

# The Church's Eucharistic Poverty in the Theologies of Jon Sobrino and Hans Urs von Balthasar

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## Abstract

The article puts Jon Sobrino and Hans Urs von Balthasar into a mutually corrective dialogue regarding poverty and the church. Sobrino's goals and outlook are laudable, but his proposal lacks an adequate metaphysical basis, which is seen most clearly in his account of God's suffering. Balthasar's theology gives an account of a church characterized by a eucharistic poverty, one of self-dispossession for the sake of others, but also upholds the divine immutability. At the same time, Sobrino's attentiveness to concrete history serves to correct Balthasar's problematic and romanticized views of poverty.

## Keywords

Hans Urs von Balthasar, church, Eucharist, liberation theology, poverty, Jon Sobrino

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, there has been widespread—though not universal—recognition that the salvation intended by God is integral and historical.<sup>1</sup> The recognition of the holistic and historical character of the salvation

1. The most directly relevant document from the council is *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) (hereafter cited in text as *GS*), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). This perspective

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embodied and mediated in and by the church has taken on a distinctive shape in Latin America, where the reality of unjust distribution of wealth and resources, leading to oppressive poverty, is unmistakable. Among the signs of the times to which the church must attend is the reality of poverty.<sup>2</sup>

In response to this deplorable and dehumanizing situation, the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America's Roman Catholic Church (CELAM) have articulated what has come to be known as the preferential option for the poor, and called for the church itself to be a poor church in solidarity with the poor (Medellín 14.2–7; Puebla 1134; Aparecida 391–98). Subsequently, the perspectives and directives offered by the CELAM meetings have been incorporated into various papal encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, signaling their reception into what might be called the “main-stream” of the church's teaching.<sup>3</sup> This article takes up this mantle, and attempts to

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was further developed by Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html) (all URLs herein were accessed March 18, 2014). On this line of development, see, e.g., Paul-Eugène Charbonneau, “De *Rerum novarum* à la constitution *Gaudium et spes* et à l'encyclique *Populorum progressio*,” in *L'église dans le monde de ce temps: Études et commentaires autour de la constitution pastorale “Gaudium et spes” de Vatican II, avec une étude sur l'encyclique “Populorum progressio*,” ed. Guilherme Baraúna (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967) 755–806; Allan Figueroa Deck, “Commentary on *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples),” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2004) 292–314. On the historical character of Christian salvation see Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, trans. Margaret D. Wilde (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) 251–89.

2. Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM), *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II. Conclusions*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Division for Latin America–USCC, 1973) chaps. 1–5, 14 (hereafter cited in text as Medellín); “The Final Document,” in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980) 15–71 (hereafter cited in text as Puebla); “Aparecida: Concluding Document” 33–82 (hereafter cited in text as Aparecida), <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>. All references to these editions refer to paragraph numbers. In the case of Medellín, where the numbering of paragraphs is not continuous throughout, I also add chapter numbers. See also Jon Sobrino, *The Eye of the Needle: No Salvation Outside the Poor: A Utopian-Prophetic Essay* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2008). Sobrino notes this turn to history in the CELAM documents in “The Significance of Puebla for the Catholic Church in Latin America,” in Eagleson and Scharper, *Puebla and Beyond* 289–309 at 290.
3. In particular, note the influence of Medellín on Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) e.g., 29–31, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html). See further Michel Deneken, “La mission comme nouvelle évangélisation,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 80 (2006) 220–21, doi:10.4000/rsr.1880. Stephen B. Bevans, “Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity: *Ad Gentes*,” in *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad Gentes, Dignitatis*

lend support to this agenda by appeal to two prominent theological voices: Jon Sobrino and Hans Urs von Balthasar.<sup>4</sup>

From Sobrino, I develop an account of the true church as the church not just for the poor but of the poor, which entails a recovery of the central place of the Kingdom of God in Christ's life, ministry, and mission. However, a significant shortcoming attends Sobrino's proposals: the lack of an adequate metaphysical basis for his account of ecclesial poverty. Sobrino's affirmation of divine passibility risks subverting his purpose of responding to the injustice of suffering by envisioning God in such a way that ontologically underwrites suffering. This shortcoming leads me to supplement Sobrino with Balthasar, from whom I appropriate a kenotic and eucharistic account of the church and its mission. Drawing primarily from *Theo-Drama* volume 4 and *Glory of the Lord* volume 7, I investigate the self-dispossessive shape of Christ's mission, which is carried forward in the church's mission.<sup>5</sup> Christ's mission is rooted

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*Humanae*, by Stephen B. Bevans and Jeffrey Gros (New York: Paulist, 2009) 3–149 at 61–64. Additionally, Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* adopts a decidedly Latin American perspective and quotes the Aparecida document authoritatively. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) 181 (citing Aparecida 380), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html). My statement about acceptance into the mainstream should be understood as referring solely to the preferential option for the poor, and to integral development, and not, necessarily to the overall phenomenon of liberation theology.

