

RESURRECTION AND THE COSTS OF EVOLUTION: A DIALOGUE WITH RAHNER ON NONINTERVENTIONIST THEOLOGY

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The scientific claim that the costs of evolution are built into the process by which life emerges brings a new intensity to the old problem of evil. One partial response is to challenge the idea of an interventionist God who overturns or bypasses the laws of nature in favor of a God who works consistently through nature. Another is a theology of Resurrection that offers hope for the final transformation of the whole creation in Christ. In conversation with Karl Rahner, the author explores a theology of Resurrection that is both noninterventionist and transformative.

SUFFERING THAT SPRINGS FROM natural causes, such as the South Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004, has always raised hard questions for Christian theology. In the current dialogue between science and theology, the issue of the suffering of human and nonhuman creatures takes on a new intensity, with science making it clear how predation, competition for survival, death, and extinction are built into the 3.8 billion-year-history of life on Earth. Without creatures drawing energy from their environment, there could be no emergence of life. Without death and the succession of generations, there could be no evolution: there would be no eyes, wings, or human brains. The evolution of life in its abundance and beauty is accompanied by terrible costs to human beings and to other species.

The costs are built into the process. They are built into the biology, geology, and the underlying physics of a dynamic, life-bearing planet. The costs of evolution are built into an emergent universe. The awareness of these costs pushes theology to a deeper reflection on the nature of God's action. Theology needs to respond, however inadequately, to the idea that so much that is beautiful and good arises by way of increasing complexity through emergent processes that involve tragic loss. We know, as no gen-

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eration has known before us, that these costs are intrinsic to the processes that give rise to life on Earth in its beauty, fecundity, and diversity.

In response to the costs built into evolution, a theology of creation has to be able to offer a view of God working creatively in and through the natural world to bring it to healing and wholeness. I see at least three requirements for such a response. First, with Robert John Russell and others in the science-theology dialogue, I am convinced that a theological response to the costs of evolution must involve eschatology, even though the claims of Christian eschatology exist in some tension with the predictions of scientific cosmology.¹ What is needed is an objective and powerful theology of both resurrection and the final fulfillment of creation. God's action in creating an emergent universe needs to be understood in the light of the resurrection and its promise that all things will be transformed and redeemed in Christ (Rom 8:19–23; Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Rev 21:5). A merely psychological or subjective theology of the resurrection cannot offer hope to creation. Only a theology of resurrection that is eschatologically transformative can begin to respond to the suffering that is built into an evolutionary universe.

A second requirement is that this divine action be understood in a non-interventionist way. Of course, it has long been recognized that science becomes impossible if God is thought of as intervening in such a way as to compete with or to overturn the regularities of nature. In addition, the theological problem of suffering is made far worse if God is thought of as arbitrarily intervening to send suffering to some creatures and not to others. Christian theology today must face up to how a particular theology of divine action that runs deep in the Christian tradition can exacerbate the pain of those who suffer because of its implicit model of an interventionist God, who chooses freely to send sufferings to some and lovingly to protect others. Such a theology can contribute to a sense of alienation from God. The culture of an interventionist God is reinforced, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, by many aspects of church life. The scientific insight that the costs of evolution built into an emergent universe challenges theology to find an alternative to the model of a God who can be thought of as freely modifying the dynamics of tectonic plates to save some from a tsunami, while causing others to suffer it.

The third requirement for a theology of divine action that might offer some response to the costs of evolution would involve an understanding of God's power as constrained by God's love and respect for creatures. Such

¹ See, for example, Robert John Russell, "Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology: The Mutual Interaction of Christian Theology and Science," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, ed. Ted Peters et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 3–30.

a view of divine power can be based on the way the power of God is revealed and defined in Jesus of Nazareth, above all in his death and resurrection. In the cross, divine omnipotence is revealed as the transcendent divine capacity to give oneself in love. The cross does not reveal the absence of divine power but its true nature. Only an omnipotent love can give itself away in radical vulnerability.² Theology has always taught that God can act only in accord with the divine nature, and that this nature is revealed in the Christ event as radical love. It can be argued that the God revealed in the cross and resurrection is a God whose nature it is to respect the proper autonomy of creatures, to work through them, and to bring them to fulfilment. In such a view of divine power, the love that defines the divine nature is understood as a love that *waits upon* creation, living with its processes, accompanying each creature in love, rejoicing in every emergence, suffering with every suffering creature, and promising to bring all to healing and fullness of life.

In what follows, I will assume the position on divine power outlined here, which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere.³ My focus will be the other two requirements, eschatological power and nonintervention, as they apply to the resurrection. Many would think of the resurrection as the hardest case for a noninterventionist theology of divine action. I will ask, Can the resurrection be understood as an act of God that is objective and powerfully transformative but is also noninterventionist? Before addressing this question directly, I will situate my own approach to divine action (which I ground in the tradition of Karl Rahner), in the context of the wider discussion of divine action and noninterventionist theology that took place in the 1990s.

