

Article

Jesus and the Cross-Centered Spirituality of the Reformation and Later Protestantism

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Abstract: For all the important theological and practical diversity which emerged during the sixteenth century and later, a diversity whose legacies are still present in the forms of divided Christian bodies to this day, a uniquely medieval fascination with the cross endured. The reformation movements of the sixteenth century and later Protestants developed various ascetical programs and theological perspectives which were concerned with two well-worn medieval patterns: an appropriation of Jesus's work of atonement on the cross and an internalizing of the crucified Jesus as an exemplar. Thus, if we question the kind of role Jesus played in the spirituality of the Reformation era and later Protestantism, the answer must be the cross. This cruci-centrism appears in theologies of salvation, in sermons, prayers, and hymnody, in perceptions of Christian devotional art, and in varied conceptions of the Eucharist.

Keywords: spirituality; reformation; cross; atonement

1. Introduction

Across a variety of devotional media, liturgical practice, and theological reflection in the later Middle Ages, the period not only preceding but building toward the reformations of the sixteenth century, there was an unmistakable emphasis on the crucifixion of Jesus. The interest was in the *suffering* of the God-man, namely his passion and death on the cross. There was a fixation on God the Son lowering himself into the depth of human pain and mortality. This intensely physical interest appeared in two distinct yet parallel patterns: first, an appropriation of Jesus' external work of atonement, and second, an internalizing of the crucified Jesus as an exemplar for the Christian life. For some today, this cruci-centrism may appear rather unremarkable, revealing perhaps how successful the long-term legacy of late medieval spirituality really is. However, owing to the influence of *ressourcement* theology, a twentieth-century reassessment of early Christian theology and practice, late modern Christians have begun, in an arguably more scripturally holistic fashion, to integrate into their devotional and liturgical practice Christ's Incarnation, resurrection, ascension, and promised return in glory. Themes of creation and new creation have also found their place and, thanks to a global burst in charismatic movements, practices related to the Holy Spirit are likewise gaining traction. Certainly, late medieval Christians knew these themes and engaged them and more besides, notably a rich devotional cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But none of these could rival the cross and the crucified Jesus as the chief preoccupation of the medieval Christian's heart and mind. What is striking, and indeed the concern of this essay, is how this seemingly ubiquitous spirituality of the cross and the crucified Jesus was inherited by sixteenth-century reformers and later Protestants. For all the important theological and practical diversity which emerged from the sixteenth century and later, a diversity whose legacies are still present in the forms of divided Christian bodies to this day, the central *medieval* fixation on the cross endured. To be sure, among the various reformation movements, we certainly find differing articulations, practices, and approaches. Nevertheless, the reformation movements of the sixteenth century and later Protestants developed various ascetical programs which were concerned with, again, those two well-worn medieval patterns of an appropriation of Jesus' work of atonement on the cross and



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an internalizing of the crucified Jesus as an exemplar. And thus, if we pose the focus question of this special issue of *Religions*, what was the role of Jesus within Reformation-era and later Protestant spirituality, the answer must be the cross and his crucifixion.

2. The Man of Sorrows

What are the origins of this late medieval and reformation era cruci-centrism and what were its principal manifestations in both thought and practice? One may broadly conclude that it was a combination of two factors, one intellectual and one social. We approach the intellectual one first, not because it leads to the other, but because it comes first chronologically. At the beginning of the second millennium, the church in the West was experiencing what is generally known as the Gregorian reform, a movement spear-headed by a series of highly influential popes to bring about uniform order of practice in the life of the church including clerical celibacy and a sharp distinction between clerical leadership and layfolk. As one might expect, this provoked a major rise in canon law (Cushing 2005, pp. 55–90). It is commonplace now to identify a certain litigiousness to the Christian culture of the high Middle Ages as a result of the Gregorian reforms at the turn of the millennium. This ingrained sensibility about order along with the emergence of a renewed interest in the Greek philosopher Aristotle in the succeeding eleventh and twelfth centuries led to the rise of medieval scholasticism. Scholasticism was not so much a school of theology as a series of schools each of which shared certain tendencies, chief among them was that same sensibility about rational order, hierarchy, and law.