4. For treatments of Balthasar and Sobrino together see Paul E. Ritt, "The Lordship of Jesus Christ: Balthasar and Sobrino," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988) 709–29; Steven Battin, "Jesus' Cross as Tragic Event: The Christologies of Jon Sobrino and Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Koinonia* 20 (2008) 34–46; Peter Lüning, *Der Mensch im Angesicht des Gekreuzigten: Untersuchungen zum Kreuzverständnis von Erich Przywara, Karl Rahner, Jon Sobrino und Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007) 229–356. Of particular interest is Lüning's recognition that both Sobrino and Balthasar's understandings of the Trinity and the crucifixion are influenced by a common experience of Ignatian spirituality. The Ignatian character of Sobrino's theology is also explored by Robert Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink: Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014) 228–334, 337–57; Nancy Elizabeth Bedford, *Jesus Christus und das gekreuzigte Volk: Christologie der Nachfolge und des Martyriums bei Jon Sobrino* (Aachen: Augustinus Buchhandlung, 1995) 75–79; Sturla J. Stålsett, *The Crucified and the Crucified: A Study in the Liberation Christology of Jon Sobrino* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003) 105–12. The most comprehensive treatment of how Sobrino's spirituality informs his theology is O. Ernesto Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation: Jon Sobrino's Christological Spirituality* (New York: Fordham University, 2016).
5. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Volume 4, The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) (hereafter cited in text as *TD* 4); Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Volume 7, The New Covenant*, ed. John Riches, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989) (hereafter cited in text as *GL* 7). I shall in general follow the English translation. However, when quoting directly I will consult and, when appropriate, cite the German editions: Balthasar, *Theodramatik: Band III, Die Handlung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973); Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Band III/2, Neuer Bund* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1969).

in the kenotic life of the immanent Trinity and finds its logical culmination in the eucharistic distribution of Christ's flesh and blood. Balthasar's particular account of triune kenosis, though, avoids a simple equation of kenosis with loss, and further avoids the metaphysically disastrous notion of God's suffering, moving Sobrino beyond a significant impasse.

However, in light of the dehumanizing reality of material poverty, Balthasar also needs correction and supplementation. His account of poverty is romanticized, with the result that it valorizes deplorable conditions. I use Sobrino's emphasis on the centrality of concrete historical praxis to correct serious shortcomings in Balthasar's account of poverty. From Sobrino we learn to recognize the true face of poverty, and how to embody the "principle of mercy," whereby we are led to take the crucified peoples down from their crosses.<sup>6</sup>

## The Poor Church in CELAM Conferences

In this section, I briefly survey the development of the concepts of the poor church and the preferential option for the poor in the CELAM conferences of Medellín, Puebla, and Aparecida. Since I am not, in this context, arguing for the preferential option, but rather assuming it, my treatment here shall remain fairly cursory, rather than delving into the sources behind its development or its subsequent history of reception, or even attempting to account for the CELAM conferences in their totality.<sup>7</sup> Instead, I limit myself to the strictures of what they affirm about the realities of poverty.

The term "preferential option for the poor" comes from the 1979 Puebla conference, but its roots are earlier in 1968's conference at Medellín, which sought to take the spirit of Vatican II's attention to the signs of the times, openness to the world, and renewed emphasis upon the local church, and apply it to the Latin American context.<sup>8</sup> In their attending to the signs of the times, the bishops were faced with the situation of

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6. Jon Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, and Ecclesial Solidarity," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis* 615–36; Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994).
  7. On the background and development of the conferences, see Joseph Gremillion, "The Significance of Puebla for the Catholic Church in North America," in *Puebla and Beyond* 310–29; Kilian McDonnell, "Vatican II (1962–1964), Puebla (1979), Synod (1985): *KOINONIA/COMMUNIO* as an Integral Ecclesiology," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988) 399–427; Marcos McGrath, "The Impact of *Gaudium et Spes*: Medellín, Puebla, and Pastoral Creativity," in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience of North and Latin America*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985) 61–73; Sobrino, "Significance of Puebla"; O. Ernesto Valiente, "The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012), doi:10.1177/004056391207300403. Michael Murphy, "Reflections on Puebla," *Furrow* 31 (1980) 650–54; Paulo Suess, "Die missionarische Synthese nach Aparecida," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 92 (2008), <https://www.unifr.ch/zmr/assets/files/leseproben/suess.pdf>.
  8. Sobrino, "Significance of Puebla" 289–309; Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 113.