NONINTERVENTIONIST THEOLOGIES OF DIVINE ACTION

In September 1987 the Vatican Observatory, at the initiative of Pope John Paul II, held an important international conference on science and religion that resulted in the publication *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology*.⁴ Building on this work, George Coyne, the director of the Observatory, invited Robert John Russell and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, to co-sponsor a series of research conferences and publications. These

² On this subject see Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 195.

³ See, for example, Denis Edwards, "Every Sparrow That Falls to the Ground: The Costs of Evolution and the Christ-Event," *Ecotheology* 11 (2006) 103–23; *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006) 39–45.

⁴ Robert J. Russell et al., ed., *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988).

conferences took up the theme of divine action, exploring it first in relation to quantum cosmology, followed by chaos and complexity, evolutionary and molecular biology, neuroscience and the person, and quantum mechanics.⁵

In these discussions, participants agreed that a theology of divine action needed to include not only God's continuous creative act (*creatio continua*), but also special and objective divine acts that would include personal providence and the Christ event. At the same time, they sought to articulate a theology of divine action that sees God acting without violating or overturning the laws of nature. A consensus emerged from the conferences around a form of divine action that was special and objective, but noninterventionist—in the sense of not violating or suspending the laws of nature.⁶

Within this consensus, however, one can discern at least five positions: (1) Ian Barbour, Charles Birch, and John Haught represent the perspective of process theology that understands divine action as the inviting lure of God, which is operative in every actual occasion, but which does not determine the outcome in an exclusive way. (2) Other scholars, including Robert Russell, Nancey Murphy, George Ellis, and Thomas Tracy, explore the idea that God acts in the indeterminacy of quantum events to bring about one of a number of possible outcomes.⁷ (3) John Polkinghorne thinks of God as acting in the openness of chaotic and complex systems to bring about outcomes through the top-down imparting of information. (4) Arthur Peacocke sees God as acting in and through and under every aspect of nature, acting on the system as a whole, by way of analogy with a "top-down" or "whole-part" cause in nature. (5) Finally, William Stoeger and Stephen Happel understand God as acting in and through secondary

⁵ The conferences yielded the following publications in the series "Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action," all from the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences: Robert J. Russell, Nancey C. Murphy, and Chris J. Isham, ed., *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature*, 2nd ed. (1996); Robert J. Russell et al., ed., *Chaos and Complexity* (1995); Robert J. Russell et al., ed., *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology* (1998); Robert J. Russell et al., ed., *Neuroscience and the Person* (1999); Robert J. Russell et al., ed., *Quantum Mechanics* (2001).

⁶ See Robert J. Russell, "Introduction," in *Chaos and Complexity* 9–13.

⁷ Murphy sees God as acting in all quantum events, not as the sole determiner of events, but in a mediated action, in the sense that God always acts together with nature at the quantum level. Tracy suggests seeing God as acting in some, rather than in all, quantum events in order to bring about the effects of God's providence. Russell proposes that God acts in all quantum events until the appearance of life and consciousness, and then God increasingly refrains from determining outcomes, leaving room for top-down causality in conscious creatures, particularly in humans. For a summary of these views see Russell, "Divine Action and Quantum Mechanics: A Fresh Assessment," in *Quantum Mechanics* 293–328.

causes: Stoeger sees the triune God acting in every aspect of creation, through God's immanent and differentiated presence to all things, including those laws of nature we partially understand and those processes and regularities of nature still unknown to us.

My proposal begins from Stoeger's position, which I see as compatible in many respects with Peacocke's.⁸ I am drawn to this position because it clearly respects the absolute transcendence and radical mystery of God's action, and because I continue to be attracted by Aquinas's idea that God acts through secondary causes "not from any impotence on his part, but from the abundance of his goodness imparting to creatures also the *dignity of causing*."⁹ Aquinas, of course, allows for miracles, wherein he sees God acting without a secondary cause.¹⁰ I will not take up a theology of miracles in general here, but simply focus on the resurrection and ask, Can God be thought of as working consistently through secondary causes even in the resurrection? Can the resurrection be seen as a noninterventionist divine action in the sense that here too God acts through secondary causes? Can God be understood as working in the resurrection through the laws and constants of nature rather than as violating, suspending, or bypassing them?

Rahner's work suggests a theology that can extend this discussion of noninterventionist divine action. Such a theology would stand within the perspective of the Thomist tradition, arguing that God can be seen as consistently working through secondary causes. In a brief discussion in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner argues that we do not experience God as one element in the world, but as the very ground of the world. We

⁸ Those who see God as determining one of several possible outcomes, either at the quantum level (Russell and Murphy) or at the macro level (Polkinghorne), intensify the problem of theodicy. Murphy and Ellis respond to the theodicy issue with a kenotic theology: *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Polkinghorne explores the issue in, among other writings, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 90–106. Russell acknowledges that "theodicy becomes a particularly intense issue in light of the present thesis regarding a noninterventionist approach to objective, special divine action" and argues that a resolution is to be sought in a trinitarian theology of resurrection and final transformation ("Divine Action and Quantum Mechanics" 319, 322–23).