While names like Aquinas and Scotus came later, the seminal figure among the early scholastics, especially for our concern, was Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury (d.1109). In his well-known *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm, who was originally trained in law in Italy, addressed the question of the Incarnation, why did God become a man? And the answer for Anselm, building on his exegesis of Paul's epistles, was that Christ took on flesh in order to endure the legal penalty of human sin thus appeasing God the righteous judge. The term *forensic*—from *forum*, a word denoting an ancient court of law—is often applied to this model of thinking. Anselm placed the principal work of Christ, the very reason for the Incarnation, as the discreet death of Jesus on the cross as part of a cosmic, divine legal proceeding. From this meritorious sacrifice, this meeting out of divine justice, flows reconciliation between an all-holy God and guilty humanity; thus, salvation is achieved. And, to be clear, this was an external action, one located in space and time: the sacrifice on Calvary was once and for all. While modern critics may query how the resurrection and the other aspects of God's work in Christ, like the Incarnation or ascension, fit into this articulation of Christian soteriology, e.g., to what extent, if any, does the resurrection play a role in salvation, the Anselmian emphasis was clear: the suffering and death of Christ is the main event, the engine for salvation. From this center point in high and later medieval thinking flowed not only salvation in a theological sense, but also the major expressions of Christian spirituality, devotional practice, liturgy, and the sacraments. Scholastic theologians like Peter Lombard (c.1100–1160) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) would expand on this foundation, portraying the cross as the fountainhead for the sacramental mediation of grace (St. Anselm 1998, pp. 260–356; Evans 2001, pp. 94–101).

If the first thread in the origin of this late medieval and successively reformation-era cruci-centrism was intellectual, the second thread is more societal and cultural. Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century, Europe was beset with multiple catastrophes. A period of exceedingly colder and wetter weather (a "little ice age" as some have called it) meant years and years of depleted crops and food stores. Starvation ensued. Weak, poorly fed people then faced the outbreak of the bubonic plague. Starting in 1348, the "black death" wiped out around a quarter of Europe's population. For good measure, England and France commenced the Hundred Years' War; those who had not starved or died from plague now had to face the sword. Certainly, the pre-modern cultural experience of death and dying was far more immediate than it is today, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, death defined the era. Death was everywhere and Christ, then, became the "man of sorrows",

a common motif in art, liturgical expression, and devotional materials. The lacerated, emaciated corpus nailed to the cross was on central display in worship spaces, roadside shrines, and village centers. The mass was likewise construed, both theologically and in practice, as an encounter with the bloody and agonized Jesus. There were shrines and devotions for the host itself and for the holy blood. The “mass of St. Gregory”, a literary and artistic trope, claimed that the sixth-century Pope Gregory the Great while celebrating mass had a vision of the crucified Jesus along with the implements of his passion. Similarly, mystics like Julian of Norwich (1343–c.1416) had visions of the dying Jesus who turned slowly blue and then black. Such visions could be a blessing, but for others were corrective; another repeated homiletic trope was of the doubting layperson or even cleric who had a vision of the child Jesus being stabbed at the altar, disappearing once the doubter admitted to Christ’s bodily presence in the Eucharistic elements. Perhaps most importantly the mass was understood to be a sacrificial reiteration of the crucifixion and a fresh work for human salvation. Although theologians may qualify this with the notion of an anamnestic return to Golgotha, a spiritual retrieval of the work at Calvary, the functional point of the mass remains the same: the cross was the central hinge for Christian spirituality (Kieckhefer 1987; Bynum 2007, especially pp. 86–90).

But this spiritual fixation was not simply external. The crucified Jesus was also an example to be imitated. Such an imitation was at the core of medieval monasticism; rules for monastic life, such as that developed by the fifth-century abbot Benedict of Nursia, portrayed the monk’s life as a living crucifixion. Paul’s admonition to share in Christ’s death in order to share in his resurrection (Rom. 6:5; Phil. 3:10) found fertile soil as Benedict’s model was expanded by later interpreters, most notably Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). Bernard’s order, the Cistercians, was a more stringent variation on the Benedictine legacy, allowing even the visual banquet of medieval liturgical space to die and give way to bone-white unadorned walls. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also witnessed the diffusion of the monastic cruciform life among the Modern Devout, a movement that occupied the borderland between the laity and the cloistered religious. And here again, the vocation was to take up the cross and follow. The *Imitatio Christi* is perhaps the classic example from the Modern Devout, a text compiled and edited by the Dutch Augustinian priest Thomas Kempis (c.1380–1471). Here we find Christ speaking directly to the would-be disciple, “Stop complaining! Consider my passion and that of the saints . . . It is little that you suffer in comparison.” (Lawrence 2015, pp. 100–34, 158–82; Kempis 2012, Book IV.19, p. 281).