dire poverty among their people (Medellín chaps. 1–5, 14).<sup>9</sup> The theme of poverty is treated most fully in chapter 14, “Poverty of the Church.” Here the bishops lament the fact that the church appears rich and aloof from the plight of the poor (Medellín 14.2–3). They differentiate between three uses of the word “poverty.” Material poverty, which inhibits a fully humanized life, is inherently evil. Spiritual poverty, by contrast, is an openness to and dependence upon God. Finally, an evangelical poverty is one that voluntarily takes on the conditions of material poverty in order to express solidarity and work for justice. This follows Christ’s example (Medellín 14.4). The conference called for a poor church, one which denounces injustices, preaches and exemplifies spiritual poverty, and is itself materially poor (Medellín 14.5).<sup>10</sup>

These themes were developed just over a decade later at Puebla, where the bishops “affirm[ed] the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation” (Puebla 1134). The dire poverty which afflicts the overwhelming majority in Latin America (Puebla 15–71, 1135) is denounced as “anti-evangelical” (Puebla 1159). The preferential option for the poor is grounded christologically, in Christ’s poverty, especially its expression on the cross, and the fact that the poor were the privileged recipients of his evangelizing activity (Puebla 1141–44). And yet, the poor are not merely recipients of evangelization. They too have evangelizing potential, and summon the church to conversion (Puebla 1147). On these bases (Christology and the evangelizing potential of the poor), the bishops call upon the church to adopt an evangelical poverty, which is motivated by the desire to “proclaim Christ the Savior,” but which proclamation requires structural changes (Puebla 1148–55 at 1153). The structural changes are necessary because the view of humanity and of human salvation is integral and historical. Actual historical human beings are being saved, and this means the healing of their historical conditions as well.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the more recent CELAM conference at Aparecida (2007) gives all of this a more explicitly missionary dimension, calling for a church of missionary disciples. The preferential option for the poor is rearticulated (Aparecida 391–98). More significantly, the evangelizing potential of the poor, articulated at Puebla, receives a new christological impetus in a theology of encounter. The impulse for missionary discipleship flows from an encounter with the risen Christ (Aparecida 13–14). Christians

9. Of course, even before the Medellín conference, Paul VI had recognized poverty as among the signs of the times in *Populorum Progressio*. See Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 20–23, for a treatment of Sobrino’s engagement with the signs of the times. Note especially Bedford’s observation that the “crucified peoples” are among the signs of the times for Sobrino. *Ibid.* 137–38.

10. These thoughts were subsequently developed by Gustavo Gutiérrez in his *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation*, 15th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), whose work in part paved the way for the next episcopal conference at Puebla. For further development of the concept outside the CELAM conferences see, e.g., Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984); Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor*.

11. Sobrino, “Significance of Puebla” 304–5.

“are called to contemplate, in the suffering faces of our brothers and sisters, the face of Christ, who calls us to serve Him in them” (Aparecida 393).

This suffices to give a basic statement of the preferential option for the poor. It is christologically rooted, aims at the integral liberation of real men and women, and partakes of an important reciprocity whereby the poor are not only evangelized but are evangelizers. The preferential option calls for a church which is itself poor for the sake of the poor.

## Jon Sobrino: The Kingdom of God and Self-Giving Praxis

Jon Sobrino, whose theology operates within this basic Latin American perspective, provides a significant development of the CELAM’s call for a poor church. Sobrino specifies that his theology arises from the perspective of the hope of the victims and in the service of transformative praxis, which is the concrete expression of doing the will of God.<sup>12</sup> This will be important to bear in mind in interpreting his thought, for his theoretical formulations (such as they are) are not there for their own sake, but rather with a view to the sort of praxis they generate.

That Sobrino is predominantly concerned with praxis presents both a potential pitfall and an opportunity. The danger is this: Sobrino’s victim-oriented approach leads him to go beyond the notion that Christ discloses a God in solidarity with victims, and to affirm God as a suffering God, the “crucified God.”<sup>13</sup> As I argue below, such a conception of God raises serious metaphysical and theological quandaries, and, in my view, exacerbates the problem it seeks to address. The opportunity presented by Sobrino’s praxis-driven approach is that he is not necessarily wed to any of these problematic metaphysical commitments, which will allow me to propose a different basis for his *desiderata* concerning solidarity with the poor.