⁹ *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 22, a. 3, *Summa theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation*, vol. 5, trans. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (London: Blackfriars, 1964–) 99. Central to this tradition is the idea that God does not act as one cause among creaturely causes, but as the ground of all created causes. It is worth noting that Polkinghorne takes an opposing view: "I have come to believe that *the Creator's kenotic love includes allowing divine special providence to act as a cause among causes*" (Polkinghorne, "Kenotic Creation and Divine Action" 104).

¹⁰ *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 105, a. 6, 8.

find God in the openness to mystery that occurs in our experience of created realities, but, if this is so, then God must be "embedded" in this world to begin with.¹¹ What is seen as an "intervention" of God is really to be understood as the historical expression of God's self-communicating presence that is always intrinsic to the world. Rahner says that every divine "intervention," although it is a free and unpredictable act of God, actually makes concrete and historical the one intervention by which God has embedded God's self in the world from the beginning as its "self-communicating ground."¹²

In Rahner's view there certainly are *special* acts of God, but these are "objectifications" of God's one self-bestowing action. In these special acts, a created reality mediates and expresses the immanent presence and love of God. Because creatures really do express the divine action, Rahner speaks of *objective*, special divine acts. However, he sees these acts as capable of being recognized as special only within the context of subjective experience of grace.¹³ In such divine acts, the one self-bestowing act of God finds objective expression in and through a range of created secondary causes. These include words, persons, and events. To those with eyes to see, these become symbolic mediations of the divine.

Rahner offers a "modest" example of a special divine action. When a person has a "good idea" that proves effective and is experienced as a gift from God, there may well be a natural explanation for the good idea. But it can still be seen as an act of God, in the sense that in it a person encounters the God who is present and really mediated in this event of a good idea. When a good idea is experienced as the place of encounter with the ground of all reality, it can be understood as willed by God, as God-given, and hence as inspired. It becomes, in Rahner's view, a genuine experience of God's special providence.

In a later (1980) book, coauthored with Karl-Heinz Weger, Rahner comments explicitly on interventionist and noninterventionist approaches to divine action and speaks of a "fundamental change" away from an interventionist view of God.¹⁴ Rahner acknowledges that, while traditional theology saw God as the ever-present, immanent, all-embracing, and ultimate ground of being, it also assumed that divine interventions could be located at certain points in space and time. In fact, the traditional idea of the history of salvation was "based mainly on the model of interventions by

¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 87.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 88.

¹⁴ Karl Rahner and Karl-Heinz Weger, *Our Christian Faith: Answers for the Future* (New York: Crossroad, 1980) 57.

God." This interventionist model coexisted with a more universal view of God as the "deepest energy of the world." The two models were never completely reconciled.¹⁵

While Rahner has no wish to condemn the older approach, and while he too holds for a history of salvation and of particular and special revelation, above all in Jesus Christ, he argues for the emergence of a "universalist basic model" of divine action. In this universalist model, God in God's free grace, has always and everywhere "communicated himself to his creation as its innermost energy and works in the world from the inside out."¹⁶ Rahner wants to show that, without interpreting Christianity in a naturalist way, it is possible "with all due caution and modesty, to do without a particularist model of external intervention by God into his world at particular points of space and time."¹⁷

In this kind of theology, Jesus can be seen as the one who makes God's deepest promise historically accessible and irreversible. Because this promise of God is already the fundamental energy at work in all things in the universe, Rahner believes it is possible to understand the event of Christ without the image of intervention.¹⁸ The resurrection of Jesus gives expression to this promise that is always at work in creation. It is certainly an event of revelation, but not one coming from "outside."¹⁹

Rahner simply states this claim. I will explore it further, asking, Can the resurrection itself be understood in noninterventionist terms without diminishing its eschatological promise? I will propose that four lines of thought in Rahner's theology suggest an affirmative answer: his theology of resurrection as part of the one divine act of self-bestowal, his evolutionary Christology, his sacramental or symbolic theology of salvation, and his understanding of resurrection as ontological transformation.

RESURRECTION WITHIN THE ONE DIVINE ACT

Rahner sees divine action in terms of God's self-bestowal to creation. He looks to the heart of Christian revelation and finds that God gives God's

¹⁵ Ibid. 77.

¹⁶ Ibid. 78-79.

¹⁷ Ibid. 84.

¹⁸ "The event of God's promise of himself in Jesus makes that deepest promise by God of himself to the world historically accessible and irreversible. It is always and everywhere the fundamental energy and force of the world and its history. It is therefore perfectly possible to understand the event of Jesus without the aid of images of an intervention in the world from outside. In doing without such an image, however, we must let history really be history and clearly realize that this deepest energy and power of the world and its history is God in his sovereign freedom, who, by his free promise of himself, has made himself this deepest energy and force of the world" (ibid. 103-4).

