its legislative commitment, has become rather a cultural fashion of loving of progressivism, snobbery and the countercultural pose.
perverted in the middle of this progressive and accelerated polarization manifested in both
tendencies, and how it could confront and illuminate such complications.

With respect to that second tendency or polarization and its loss of relevance, at least Christian,
and of its growing and alarming decrease of community, it is convenient to formulate here the
question that we already posed at another time and that apparently is neither correct nor popular
to insinuate within these sectors: Who, really, would like to join an ecclesiastical organization
that has stripped the faith of its transcendent content, of its irreplaceable vertical dimension, of
the recognition and affirmation of its identity, to reduce it virtually to a pure historicist
immanentism, in which the depth of the doctrine of salvation and redemption has already been
replaced by the slogan of liberation, by countercultural attitude, by extreme inclusivism and
tolerance as the true signs of the church, instead of Word and sacrament; and Christian
discipleship simply by political-partisan conscientization, the adoption of the worldview and the
cultural patterns of postmodernity, seen *a priori* themselves as absolutely redeemable by this
tendency that has already diluted faith into a mere horizontal movement? Does not the common
citizen, the man in the street, observe from the outside, that everything offered here could well be
found within the very same postmodern culture itself, or by participating in some space of
activism offered by the progressive or "cultural left," with the benefit, moreover, of not having to
make concessions to any organized religion?

Now, in the midst of this evident subordinationism from the vertical to the horizontal; from the
eager and compulsive search to be relevant at any cost, even to the detriment of the dimension of
identity; of what Bonhoeffer\(^\text{341}\) defined as the *solution of commitment*, which not only ends
 inexorably sacrificing the last for the sake of the penultimate, but openly or covertly hating the
last: is not the theology of the cross precisely the only message capable of unveiling here, that in
that program of universal piety, the one that despite resulting approved, welcomed, legitimized
by that mood of our time that elevates relativism and pluriformity as the supreme values of
humanity, insofar as such a mood does not observe in this ecclesial program any type of threat or
hindrance to its cultural project, but rather recognizes it simply as its religious modality; it hides
in reality with all its fierce resistance to the costly grace of God and the call to take the cross and
follow after the Crucified every day, denying and dying to himself, the apotheosis exaltation of

\(^{341}\) *Ethics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 129s.
the theology of glory and the incombustible pretense of being a fallen human and a sinner of cooperating, perfecting, completing through his human program the redemptive work of God, thus stripping him of his throne and subtracting from him the glory that belongs only to him? As for that second tendency and likewise polarization, which is already customary to call it as fundamentalism - although it is convenient to point out here, as we have said, that the previous tendency also ends up converging in its own form of fundamentalism, only that in that case of relativism and tolerance- and whose evident propensity is to the evident entrenchment of the identity dimension of faith, at the expense of its indispensable counterpart of relevance, of sacralizing what is come to understand here as the vertical dimension of faith, in detriment if not exclusion of its obligation of insertion into the fundamental networks of life in society, or making use again of the concepts of Bonhoeffer in his Ethics, offer only a radical solution that sacrifices the penultimate to the ultimate reality, and that judges the penultimate in the behavior of the human being nothing more than as sin and denial of the faith, abandoning, consequently, to the world, its challenges and needs, as a penultimate issue, to its fate, since only the last is the definitive word against which all the above is called to be destroyed and perish, as for of this tendency and polarization, I say, is it not, perhaps, also the theology of the cross that is the only message able to weigh in its just measure the relevant, the horizontal, in other words, the penultimate, not discarding it a priori already as the cowardly and apostate capitulation of the sacred before profane, to the extent that the cross of the Crucified has been the least religious and least sacred event in the entire history of the Christian faith and, furthermore, and citing here the happy words of Gresham Machen, “the church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.”

But, equally, is not that same theology of the cross which it refuses to see in the penultimate, the consummation of the Kingdom, the definitive word and, therefore, does not seek to redeem at all costs what in this penultimate it is clearly irredeemable, neither does not baptize as Christian what is really anti-Christian par excellence, neither sacralizes it nor canonizes it because it is precisely that, the penultimate, and precisely because everything judges and discerns in light of the Crucified One can call everything by its name, that is, calls evil, evil and good, good?

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