## The Unintended Consequences of Affirming Divine Suffering

The language of the “crucified God,” entered the theological lexicon largely through the influence of Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*,<sup>14</sup> and in the past few decades

12. Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001) 1–6. See also Paul G. Crowley, “Theology in the Light of Human Suffering: A Note on ‘Taking the Crucified Down from the Cross,’” in *Hope & Solidarity: Jon Sobrino’s Challenge to Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008) 16–30 at 17; Roberto S. Goizueta, “The Christology of Jon Sobrino,” in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 90–104 at 90–92; Rafael Luciani, “Hermeneutics and Theology in Sobrino’s Christology,” in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 105–18 at 110–12; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 41–98; Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Völk* 15–43. Stålsett and Bedford both link this orientation towards praxis with Sobrino’s vision of theology as *intellectus amoris*. This facet of Sobrino’s thought is set forth in Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 27–46. See also Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 109–17.
13. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994) 244–46.
14. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

affirmations of divine suffering have become not only common, but were for a while almost *de rigueur*.<sup>15</sup> Sobrino, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Christologies of Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, is undeniably influenced by Moltmann's thought.<sup>16</sup>

In order to avoid an argument of guilt by association, whereby Sobrino is suspect merely because Moltmann influenced him, or because he speaks of the "crucified God," I shall focus on a few key affirmations about divine suffering from Sobrino. According to Sobrino, the key dispute at Nicea was not simply whether the man Jesus is God, "but what the being of God is," and specifically, whether God is a God who suffers.<sup>17</sup> It is crucial to see here that this goes beyond the question of whether or not the person who suffered on the cross was a divine person—a Chalcedonian Christology allows and even demands that we affirm that this is so: the impassible one suffered. Sobrino is concerned with the being of God. His motivation here is soteriological: "Without *affinity* there is no salvation. And this affinity has to reach down to the deepest levels in human beings, to where the expectation of salvation is most necessary and, at the same time, seems most difficult to achieve—in suffering."<sup>18</sup>

Going further, in *Christology at the Crossroads*, Sobrino is explicit in affirming "suffering as a mode of being for God," as a way of affirming "the most profound intuition of the New Testament . . . that God is love."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, "God himself is crucified" in the death of Christ, and in this event, "the Father suffers the death of the Son and takes upon himself all the pain and suffering of history."<sup>20</sup> The reference to history is key, for Sobrino's vision of God is not merely of a God involved with history, but of a God who "lets himself be affected by history," because he "is a trinitarian 'process' on the way towards its ultimate fulfillment."<sup>21</sup>

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15. See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2000) 1–26 for an impressive survey of literature on the question of divine passibility.
  16. Note the approving citations of Moltmann in *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994) 244; *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001) 26, 34, 50–53, 91, 248, 265–69; *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, trans. John Drury (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002) 28–33, 217–19, 228–29. See Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 50–54, and Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 15–17, 431–73, for treatments of Moltmann's influence upon Sobrino.
  17. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 265–67.
  18. *Ibid.* 266 (italics original). And yet see Weinandy's argument that if the suffering of Calvary is conceived of as occurring in the being of God *qua* God, it actually destroys any affinity with our suffering, for then it would be utterly unlike human suffering. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 204–5.
  19. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* 217. The idea that in order to truly love, God needs to be able to suffer is characteristically Moltmannian. See Moltmann, *Crucified God* 222–23.
  20. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* 224.
  21. *Ibid.* 226. See also Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 91. Stålsett defends Sobrino from the charge that he makes suffering eternal by noting that he conceives of God as an as-yet-incomplete process. Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 469–70. However, as I argue below, this only exacerbates the problem.

O. Ernesto Valiente writes that for Sobrino, “This God-in-relation becomes vulnerable and is affected by a suffering world, but God is not dependent upon the world or constituted by God’s relationship with it.”<sup>22</sup> While it would be significant indeed for Sobrino to affirm God’s independence from and non-constitution by his relationship with the world, I am not persuaded that this can be sustained. As I have just demonstrated, Sobrino views the Trinity as an as-yet incomplete process, and posits God’s suffering as necessary for affirming the insight that God is love, both of which seem to require a relationship with the world in order to be true. Moreover, the passages from Sobrino that Valiente cites do not specify God’s independence from the world, but rather his transcendence, which, in light of the foregoing, is not quite the same thing.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the passages explicitly deny to God “the *apatheia* of the gods”<sup>24</sup> and affirm his “impotence” as he “succumbs to [evil],” which demands that we rethink what divine transcendence means.<sup>25</sup>

This should suffice to give Sobrino’s basic position on the matter. Suffering does indeed affect God, who does not hold himself aloof from history and its vicissitudes, but rather stands in solidarity with the suffering of the world in order to rescue them from their suffering. God does not simply affect history, but is himself affected by it. While Sobrino turns to the idea of divine suffering as a resource for providing a vision of hope for history’s victims, the abandonment of divine impassibility carries with it monumental negative consequences, which I believe render it unacceptable. Indeed, a suffering God only exacerbates the problem of suffering.