¹⁹ Ibid. 111.

self to us in the Word made flesh and in the Spirit poured out in grace. He sees this trinitarian self-giving as involving not just incarnation and grace, but creation and final fulfilment. Because the self-giving of God defines every aspect of God's action, the scientific story of the emergence of the universe and the evolution of life is to be seen as part of a larger story of divine self-bestowal.²⁰ God creates in order to give God's self to creation as its final fulfilment. This fulfilment will be the salvation not only of human beings but also of the whole creation. God wills to bestow God's very self in love, and creation comes to be as the addressee of this self-bestowal.²¹

In the theological tradition there are two schools of thought on the relationship between creation and the Christ event. One school sees the Christ event as a second act after creation, brought about because of sin and the need for redemption. The other school, that of Duns Scotus (1266–1308), holds that God freely chooses from the beginning to create a world in which the Word would be made flesh. Rahner adopts this theology and sees creation, incarnation, and final fulfilment as united in one great act of divine self-bestowal. The incarnation is not thought of as an add-on to creation. It is not simply a remedy for sin, although it is this. The Christ event is the irreversible beginning of God's self-giving to creation that will find its fulfilment only when the whole of creation is transformed in Christ. Divine action is *one* act, one act of self-bestowing love in which there are distinct elements that include creation, incarnation, and final fulfilment.²²

Rahner insists that what is most specific to the Christian view of God is the idea of a God who bestows God's very self to creation.²³ This is a God who creates creatures that are *capax infiniti*, who, without being consumed in the fire of divinity, are able to receive God's life as their own fulfilment. While Christianity insists against pantheism on the distinction between creation and God, there is no distance between God and creatures. God's being is the distinction.²⁴ But this same transcendent Creator is radically interior to each creature in self-bestowing love. God is the very core of the

²⁰ Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," in *Theological Investigations* 11:215–29, at 219. I am building here on an earlier article, "Resurrection of the Body and Transformation of the Universe in the Theology of Karl Rahner," forthcoming in *Philosophy and Theology*.

²¹ Karl Rahner, "Resurrection," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury, 1975) 1430–42, at 1442.

²² Creation and incarnation, therefore, are "two moments and two phases of the one process of God's self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process" (Rahner, *Foundations* 197).

²³ Karl Rahner, "The Specific Character of the Christian Concept of God," in *Theological Investigations* 21:185–95.

²⁴ "God is not merely the one who as creator establishes a world distant from

world's reality and the world is truly the fate of God. Creation is intrinsically directed toward self-bestowal. It is not simply that God creates something other, but that God freely communicates God's own reality to the other. The universe emerges in the process of God's self-bestowal. Rahner sees this self-bestowal of the transcendent God as "the most immanent factor in the creature."²⁵

In this understanding, creation is intrinsically oriented both to the resurrection of Christ and to final fulfilment. It is eschatological from the ground up. This view of God acting in one act of self-bestowal constitutes a first line of thought that can build toward an inside-out rather than an interventionist theology of resurrection. If God acts in one differentiated act, then the resurrection is not an intervention of God from without, but the central dimension of this one act by which God creates, saves, and brings all to fulfilment. This idea of the unity of the divine act leads to a second line of thought that can contribute to a noninterventionist theology of resurrection, that of evolutionary Christology.

RESURRECTION WITHIN EVOLUTIONARY CHRISTOLOGY

While divine action can be considered from God's side as divine self-bestowal, it can also be considered from the perspective of its effect in the creature, as enabling creaturely self-transcendence. According to Rahner, the effect of God's immanence is that creation has the capacity to transcend itself. This concept, worked out in Rahner's anthropology and central to his evolutionary Christology, functions in much of his work.²⁶ With the concept of divine self-bestowal, it provides a way of grasping the radical unity of God's one act. It is God present in self-bestowal who enables creaturely self-transcendence. Divine self-bestowal and creaturely self-transcendence characterize not only creation, grace, and incarnation, but also final consummation.²⁷

The ancient theological tradition always had a theology of continuous creation. It saw God as sustaining all creatures in being (*conservatio*) and enabling them to act (*concursus*). Rahner transforms this theology of con-

himself as something different, but rather he is the one who gives himself away to this world and who has his own fate in and with this world. God is not only himself the giver, but he is also the gift" (Rahner, "The Specific Character" 191). See also Rahner's "Christology in the Setting" 224.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 10:273-89, at 281.

²⁶ See Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965) 98-101; "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 5:157-92; *Foundations* 178-203.