Although this late medieval cruci-centrism, a sensibility whose parents were a forensic account of the atonement and an immediacy of human mortality, would be perpetuated by sixteenth-century reformers, there is one more element to consider before moving to the emergence of Protestantism: mysticism, an alternative and definitely minority form of medieval spirituality which stressed passivity before God and a direct, unmediated experience of the divine. One should be very clear, mysticism was not (nor today is) a systematized school of thought or practice; medieval mystics did not even call themselves “mystics”. It is a term utilized by historians. However, a theme found running through some late medieval mystics’ writings is passivity before God, that God must be the actor, often beyond words and even concepts, on the human person to bring that person into the life of God. Some mystics, like the Dominican nun Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1207–c.1282) and the Dominican friar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328), offered ways of preparing for mystical experiences but they always end with God as the active party. We will find that thread of passivity, to some extent, reappearing among sixteenth-century reformers, often in relation to God’s work on the cross (McGinn 2001, pp. 114–61).

3. Martin Luther’s Theology of the Cross

This late medieval fixation on the cross—as both external work and opportunity for personal example—was so deep that the reform movements of the sixteenth century can be understood as debates within that presumed framework. In their various re-articulations of Christian theology and practice, Protestants of differing hues never departed from this

preoccupation. Martin Luther (1483–1546) is best known for his rejection of the indulgence trade beginning with his *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, but central to his reform project was his so-called theology of the cross, i.e., that Jesus upends the expectations of the world and those who follow him must live in the light of his sufferings. Here Luther challenged the underlying co-operative view of salvation which was common (though not uniform) in fifteenth-century thought and practice. Luther thundered that humanity is saved not by our own good works but by God's gracious and unearned imputation of an external or "alien" righteousness—the merits of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross—to sinners who have absolutely no hope in themselves. And this alien righteousness is appropriated by faith alone (Forde 1997, pp. 5–22; McGrath 1990).

A "theologian of the cross" points to the work of God on behalf of sinners rather than the seemingly good works of holy men and holy women winning the favor of God. Such good works—and here Luther has a stock of examples usually from his own days in a monk's habit—are illusory given the magnitude of sin and the human inability to attain holiness; the cross, for all its ugliness and blood, is the truth. This paradox was core to Luther's reformation agenda and he delighted in the truth being hidden under its opposite: the sinner who quietly confesses is more lovely to God than the supposed saint in the spotlight; strength is in weakness; salvation comes in one's passivity before an active God; the violent death of the innocent messiah is a victory for those who do no more than trust (Paulson 2019, pp. 329–82). Luther also credited the late medieval mystical text, the *Theologia Deutsch*, for its discussion of passivity before God; he believed this was written by the fourteenth-century Dominican and disciple of Eckhart, Johannes Tauler (c.1300–1361) but that authorship is doubted by scholars today (Ozment 1980, pp. 239–44). Nevertheless, the point is that, according to Luther, one stands empty-handed before God, a theme which reverberates into Protestant theology, prayer, and hymnody to this day. We might consider here the words of "Rock of Ages", by the eighteenth-century Anglican Augustus Toplady, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling". Luther's words in a 1516 letter to one of his fellow Augustinians, a text pre-dating the *Ninety-Five Theses*, capture this directly. He writes, "Have you finally become sick and tired of your own righteousness and taken a deep breath of the righteousness of Christ . . . My dear brother, learn Christ, specifically the Crucified. Learn to sing him and in your despair at yourself to say to him 'You Lord Jesus are my righteousness; I on the other hand am your sin.'" ("Letter to George Spenlein, 1516", in (Luther 2007, pp. 3–5)). Note well that when thinking of Jesus, Luther stresses the crucifixion. While Luther does not reject any other aspect of Christ—for example, his incarnation, resurrection, ascension, and promised return in glory—the immediate point of reference is the cross. And not only is the cross at the center of Luther's theology, but it is also understood as God's external work for sinners who can only appropriate the merit of this righteous act by faith. Thus, the sacrifice of Christ is ever the free gift of God whose love is mysterious, grounded only in God's self and not in human worthiness.