As Thomas Weinandy argues, to suggest that God is capable of suffering risks “shattering” the subsistent relations of the Trinity.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, affirming divine suffering ontologizes evil, rendering it necessary and making salvation dubitable if not impossible. For God to suffer he must exist within the same order as the creation, rather than as its transcendent Creator.<sup>27</sup> “If the whole ontological system, which includes God, is impaired by evil, then there is no one, including God, who can repair it and make it right. Salvation—freedom from evil and suffering—becomes a false hope for it will never be obtained.”<sup>28</sup> In all fairness, Sobrino’s position on suffering is that God takes suffering into himself in order to eradicate it.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, a metaphysics that would allow God to suffer also precludes the elimination of suffering, for it makes suffering an ontological principle.

In addition to this metaphysical problem, there are serious moral quandaries posed by the idea of divine suffering. While Sobrino adopts this notion in order to safeguard the New Testament affirmation that God is love, the doctrine of impassibility actually

22. Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 190.

23. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* 247–49; Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 87–88.

24. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 88.

25. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* 248.

26. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 113–46 at 120.

27. *Ibid.* 153–55.

28. *Ibid.* 157.

29. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 266; Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* 224–29.



provides better support, for "if God did suffer . . . God would need not only to alleviate the suffering of others, but also his own suffering," whereas, "since God does not suffer, his care for those who suffer is freely given and not evoked by some need on his part. His love is freely expressed entirely for the sake of those he loves."<sup>30</sup> A God without *apatheia* is, both literally and colloquially, pathetic.

Moreover, if suffering is ontologized, as it must be for it to affect God, we are left with a monstrous universe and a loathsome god, as David Bentley Hart has forcefully argued. For under such an arrangement, history's slaughter bench becomes necessary to the being of God, rather than a contingent state of affairs with no ultimate intelligibility.<sup>31</sup> Sobrino's characterizing God as an as-yet-incomplete process only exacerbates the issue. Perhaps the outcome will be good, but, if the corpse-strewn path of history is necessary to attain it, the cost of admission is too high, for such a project of self-realization through violence.<sup>32</sup>

Of course Sobrino intends none of this, but that does not change the fact that these implications are consequent upon his affirmations. Nevertheless, as I noted above, his approach is not theoretical but practical. As he puts it, "The question is, what process does the crucified God initiate?"<sup>33</sup> His concerns—whether they are positive or negative—are with praxis, not with the fabric of the universe. Were I to provide an alternative basis that would generate the same praxis, there should be no intrinsic problem to adopting it instead. This is what I intend to do with Balthasar. Before I do this, though, I must provide an account of Sobrino's positive agenda so that it is clear for what I am marshaling Balthasar's support.

### *Christology from Below and the Kingdom of God*

Given his Latin American provenance and his praxis-oriented approach, it is unsurprising that Sobrino's Christology is fundamentally a Christology from below.<sup>34</sup> Even

30. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 160–61.

31. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 155–67; Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

32. So, Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite* 164–66; Hart, *Doors of the Sea* 98–99. Note the importance of Ivan Karamazov's argument against theodicy for Hart's position; e.g., *Doors of the Sea* 36–44. The most thorough treatment of the questions of divine suffering and suffering's necessity in Sobrino's thought of which I am aware is Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 429–92. Despite recognizing some attenuating factors, Stålsett ultimately decides that Sobrino's position on divine suffering contains so many ambiguities that it can only be affirmed in a very circumscribed sense.

33. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator* 246.