²⁷ Rahner, "Christology in the Setting" 223-6.

servation into a theology of becoming. God enables creatures not only to exist, but also to transcend themselves, to become something new. In his evolutionary Christology, Rahner begins from the fundamental *unity* he finds in creation. All of creation is united in its one origin in God, in its self-realization as one united world, and in its one future in God. Within this unity are transitions to the *new* in the history of the universe, particularly when matter becomes life, and when life becomes self-conscious spirit. Rahner argues for a theology of God's creative act as enabling the active self-transcendence of creation. This capacity is truly intrinsic to creation, but it occurs through the creative power of the immanent God. The presence and constant "pressure" of the divine being enables the creature to become more than it is in itself.²⁸ This "pressure" is not something that can be discerned by the natural sciences, but is the interior, dynamic relationship of all things in the evolving universe to their Creator.

The material universe transcends itself in the emergence of life, and life transcends itself in the human. In human beings the universe becomes open to self-consciousness, freedom, and a personal relationship with God in grace. Rahner sees the Christ event in this context, as the definitive self-transcendence of the created universe into God.²⁹ Jesus in his created humanity is a part of evolutionary history, a part that is completely and uniquely open to the divine bestowal. If the Christ event is considered from below, it can be seen as the self-transcendence of the evolving universe into God. If the Christ event is considered from above, it can be seen as God's irreversible self-bestowal to creation. In this one person Jesus is found the irreversible self-communication of God to creatures and the definitive human acceptance of this communication. Because of this definitive acceptance, Jesus Christ is understood as absolute Savior.³⁰

Jesus' creaturely life of self-giving love culminates in his death as a radical act of love for God and for others. In the resurrection, God radically and irreversibly takes creation to God's self. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are always to be seen together. In this paschal event, part of evolutionary history gives itself completely into God and is taken up and transformed in God as the beginning of the transformation of all things.

Together, the death and resurrection are to be seen as the culminating moment of the self-transcendence of creation to God, and as the irreversible self-bestowal of God to creation. Within the context of an evolutionary

²⁸ Karl Rahner, "Natural Science and Christian Faith," in *Theological Investigations* 21:16-55, at 37.

²⁹ In Jesus, we find the "initial beginning and definitive triumph of the movement of the world's self-transcendence into absolute closeness to the mystery of God" (Rahner, *Foundations* 181).

³⁰ *Ibid.* 193.

Christology, the resurrection can be seen not as an intervention from without, but as the free and unpredictable breaking forth of that divine self-bestowal to the world that has been immanent in creation from the very beginning in the presence to creation of the Creator Spirit.

RESURRECTION AS REAL SYMBOL OF SALVATION

A third dimension of Rahner's theology that supports a view of resurrection that is both objective and noninterventionist is found in his concept of salvation. The Christian tradition has always claimed that Jesus died and was raised up "for us." Rahner asks how this is to be understood. In what sense is the paschal event the cause of our salvation?

Rahner finds that the biblical concept of redemption through the sacrificial blood of Jesus fails to communicate in the cultural contexts of today. It "smacks of mythology" when an angry God seems to insist on reparation for the offence done and then becomes a forgiving God as a result of a bloody sacrifice.³¹ Rahner also rejects Anselm's theory of satisfaction as meaningful for today: it assumes that the sins of the world are an infinite offence against God, because of the dignity of the one offended; it assumes that the satisfaction is of infinite value because it is measured by the dignity of the person making satisfaction. These assumptions are difficult to justify in today's world.³² Rahner acknowledges that these theologies can be meaningful when properly understood in their historical context, but he sees them as secondary and derivative in relation to the primary experience of salvation in Christ.

Rahner argues that a more contemporary theology of salvation is needed. A fundamental requirement for such a theology would be that it shows clearly that God is the cause of salvation. What needs to be avoided is any suggestion that the cross changes God from being a God of wrath to a God of grace. Jesus' death and resurrection do not cause God to begin to love us sinners. They are the expression and consequence of God's divine love. They give expression to God's eternal will to save. Rahner suggests a theology of salvation in which the Christ event has a causality of a quasi-sacramental and real symbolic nature.³³ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection taken together can be seen as the real symbol in which God's saving will reaches its full and irrevocable realization and manifestation in the world. Rahner's concept of the real symbol is a strong one. It involves not only the revelation of salvation but its accomplishment.

³¹ Rahner and Weger, *Our Christian Faith* 114.

³² *Ibid.* 114-15.

³³ Rahner, *Foundations* 282-85; "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations* 4:221-52; "Salvation," in *Encyclopedia of Theology* 1499-1530, at 1527.

Jesus' life finds its climax in the surrender to God in his death and in God's acceptance of this in the resurrection. The event of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is both the symbol and the radical accomplishment of God's saving love. Jesus, who is one of us, who has given himself in death to God, is raised up by God. This is the irreversible manifestation of God's saving love for our world. In the Christ event, God's salvific will is made present in the world "historically, really and irrevocably."³⁴ The universal experience of the Spirit in grace is always ordered to the Word made flesh, to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The grace of the Spirit is always the grace of Christ. In this sense Christ is the final cause of the Spirit, and the Spirit is always the Spirit of Jesus Christ.³⁵

In this framework, the resurrection is not an event that comes from outside, but the expression in history of God's will to save, which has been operative in creation from the beginning and will find its fulfilment in the transformation of the whole creation. The resurrection is the radical expression of the promise of God and the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise. It is the real symbol, the expression and the reality, of God's saving, self-bestowing love at work in the world. It brings to visibility and initial accomplishment the self-bestowing love that has always been present to every aspect of the universe and its creatures.