While Luther was abundantly clear that the cross is God's accomplishment for us, a reconciling gift, nevertheless the cross remained paradigmatic for the Christian life. This motif, which we witnessed already in the later Middle Ages running parallel with the concept of the cross as external work of God, did not disappear in Luther's reformation project nor in later Protestantism. Here it manifests in the suffering of God's people who are conformed to Christ. While Protestant theologians are quick to qualify that this posture or condition does not itself bring salvation, Luther and other reformers did not abandon (even if they could) the disjunction between the church and the world. Luther's preferred image for the church was the poor little flock, described in Luke 12:32 as harassed and helpless. The most classic of his discussions on this subject is his sermon preached to the evangelical representatives for the Diet of Augsburg at Coburg Castle in 1530. There he affirmed that Christians must bear the cross, but they do not get to choose *which* cross, i.e., choosing which order of monks to join, which saint to venerate, or which shrine for a pilgrimage. Rather, the world and the devil give the Christian her or his crosses every day and these must be borne with cheer and hope. In other words, the world will give the

true Christian so many arduous crosses that picking an ascetical discipline seems absurd. The one who trusts in Christ will be conformed to the crucified and sufferings of Jesus as a result of his or her faith; the disjunction with the world comes naturally (“Sermon at Coburg, 1530”, in [Luther 2007](#), pp. 151–60; [Leinhard 1987](#), pp. 268–99).

4. Locating the Crucified Jesus

In September 1523, very close to the Feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross, three men destroyed a large outdoor crucifix in Stadelhoffen, a village near Zürich. One of them explained to authorities that their intention was to chop up what they perceived to be a false idol, and then to sell the wood and give the money to the poor ([Wandel 1994](#), pp. 72–77). One of the most striking ruptures of the sixteenth century was the reformation of the material landscape and the redefinition of the sacred. And here we think specifically of that most ubiquitous of medieval images, the cross and the crucified Jesus. In the 1520s, there was a burst of iconoclasm, the smashing of religious art as the locus of misdirected worship, as adoration is due to the unseen God alone. This major change in the material context of the sacred was hottest in the Swiss and South German cities. While Zürich’s authorities carried out an orderly purge, there were carnivalesque riots in Basel. Crosses and crucifixes, along with shrines and altars, were the object of violence. These physical items were condemned as voracious, idols that had consumed the financial, spiritual, emotional, and material resources of Christians who owed love and adoration to that Christ who, bearing the scars of the crucifixion, had risen from the grave and then ascended to the right hand of God the Father, no longer visible to human eyes.

While iconoclasm cropped up at various points across the century, with a notable outburst in 1566 in the low countries known as the *beeldenstorm* (“image storm”), the earliest instances of iconoclasm in the reformation era were inspired by Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), a former colleague of Luther’s at the university in the early 1520s. Luther, however, rejected this “radicalism” and insisted that much of the material context of worship, including crosses, could be retained to inspire and teach ([Heal 2005](#)). But Luther’s concerns ran deeper still. It was not merely disruption and disorder which troubled Luther but rather his suspicion of a certain dualism between spirit and matter which he discerned among not only the riotous crowds but also the emerging Reformed theologians to his south. Luther would not countenance what he perceived as a Platonic unraveling of the Incarnation, a Manichean privileging of some nebulous disembodied spirit world over God’s good creation. At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, a gathering often described as the rupture point among early Protestants, Luther drove down to the theological issues of creation, Incarnation, and embodied revelation. Responding to the Basel reformer Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531), Luther declared “I know God only as he became human, so shall I have him in no other way.” ([Eire 1986](#), p. 73). As discussed below, this theological division between the Lutheran evangelicals and the Swiss and South German Reformed would then echo through the Protestant traditions in their varying appreciations of the presence of the crucified Jesus in the Lord’s Supper. By 1535, at a public disputation in Geneva, Reformed theologians argued that the only crosses which should be tolerated are the sufferings of Christians in their lives. A French refugee to Geneva and perhaps the best-known reformer of the period after Luther himself, John Calvin (1509–1564) was a generation younger than those just discussed. But by the later 1530s and 1540s, Calvin was working out some of the implications, as he understood it, of Christ’s bodily ascension. Leading a reform program in the Swiss city of Geneva and revising several times over his monumentally influential *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (final edition in 1559), Calvin came to the axiomatic conclusion that the finite cannot contain the infinite (*finitum non est capax infiniti*) (*ibid.*, pp. 195–223, 304–10; [Joby 2007](#)). And therefore, while the sacraments might be conduits for grace, images of the cross are dangerous; they purport to contain that which cannot be contained. Christ has ascended and therefore, according to Calvin, Christians must cast their eyes to heaven where the nail-scarred Jesus pleads his meritorious death to God the Father for helpless sinners. The focus, note well, is still on the crucified