34. Note, though, Goizueta's suggestion that Sobrino's Christology can be understood as "from above" insofar as it assumes the objectivity of God's revelation and act in Christ, and "from below" insofar as it is grounded in the concrete history of Jesus. In other words, his outlook defies the simplistic bifurcation of this typology. Goizueta, "The Christology of Jon Sobrino" 92–93.

considering the post-Resurrection Christ, Sobrino has continual recourse to the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth and laments its occlusion in the subsequent history of the church.<sup>35</sup> In this, he is simply following the logic of the Pauline Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5–11. Christ's exaltation follows his humiliation. His preexistent glory is only discerned after the fact of his earthly career, which culminated in his death on the cross. Only in the resurrection's light is it clear that Christ is the glorious Son of God.<sup>36</sup> Sobrino's way of negotiating this pattern is clearly seen in his treatment of the christological titles. In the case of each title, there are two stages of its history. In the first, the title is applied in an explanatory way to Jesus. In such case, one already knows what priesthood, lordship, or being Messiah entails, and sees this as a fitting way to describe Jesus. In a subsequent and decisive stage, though, Jesus's history comes to fill out and define the title. One moves from saying that Jesus is Lord to recognizing that Lord is Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

Sobrino's is a Christology from below in another sense as well. Gustavo Gutiérrez speaks of doing "theology from the underside of history."<sup>38</sup> The Christology and attendant ecclesiology generated by such a perspective takes into account the fact that Jesus occupied this underside. An adequate Christology must, therefore adopt the view of the poor and otherwise marginalized.<sup>39</sup> Hence, merely attending to history is inadequate, for "the history of humanity has been written 'with a white hand,'" and "history's losers have another outlook,"<sup>40</sup> which must be taken into consideration, but typically is not.

This Christology from below serves a few important functions for Sobrino in his quest for a transformative theology from and for the victims. First, it roots our reflections upon Christ in history, where real men and women dwell. It marks out history, then, as the site of God's saving activity.<sup>41</sup> Second, such a view reminds us that Jesus himself

35. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, *passim*, but esp. 225–27.

36. See Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 314–15, for discussion of this history-of-salvation-shaped approach to Christology in Sobrino, which derives from Rahner.

37. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 118–19, 130–34, 140–43, 153–59. See also Goizueta, "The Christology of Jon Sobrino" 92–93; Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 79–83, but note that Bedford raises questions about the adequacy of Sobrino's retrieval of the historical Jesus 103–6). See also, Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 179–217.

38. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983) 169–214.

39. *Ibid.* 206–12; See also Jorge Costadoat's characterization of Sobrino's Christology from the perspective of history's victims. "Central Themes in Sobrino's Christology," in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 119–30 at 120–21.

40. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* 201; citing Leonardo Boff, *Teologia do cativerio e da libertação* (Lisbon: Multinova, 1976).

41. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 280–84; Sobrino *Christ the Liberator* 225–27. In this regard, see also Ignacio Ellacuría's account of "salvation in history" as the proper way to understand the concept of salvation history in *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and His Church*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976) 5–18. On the impact of Ellacuría's fundamental theology upon Sobrino, see Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 285–336; Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 70–80. Both Lassalle-Klein and Valiente argue that Ellacuría, making use of Zubiri, historicizes Rahner's transcendental theology.

died as a victim of history, which then shifts the resurrection into a different register. It is the vindication of an innocent victim, marking God out as the God who will raise history's victims.<sup>42</sup> Third, foregrounding the life of Jesus means foregrounding the sort of praxis in which he was engaged.<sup>43</sup> Fourth, and synthesizing these other strands, it recovers the central place of the Kingdom of God in Jesus's life and ministry.<sup>44</sup>

In Sobrino's Christology, two relationships prove constitutive of Jesus's identity. One is his relationship to God. The other is his relationship to the Kingdom.<sup>45</sup> Christ's entire concrete existence is a revelation of God.<sup>46</sup> Hence, Sobrino's Christology and its attendant soteriology are regnocentric. I shall return to this point below. For now, though, let us note with Sobrino that the content of Jesus's preaching—the content of the Gospel—is the Kingdom of God.<sup>47</sup> This calls, then, for a christological concentration of our understanding of the Kingdom, rather than a christological reduction. In other words, the mere appearance of Jesus on the stage of history is not God's ultimate purpose.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Jesus