The church in essence is to be the visible sign and agent of the resurrection at work in the world.³⁶ The risen Christ is encountered today in the experience of grace that occurs in the church's mediation, above all in the word of God, in the Eucharist, and in the other sacraments. But these sacraments are linked to the mysticism of everyday life. They "awaken, deepen, strengthen, and bring to full expression" the sacramental experiences of everyday life.³⁷ Christians go out from the Eucharist and encounter the resurrected Christ in words, persons, and events in this world. In the light of the word, they meet the Risen One in the transcendental experience of grace that occurs in daily life. The experience of the Risen One is not the experience of an intervention from without but a meeting with the mystery of God incarnate in Christ that occurs in and through our encounters with fellow creatures in the world. It has a sacramental structure.

RESURRECTION AS ONTOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

A fourth line of thought concerns the objectivity of the resurrection and its impact on creation. It is all too easy to maintain a noninterventionist

³⁴ Karl Rahner, *Foundations* 284.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 317.

³⁶ See Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments* (New York: Seabury, 1977)

xv.

³⁷ Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998) 163.

theology of resurrection in a reductivist model, where the resurrection is understood simply in terms of the subjective experience of the disciples. Such a reductivist theology fails not only to represent the Christian tradition adequately, but also to provide a basis for the eschatological transformation of creation. It has little to offer suffering creation.

Rahner's robust and objective claims about the resurrection and its eschatological impact are developed by working with a theology of salvation in Christ that is strong in the East: divinization. Rahner asks why the theology of the resurrection, when compared to its New Testament origins, has suffered such an "astonishing process of shrinkage" in the theology of the West.³⁸ He thinks that a central reason was the adoption by the West of a purely juridical notion of redemption: Jesus, because of his full divinity and full humanity, is able to make proper satisfaction for human sin. In this kind of theology, the focus is on the cross rather than on the resurrection.

In the East, by contrast, the resurrection plays a central role in the theology of salvation. Salvation occurs because God takes humanity and the whole creation to God's self in the incarnation. The incarnation culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and these events promise final fulfilment. The resurrection transforms humanity and creation from within. This theology of resurrection is more concerned with ontological change than with legal relations. Because God embraces creaturely life in the incarnation, and above all in its culmination in resurrection, creaturely life is changed forever. Human beings and in some way all creation are taken up into God. Rahner takes three interrelated themes from the Eastern model: salvation as ontological rather than juridical, salvation as involving the divinization of humans and the whole creation, and the resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of this divinizing transfiguration.

In this ontological model of the redemption, God's adoption of creaturely reality as God's own in the incarnation culminates in the resurrection of the crucified.³⁹ In the life and death of Jesus, a part of the creaturely reality of this world is fully handed over to God in complete freedom, obedience, and love, and in the resurrection this creaturely reality is fully taken up into God. In the resurrection, God irrevocably adopts creaturely

³⁸ Karl Rahner, "Dogmatic Questions on Easter," in *Theological Investigations* 4:121-33, at 122.

³⁹ "The redemption was felt to be a real ontological process which began in the incarnation and ends not so much in the forgiveness of sins as in the divinization of the world and first demonstrates its victorious might, not so much in the expiation of sin on the cross as in the resurrection of Christ" (ibid. 126).

reality as God's own reality, divinizing and transfiguring it. Because of the unity of the world that springs from the Creator, this is an event for the whole creation. What occurs in Jesus, as part of the physical, biological, and human world, is *ontologically and not simply juridically* the "beginning of the glorification and divinization of the whole of reality."⁴⁰ It is "the beginning of the transformation of the world as an ontologically interconnected occurrence."⁴¹

The resurrection of Jesus is understood not only as a unique and radical transformation of the crucified, but also as the beginning of the transformation of all things in God. It is not the resuscitation of a corpse to live again in the old way, but the "eschatological victory of God's grace in the world."⁴² Rahner insists that our future participation in resurrection life will be a completely unforeseeable and unimaginable transfiguration of our spiritual, bodily, social selves. He sees continuing identity in resurrection life as provided not by the molecules that make up our bodies before death and that in this life are always subject to metabolic processes, but by the free, spiritual subject that can be called the soul. Finding a corpse in a grave could therefore not be taken as evidence of no resurrection.⁴³

Christ in his risen, bodily reality is the hidden presence that gives meaning and direction to the universe. The transfiguration of the world has begun in the risen Christ and is "ripening and developing" to the point where it will become manifest in the final fulfilment of all things.⁴⁴ Clearly this is not a theology with a purely psychological or interior understanding of the resurrection and its effects. It has no interest in a reductivist view of the resurrection. It makes the very large claim that the resurrection is the central event in the history of the universe, that it is the irreversible expression of God's saving love in our world, and that it has already begun transforming the whole of creation from within. But, as I have been attempting to show, this large claim is made about a divine action that springs from the God who is always at work from within creation, rather than being seen as an intervention from without. It is seen as the radical transformation, unpredictable fulfilment, and the real meaning and goal of God's work of creation, rather than as a miracle that overturns the natural world and its laws.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 129.