Jesus; it was his location that was under dispute. This would have enormous consequences for that centerpiece of Christian life and thought, the Lord's Supper.

5. The Presence of the Crucified Jesus

The Eucharist was the intersection of all Christian beliefs and practices not only in the Middle Ages but also in the Reformation era and beyond. Prior to the sixteenth century, the mass generated a tremendous amount of theological reflection and absorbed the day-to-day work of the clergy and the attention of whole communities. Parish churches often had multiple altars and the mass was said by multiple priests off and on through each day. Christ was understood to be present bodily and each mass was considered a fresh sacrifice, an act which could propitiate sins. It is important to distinguish between the question of how Christ is present at the Lord's Supper and the question of what is being accomplished at the Lord's Supper. It will be argued here that, across their highly eye-catching differences, Protestants of varying hues still had their attention centered on the crucifixion. And thus, the spirituality of the Reformation era and beyond remained cruci-centric (Rubin 1991, pp. 302–10; Lane 2018, pp. 9–30).

Martin Luther, for his part, was emphatic that the plain words of scripture, "this is my body" must be read in their literal sense. At the Lord's Supper, Christ promises to be present and so he is—bodily. Jesus's unambiguous words were not, "this is my spirit" nor "this represents my body". Luther argued that Christ's presence is very much like the fire in heated iron (*sicut ignis in ferro*), a patristic description. While it is not the case, Luther argued, that the bread and wine change their inner substance while their accidents (the appearance of bread and wine) remain the same as Thomas Aquinas had taught (i.e., transubstantiation), the Wittenberg reformer insisted that the bodily presence of Jesus Christ is present alongside the elements. Luther even used the words of an oath imposed centuries earlier on the infamous heretic Berengar of Tours (999–1088), who was forced to affirm the bodily presence: I grind Christ with my teeth. This was, as some may expect, an outworking of Luther's commitment to the joining of heaven and earth and his rejection of an arguably Platonic separation of the higher spirit from the lower matter. Yet, as Luther made this argument about the bodily presence of Christ, he was equally emphatic that the Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice made by the people to God. Rather, the Lord's Supper is a free and reconciling gift from God to the people. Again, there are two separate questions at work here. On the question of Christ's bodily presence, Luther was emphatic: Christ said this is my body, and so it is. On the question of what is happening or being accomplished, Luther was clear that the true priestly act was Christ's work on Calvary, an atoning sacrifice once and for all and not the work of clergy at altars (Luther 1962, pp. 249–359; Brewer 2017, pp. 192–225).

Although they agreed with Luther that the Eucharist is not a propitiating sacrifice, other reformers to his south offered a different answer to the question of Jesus' presence. Beginning with certain humanists, including Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) who never broke with Rome, some adopted the hermeneutical position that when Christ said "this is my body," perhaps he meant "this *signifies* my body". The Zürich reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) and others argued that this statement was no different from instances in which Jesus said "I am the gate" or "I am the vine". Zwingli, a former military chaplain, further argued that the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist are like soldier's badges for the Christian: they denote being enlisted members of the Lord's body. Zwingli's successor at Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) qualified his predecessor's position by insisting that grace—the presence of Christ—is still in some way granted to the Christian, but that this divine communication is only parallel to the reception of the bread and wine. The Genevan reformer John Calvin, however, insisted that the bread and wine are *instrumental* to the communication of the presence of Christ; these material elements are conduits for grace. Notwithstanding, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin agreed that the crucified and risen Jesus had bodily ascended to the right hand of God the Father and, unlike Luther, they taught that Christ was bodily absent. Calvin qualified that Christ is