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42. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 84. This theme receives extensive treatment in Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 175–81, and serves as the subject matter of the lengthy postscript to Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 571–84.
43. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 45–49. Crowley, "Theology in Light of Suffering" 29; Eileen M. Fagan, *An Interpretation of Evangelization: Jon Sobrino's Christology and Ecclesiology in Dialogue* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars, 1998) 149, 174; Thomas M. Kelly, "A Church Rooted in Mercy: Ecclesial Signposts in Sobrino's Theology," in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 155–70 at 158; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 317–21; Luciani, "Sobrino's Christology" 110–14; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 219–25; Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 86–93.
44. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 310–12; Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 282–83. See further Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Christ and Kingdom: The Identity of Jesus and Christian Politics," in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 242–54; Félix Palazzi, "Hope and the Kingdom of God: Christology and Eschatology in Latin American Liberation Theology," in Pope, *Hope & Solidarity* 131–42; Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 126–27.
45. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 309–12. See Goizueta, "The Christology of Jon Sobrino" 93–98; Luciani, "Sobrino's Christology" 112–14; Costadoat, "Sobrino's Christology" 121–23; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 225–57; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 317–27; Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 125–43.
46. Lassalle-Klein notes that this principle is rooted in Ellacuría's theology of sign, which is itself a historicization of Karl Rahner's theology of the symbol. Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 253–84. See also Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 70–80. Valiente also explores Rahner's direct influence upon Sobrino (58–60). For Rahner's theology see Rahner, "Zur Theologie des Symbols," in *Karl Rahner Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Wendelin Knoch and Trappe (Freiburg: Herder, 2006) 18: 423–57. For Sobrino's direct engagement with Rahner see, e.g., Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 202, 214, 216, 276, 317–19; Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* 22–25.
47. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 40–41; Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis* 350–88. See also Kelly, "Rooted in Mercy" 161–65.
48. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 41–43; Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 144–47. See also Costadoat, "Sobrino's Christology" 122; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 237–41.

comes to mediate the Kingdom. This highlights the practical dimension of Jesus's ministry and of discipleship. For Jesus was devoted to bringing about the Kingdom, and those who would follow after him must walk the same path.<sup>49</sup> The Kingdom of God roots our consideration of salvation and of Christ's mediation of that salvation in concrete history, in the lives of real women and men. The political entailments of Christ's ministry are foregrounded in this consideration. All of this serves in accomplishing Sobrino's stated goal of transformative praxis on behalf of and from the perspective of history's victims.

### *Self-Gift as the Kingdom's Character*

So, then, Christ is dually constituted by his relations to God and to the Kingdom. What is the character of that by which he is so constituted? In both cases, the determining reality is that of self-giving. As Sobrino writes,

Jesus is constituted as person precisely in this self-giving to this "other" who is God . . . What makes this radical self-giving possible and requires it—and demonstrates it—is Jesus' history down to his end on the cross . . . This relationship of Jesus to God *in the way of historical self-giving*—not only in the way of provenance—can also be described in the term *sonship*. The divine sonship of Christ can then come to be expressed through the following stages: (1) establishing Jesus' historical relationship with the Father as self-giving; (2) understanding this self-giving as an expression of sonship, as Jesus' unity with and differentiation from the Father; (3) identifying this sonship of Jesus with that of the eternal Son.<sup>50</sup>

So, then, Jesus's divinity, the essence of his sonship, is located in his self-giving to the Father, which is expressed most fully at the cross, which is the historical outcome of his itinerary of proclaiming God's reign and standing in solidarity with the poor.<sup>51</sup> Jesus dies at the hands of the powers that be, and it is here that he most clearly reveals the Father and the Father's love, for even in the face of death, he does not turn from his vocation of love and solidarity, but continues to offer himself to God, and to God's service. As we shall see, this constitutive role for self-gift is an important point of contact with Balthasar's theology, an affinity which will allow for my Balthasarian

49. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 43–49; Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 43–47. This is particularly developed in Bedford's treatment of the centrality of discipleship ("Nachfolge") in Sobrino's Christology, a concern which binds together the Kingdom of God, praxis, and ecclesiology. Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 73–93. See also Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 267–75. Significantly, Stålsett locates Jesus's relationship to his disciples as a third central relationship for Jesus' identity, alongside the Kingdom of God (225–37) and the "God of the Kingdom" (237–41).

50. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 309–10 (italics original). See also Goizueta, "The Christology of Jon Sobrino" 98–102; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 246–59.

51. See, especially Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* 201–17. See discussion in Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 137–43.

supplementation. Likewise, the centrality of the cross provides an important affinity between these theologies. In the next section I shall introduce Balthasar for the purpose of supplementing Sobrino's positive agenda while avoiding the metaphysical pitfall I have identified in his theology. In so doing, another area of supplementation for Sobrino will also become clear.