⁴¹ Rahner, "Resurrection" 1442.

⁴² Karl Rahner, "Jesus' Resurrection," in *Theological Investigations* 17:16–23, at 22.

⁴³ Karl Rahner, "The Intermediate State," in *Theological Investigations* 17:114–34, at 120.

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, "The Festival of the Future of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 7:181–85, at 184.

RESURRECTION: TRANSFORMING BUT NONINTERVENTIONIST

My proposal is that, to respond to the issue of suffering built into creation, a theology of divine action is needed that is both eschatological and noninterventionist. This proposal raises the test case of the resurrection. Many have understood the resurrection to be the greatest of divine interventions. Is it to be seen as an intervention from without? Rahner thinks not, but does not argue the case. I have been attempting to show that four lines of thought from within Rahner's theology support a noninterventionist but still objective and powerful theology of resurrection. These lines of thought involve seeing the resurrection as a dimension of God's *one* divine act of self-bestowal, as within the framework of an evolutionary Christology, as a real symbol of God's universal saving love, and as an ontological event, the beginning of the divinizing transformation of all things. Taken together, these theological positions give general plausibility to the claim that the resurrection can be seen as an objective but noninterventionist act of God.

To take this argument further, however, I will consider how the resurrection impinges on human beings and on other creatures. Can these impacts of the resurrection be considered objective and noninterventionist? I will take up briefly two important ways in which the resurrection impacts creation: first, the experience of the risen Christ by the first disciples and second, the ontological transformation of creation that the resurrection involves.

Clearly the encounter between the first disciples and the risen Christ had a distinctive character. Many of the disciples who encountered Jesus beyond death had walked with him in Galilee and accompanied him to Jerusalem. Their experience was distinct because they had known him in life and death and now knew him as risen from the dead. It was distinct from later Christian experience in a second way: it had a church-founding character. For both of these reasons their witness is unique and irreplaceable. All later Christian life depends on their experience and their testimony.

But were their experiences of the risen Christ miraculous interventions in the sense that they broke the laws of nature? Or did they take place in and through the laws of nature, and thus in and through secondary causes? Historically, there is no evidence that can tell us exactly what kind of experience was involved in the appearances of the risen Christ to the first disciples. Theologically, however, there is good reason to think that these encounters were not the same as everyday encounters with other persons in our lives, or with Jesus during his lifetime. As Rahner insists, the experience of the risen Christ cannot be thought of as one among other ordinary experiences, but must be seen as an experience that is *sui generis*:

Such a resurrection, into a human existence finalized and bringing history to fulfillment, is essentially an object of knowledge of an absolutely unique kind. It is

essentially other than the return of a dead man to his previous biological life, to space and time which form the dimensions of history unfulfilled. Hence it is not in any way an ordinary object of experience, which could be subsumed under the common condition and possibilities of experience.⁴⁵

Granted this uniqueness, I believe that it is possible and appropriate to understand the appearances of the risen Christ in a noninterventionist way. They might be seen as unique revelatory encounters with the risen Christ that occur in a way that is related to our own experience of God in grace. Rahner suggests that the best analogy for understanding the appearances may be the experience of Christ in the Spirit that Christians have today, rather than imaginative visions or everyday sense experience.⁴⁶ Rahner gave much of his theological life to articulating the nature of the experience of God as transcendental experiences that occur in and through the experience of creaturely realities in the world. I have discussed this matter in detail elsewhere and here simply note that this experience is one of grace in which God really does act, but which is experienced by us in a truly human and creaturely way.⁴⁷

The appearances of the risen Christ may have the structure of a transcendental experience that occurs in and through the experience of created realities, where the one encountered is recognized as Jesus who had walked with the disciples in Galilee but who is now radically transformed as the power of new creation. The encounters with the risen Christ may have been mediated by the communion of the church, the word of God, the breaking of the bread, the natural world, the love of another human being, or the experience of prayer. What matters is that these encounters were experienced as unique revelations of the crucified Jesus, risen from the dead as the power of new life from God. Such experiences can be understood in a noninterventionist way and yet at the same time be thought of as church-founding encounters with Jesus, in which the Risen One reveals himself as alive beyond death with the fullness of bodily life transformed in God and embodying resurrection life.

Now to the question about the ontological change that the resurrection promises and initiates. If the resurrection is the beginning of the transformation of the whole creation in Christ, how does it impact on the laws of nature? Does it overturn the laws of nature or inaugurate new laws of

⁴⁵ Rahner, "Resurrection" 1431.

