

most profound portion of the book, because it compels us to look deep within ourselves, examine our own tendencies toward idolatry, confront the reality of our hardened state, and ask God for forgiveness and a reassurance of eternal life.

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THE SCANDALOUS GOD: THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE CROSS, by Vitor Westhelle. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. Pp. 180. \$22.00 (paper).

A theology of the cross sets limits on what properly can be said. Or, a theologian of the cross takes the risk of evoking the scandal of the cross, and so uses language to articulate a scandal that defies expression, “a thing beyond telling, out of reach of words” (6). Since the cross breaks epistemologically the way we normally organize our understanding of the world, articulating the cross is a linguistic impossibility; nevertheless, a theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is and so risks articulating that which cannot be articulated, making poetry out of things beyond the reach of words.

Vitor Westhelle’s book is just such an undertaking; it is a discourse about cross and suffering that takes the risk, offering the thesis that Christ suffered precisely because he named the cause of suffering. Westhelle asks a question that Paul and Luther also asked: “What can I know of God in face of the cross or according to the cross (*kata stauron*)?” (75). He finds in this epistemological question a way of bringing together two theological traditions that have often been unnecessarily divided—the Reformation itself, and liberation theology. Both traditions, he argues, are committed to reorienting theology through the experience of liminality, the liminality of the cross. This liminality is best encapsulated in the great

statement of Luther—the cross alone is our theology (110).

Westhelle so reiterates an important distinction made clear in the writings of a few other contemporary Lutheran theologians, including Roy A. Harrisville and Gerhard Forde, namely, that the theology of the cross is not “a theology,” but a way of doing theology. One might say that there is not a theology of the cross *per se*, but rather there are theologians of the cross. *The Scandalous God* proves that Westhelle is one of our most gifted and articulate theologians of the cross. This is a book to be read and reread as training in being a theologian of the cross.

Since Westhelle has assembled a book that seeks to articulate that which cannot be articulated, and construct a theology that is not one among others but rather a way of doing theology, it is no surprise that the benefits of the book lie not so much in a grand concluding thesis, or a list of constructive proposals, but rather precisely in its being a set of explorations and forays. Westhelle is interested in evoking and eliciting thoughts about pain, death, and the cross (xi). Throughout, Westhelle makes use of surprising and beautiful poetry to illustrate and prod. The poetry in the book (some of it original translations by the author) could almost stand alone as an anthology of “poetry of the cross.”

The first part of the book is a historical survey of the uses and the abuses of the cross, including chapters on the cross in the early church, the Reformation, and the modern period. The second half of the book is organized according to expansive categories of human thought and creativity—epistemology, poiesis, and praxis. Possibly the most intriguing proposal in this section is Westhelle’s definition of orthopraxis—“a practice of solidarity with the pain of the world, which follows the encounter with Christ crucified” (112). This is the *tentatio* that Luther argued “made” a theologian. It is also the central tenet of liberation theology. In uniting the two theological tradi-

tions, Westhelle lifts up the precise way in which the theology of the cross is a “disposition” shaped by the cross rather than a theology about the cross.

Woven throughout the book are profound reflections on one of the most paradoxical and scandalous (and so overlooked or ignored) aspects of Lutheran theology, the *deus nudus* (the naked God). What are we to do with statements of Luther like the following: “Nothing against God but God’s own self” (30) or “to flee from God and find refuge in God against God” (59; 155)? Or with Friedrich Hölderlin (in Westhelle’s translation): “It is where danger lies that liberation comes from, but do we want to be saved?” (158). Salvation is hidden under its opposite—in death and suffering. Seldom do works of theology offer sustained reflection on this scandalizing paradox. Westhelle’s book is an exception.

Westhelle offers a last chapter on “the stations of the cross revisited” to try and map an itinerary of this scandal, one of the more profound reflections on Sabbath and Holy Saturday (the time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday) that I have ever read. His meditation includes this excerpt from a poem of Wendell Berry: “Unless we grieve like Mary / at His grave, giving Him up / as lost, no Easter morning comes” (140), that could stand as an apt encapsulation of Westhelle’s whole book, except that after reading the book, these lines of Wendell Berry take on a new profundity and depth that prove the power of Westhelle’s project.

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AUTHENTIC FAITH: BONHOEFFER’S THEOLOGICAL ETHICS IN CONTEXT, by Heinz Eduard Toedt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. 298. \$24.00 (paper).

In this marvelous collection of essays, edited by Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth in 1993 (brought forth in English by Glen Stassen in 2007) and translated by David Stassen and Ilse Toedt, we have a goldmine of source material and reflections that offer essential themes in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology and ethics. At the instigation of Clifford Green, and in cooperation with Eerdmans Publishing Company, this grouping of essays, dating from 1976 to 1990, “achieves a precision in understanding key dimensions of Bonhoeffer’s ethics that is hard to match elsewhere” (viii). Glen Stassen, who studied with Toedt in the 1980s in Heidelberg, writes that, “Toedt’s publications have an analytical sharpness, an ethical incisiveness, and a genuine truthfulness that is rare even among the best....he unearths major dimensions of Bonhoeffer’s ethics, and enables us to enter personally into the political, ecclesiastical, and family context in which Bonhoeffer wrote” (vii).

Heinz Eduard Toedt was born in Germany in 1918, completing his doctorate in theology at Heidelberg in 1957, having earlier served five years on the battlefield during World War II and then five more years in detention as a Russian POW. He became professor of systematic theology, ethics, and social ethics at Heidelberg in 1963 and was active in ecumenical work most of his career. Toedt chaired the editorial board of the recently completed *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* (1998). Throughout his career he published extensively on human rights, revolution, and peace in a technological world. Toedt’s passionate interest in Bonhoeffer came from his desire to learn “what it was about Bonhoeffer’s ethics that enabled him to see more clearly and speak out more decisively than other theologians and church leaders,



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