spiritually present, a distinction which his Lutheran interlocutors chastised as smacking of the ancient Nestorian heresy, a separation of Christ's divine and human natures. The somewhat diffuse Reformed tradition which gained traction from Scotland to Hungary presented variations of Bullinger's or Calvin's thinking on the presence of Christ. The Church of England's 39 Articles, for example, specify in fully Calvinist language that Christ is given spiritually and in the early editions of the Book of Common Prayer this is expressed by a lack of specific directions (rubrics) about the bread and wine. Although in the seventeenth century, the prayer book tradition, in the hands of high churchmen, would recover certain material sensibilities about the holiness of the elements, the tradition of distinguishing spirit and matter would spread to North America among the Puritans. The cleavage between the spiritual and the material, it should also be noted, was consistent with the above-discussed Reformed antipathy to images and gave rise to the purge of liturgical space. The Reformed Christian was to lift up her heart—*sursam corda*—to the crucified Christ seated in glory in heaven rather than delight her eyes with earthly images (Calvin 1989, Book IV.17; Gerrish 1992; Lane 2018, pp. 117–38).

While Calvin taught that the spiritual presence of Christ is communicated via the material elements of bread and wine, some Christians hewed more closely to Zwingli's sharp dichotomy, believing that these ceremonies are only external signs of a higher spiritual reality. Radicals, sometimes termed Anabaptists, like Felix Manz (1498–1527) suffered and were even executed for their insistence that baptism is an outward sign of a personal commitment to the ascended Christ and that those who had been baptized as infants should be rebaptized following their conversion. In time, this Zwinglian disconnection between spirit and matter birthed movements that abandoned entirely the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist; they carried the argument to its logical conclusion that if the material signs and elements do not communicate anything then they are unnecessary. The English Quakers of the seventeenth century, who repudiated outward sacraments to seek an unmediated experience of divine presence, reflect this perspective well (Spinks 2005, pp. 31–100; George 1987; Hinson 1996).

6. The Crucified Jesus as an Exemplar

There was a notable common thread among the Reformed and the Radicals, and scholars have long recognized its roots in medieval ascetical theology: a commitment to the crucified Christ in personal experience. As discussed at the outset of this essay, while the cross was central in late medieval and thus reformation-era spirituality, there were parallel approaches. On the one hand, the crucifixion was an external objective act of God for sinners, a once-for-all sacrifice that satisfied the divine judge and achieves reconciliation, the merits of which are appropriated by faith. On the other hand, however, the crucified Jesus was also a model for the church and individual Christians, teaching that the would-be follower of Christ must likewise suffer, and this is the natural outworking of being at odds with the principalities of this world in light of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, although in the hands of some theologians it may appear as such. Furthermore, it is overly facile to delineate whole traditions emerging from the sixteenth century as either appealing to one approach or the other. Luther, for example, was emphatic about the external, objective work of Christ, but the theme of suffering is hardly absent from his writing, and this is true for both his scholarly work and his popular sermons.

The notion of personal experience would certainly bloom in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among different Protestants, most especially those known as Pietists. Christians ranging from German Pietists like Philipp Spener and August Herman Franke to English Puritans and later evangelicals like William Perkins, John Bunyan, and John Wesley to the preachers of the American Great Awakening like Jonathan Edwards and more mystical writers like Johan Arndt stressed a variety of practices which related to the issue of experience. These included regulated daily prayer, routinized Bible study, holding night watches or vigils, more devout preparation for the Lord's Supper, keeping a journal of one's

experience of sin and grace, attending conferences with sisters and brothers in the faith to confess sins and learn best practices, and even some attempts at communal living. This was a re-emergence of the patterns discussed above in this essay, associated with medieval monastics and mystics and, perhaps most notably, the Modern Devout, a late medieval movement that sat on the blurry boundary between monks and layfolk. What overlaid this piety was the vision of the crucified Jesus bidding his followers to take up their cross, to engage the cruciform shape of the Christian life (Lane 2018, pp. 225–45; Strom et al. 2009; Campbell 1991; Bach 2003).