⁴⁶ Rahner writes, "So far as the nature of this experience is accessible to us, it is to be explained after the manner of our experience of the powerful Spirit of the living Lord rather than in a way which either likens this experience too closely to mystical visions of an imaginative kind in later times, or understands it as an almost physical sense experience" (*Foundations* 276).

⁴⁷ J. Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York: Paulist, 1983).

nature? The theology developed above says no, because God has been creatively involved with every aspect of the universe from the beginning precisely as the one who would raise Jesus from the dead and bring all creation to its consummation. This had always been the very meaning of creation, that for which the processes and regularities of the natural world exist. The God of resurrection, the God who will transform all things in Christ, is the God of creation. God is present in the Spirit to every creature in the long history of the universe as the God of self-bestowing resurrection love. God creates a universe that is capable of being transformed from within. As Russell says, God creates a universe that is transformable by resurrection:

Our starting point is that the new creation is not a replacement of the old creation, or a second and separate creation *ex nihilo*. Instead, God will transform God's creation, the universe, into the new creation *ex vetere*, to use Polkinghorne's phrase. It follows that God must have created the universe *such that it is transformable*, that is, that it can be transformed by God's action. Specifically, God must have created it precisely with those conditions and characteristics that it needs as preconditions in order to be transformable by God's new act.⁴⁸

Because God creates a universe capable of being transformed into a new creation, there is no need to understand what Rahner calls the ontological change of resurrection as an intervention. Rather, it can be seen as the instantiation of potentialities that God had placed in the natural world from the beginning, potentialities that have always been directed toward resurrection and new creation. In a series of articles, Stoeger has distinguished between two meanings of "the laws of nature": on the one hand, the phrase refers to the laws contained in our scientific theories, which are only a partial description of reality; on the other, it can refer to something far wider: the relationships, processes, and causal connections of the natural world itself, much of which escapes our theories.⁴⁹ The laws of nature as we know them are provisional and imperfect and not well suited at this stage to deal with important areas of life, including the mental, the interpersonal, the esthetic, and the religious, all of which are part of the natural world. This view of the laws of nature makes it quite possible to think that the eschatological transformation of creation begun in the resurrection may occur through secondary causes that exist in the natural world but that

⁴⁸ Russell, "Bodily Resurrection, Eschatology, and Scientific Cosmology" 21. At a conference on the resurrection held at St. Mark's in Canberra in March 2006, Russell explored the possibility that the resurrection might involve new laws of nature.

⁴⁹ William R. Stoeger, "Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature," in *Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature* 209–34; Stoeger, "The Mind-Brain Problem, the Laws of Nature, and Constitutive Relationships," in *Neuroscience and the Person* 129–46; Stoeger, "Epistemological and Ontological Issues Arising from Quantum Theory," in *Quantum Mechanics* 81–98.

are either not mapped well or are not mapped at all by our scientific theories.

The impact of the resurrection on the universe might be seen as a new and, to us, unforeseeable instantiation of potentialities of nature that were built into God's creation from the beginning. This view fits well with Rahner's idea that the eschatological consummation of the universe will take place as the act of God, but that this act works in and through the self-transcendence of creation. God is at work as the power of the future in every aspect of creation. In God's final act, God will embrace the whole of creation in self-bestowing love, but this love is already "the most immanent element in every creature."⁵⁰

At the beginning of this article I proposed that a theology of divine action that can make some kind of response to the suffering of creation might have at least three characteristics: (1) it would offer eschatological hope for the redemption of creation; (2) it would be a noninterventionist theology; (3) and it would understand divine power to be defined by the cross and resurrection as a power that by nature finds expression in love and respect for creatures, a power that waits upon creation, lives with its processes, and accompanies each creature in love.

I have focused on the first two of these characteristics as they apply to the all-important case of the resurrection. I have argued for a theology of resurrection that makes strong objective claims about Christ's resurrection and its liberating eschatological consequences. At the same time, I have proposed that the resurrection can be understood in noninterventionist terms as the central expression in our history of God's one act that embraces creation and redemption, an act that consistently finds expression through secondary causes. I see this combination of objectivity with non-intervention in a theology of resurrection as a partial theological response to the suffering of creation.

The physicist Paul Davies is a learned and helpful contributor to the discussions between science and theology. Many years ago, after expressing openness to the idea of a creator, he was asked, What do you think about Christianity? He replied that Christianity is based on the miracle of the resurrection, and as a scientist he did not hold for exceptions to the laws of nature. My own theological response, framed inwardly at the time and made more explicit here, is that the resurrection is not best thought of as a miracle that overturns the laws of nature. It is far more than this. It is the event that gives meaning and direction to the whole universe and to all of its laws. It does not come from without but from within, from the presence of the creative, saving God who enables creation not only to emerge and unfold, but to come to its final fulfillment.

⁵⁰ Rahner, "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation" 289.