An experiential following of the crucified Jesus could, however, be far more literal. The early modern period had no shortage of opportunities for suffering for the sake of one's faith and, likewise, Christians did not miss the chance to see such misery through the lens of the crucifixion. This phenomenon, it should be underlined, was cross-confessional. Anabaptists were drowned to death; Jesuits and other Catholics were hanged or beheaded; Reformed Protestants were burned. Memorable instances include Felix Manz being tied to a pole and lowered into Lake Zürich, Thomas More laying his head on the block at the Tower of London, and Thomas Cranmer facing the stake at Oxford. Yet sharing and even celebrating these cruciform stories was just as important in the history of Christian spirituality as the experiences themselves. Every group who had access to a press produced tracts about the faith of their respective martyrs, women and men who took up the cross and followed. These included graphic details, songs, poems, and wood-cut images celebrating their fidelity to the crucified Jesus.

Book-length collections of martyr stories, martyrologies, retread the whole of Christian history as a combat with the forces of the Antichrist, the same malicious forces that put Jesus on the cross and which persist in antipathy to the Kingdom of God. Excellent examples include John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, first published in 1563, and the Dutch Anabaptist Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, first published in 1660. These stories provided encouragement for their co-religionists and all those who would adopt their respective sense of true Christianity. It is important to note that "martyr" is a conceptual category. The team who bound Manz to the dunking pole, the executioner who dropped his axe on More's neck, and the people who kindled the fire at Cranmer's feet did not see the people they butchered as martyrs but rather toxins which needed purgation for the health of society. Sympathizers who, perhaps ironically, might later do their own executions, judged the condemned as "martyrs" and those who lighted the pyre or raised the axe were coterminous with the Roman soldiers who nailed Christ to his cross. Many in the sixteenth century distinguished between a counterfeit "sweet Jesus" and the true "bitter Jesus" of scripture, the crucified messiah who commands his disciples to take up their own cross and follow (Gregory 1999, pp. 197–249; Diefendorf 1991; Weaver-Zecharer 2016).

7. The Cruci-Centrism of Reformation-Era Protestantism and Beyond

The Quakers of the seventeenth century, while eschewing external sacraments, evinced an internalizing of the cross, especially while experiencing persecution. This provided an avenue for closer identification with the suffering Jesus. George Fox wrote, "So the letter-professing and learned Christians and Jews must do God's will, if they will know Christ's doctrine; and that must be done by the same Spirit as the apostles were in, that through it they may mortify the deeds of the flesh, and take up the Cross daily, and follow Christ (and deny themselves,) who reveals the Father to them, if they will know him or his doctrine, that did the will of God." (Fox 2012; see also Palmer 1980). In the wake of the sixteenth-century reformation movements, we find new movements which continued to place the cross as a central motif for Christian life and thought.

The Wesleyans of the eighteenth century offer a good opportunity to see the two parallel approaches which have been tracked through this article. Wesley, like other evangelicals and pietists of the eighteenth century, emphasized discipline: by taking hold of the means of grace, e.g., the sacraments, prayer, Bible study, various forms of personal sacrifice, etc., one could maintain a well-ordered embodied faith—and that *embodiment* was

linked to the crucified Jesus. Attempting to retain that thread of passivity before God who must be the primary actor, Wesley taught that there will be times of patient waiting. One could grow in zeal and easily misunderstand her or his role in the order of salvation. Here we see the careful blending of the cross as external objective divine work and opportunity for personal example. For Wesley, the most important of the means of grace was the Eucharist and this is extremely telling. Wesley wrote of sharing in the bread and cup as an opportunity to participate in the divine life and, to be clear, “to be made conformable to the death of Christ.” (Wesley 1984, p. 387; Tricket 1996). Wesley was hardly alone in this sort of articulation of the Lord’s Supper and it highlights that central preoccupation with the crucifixion. Thus, whether we are discussing late medieval and reformation-era theologies of salvation, the practices of monks, mystics, the Modern Devout, Protestants, and pietists, the nature of Christian devotional art, or various conceptions of the Eucharist—the place we begin and end is the same: the crucified Jesus.

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