## Hans Urs von Balthasar and Eucharistic Poverty

The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar may seem like a strange resource to support the concerns of liberation theologies. He has, after all, written critically about liberation theology,<sup>52</sup> and exemplifies what might be considered a Christology from above in contrast to the more typically Latin American Christologies from below.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, European location separates him from the Latin American milieu within which the preferential option arose and is most keenly felt. In other words, he is distant from the underside of history about which Gutiérrez speaks.<sup>54</sup> Frankly, when a North American proposes a European as a corrective for a Latin American, he or she should step lightly. However, as Sobrino notes, there is a potential for harmony between the European and Latin American theological outlooks. The problem is not incompatibility so much as it is European theology's tendency towards non-historically conscious hegemony.<sup>55</sup> One must avoid Eurocentrism rather than Europeans. By placing Balthasar into dialogue with theologies from the Latin American context, and indeed bringing him correction from them, I aim to avoid this problematic Eurocentrism, even as I demonstrate Balthasar's enriching and corrective potential for the quest for a poor church, and thereby, hopefully, embody a catholicity of outlook that neither unduly privileges nor outright neglects diverse voices.

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52. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Liberation Theology in the Light of Salvation History," in *Liberation Theology in Latin America: With Selected Essays and Documents*, ed. James V. Schall, trans. Erasmo Leiva (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982) 131–46. This criticism is somewhat attenuated in Balthasar's later writings, such as "The 'Beatitudes' and Human Rights," in *Explorations in Theology: Volume 5, Man Is Created*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014) 443–48. For another attempt to put Balthasar into constructive dialogue with liberation theologies see Roberto S. Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis," *Crosscurrents* 63 (2013), doi:10.1111/cros.12013.
53. As we shall see below, though, his trinitarian theology has continual recourse to the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth. Hence, it is more accurate to see his Christology as cutting across such distinctions as "from above" and "from below," in a manner parallel to what Goizueta observed with Sobrino. Goizueta, "The Christology of Jon Sobrino" 92–93.
54. Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis" 62–76. Yet note Balthasar's recognition that Christ did come and occupy this underside in his earthly life. Balthasar, "The 'Beatitudes' and Human Rights" 445–48.
55. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 36. Elsewhere, Sobrino writes of the potential for reciprocity between the churches as they enter into a posture of openness in giving and receiving from one another. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 156–57.

## Dispossessive Christ, Dispossessive Church

For Balthasar, Jesus Christ lives an entirely dispossessive existence. In his life and ministry, particularly by his obedience to the Father, Jesus is “transparent” to the Father.<sup>56</sup> This transparency to the Father means that Jesus, rather than determining himself, allows himself to be fully determined by his mission from the Father. His life and ministry, then, are dispossessive. This dispossession is further exemplified in the fact that his entire life is oriented towards his death on the cross, and this death on the cross is a total self-giving.<sup>57</sup> A genuine poverty, then, pervades the life and ministry of Christ. However, this does not give the complete picture. In order to fully appreciate Balthasar’s dispossessive Christology, we must recognize its eucharistic character.<sup>58</sup> “Only the Eucharist really completes the Incarnation,” he writes.<sup>59</sup> Christ’s expropriated existence is not dispossession for dispossession’s sake, but dispossession for the good of others, for the life of the world. It is poverty so that others might become rich.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, I propose construing Balthasar’s christological vision as a eucharistic poverty. Balthasar writes that “bread and wine do not conceal the flesh and blood of Christ, but rather reveal precisely in what an essential manner Christ wills to be nourishment for us, how deeply he incorporates himself in us in order to take us up into himself.”<sup>61</sup> A eucharistic poverty, then, is not one in which one simply divests oneself of wealth. Rather, a eucharistic poverty manifests itself in giving one’s substance fully to another, so that the other might live.<sup>62</sup> As I shall demonstrate in the next section, Balthasar’s trinitarian theology envisions this life-giving gift of self as the reality that constitutes the being of God.

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56. Balthasar, *GL* 7:125, 283, 290–91. See further Étienne Vetö, *Du Christ à la Trinité: Penser les mystères du Christ après Thomas d’Aquin et Balthasar* (Paris: Cerf, 2012) 233–34; Silvia Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität: Ein Vergleich der Konzeptionen Karl Rahners und Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2008) 242–50. Note the similar language used by Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 183–84.
57. Balthasar, *GL* 7:80–81; *TD* 4:233–37.
58. On the basically eucharistic character of Balthasar’s thought see Roch Kereszty, “The Eucharist and Mission in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *Love Alone Is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, ed. David L. Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 1: 3–15. For further treatments of Balthasar’s eucharistic theology see Peter Casarella, “*Analogia Donationis*: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Eucharist,” *Philosophy & Theology* 11 (1998), doi:10.5840/philtheol1998111111; Nicholas Healy and David L. Schindler, “For the Life of the World: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004) 51–63.
59. Balthasar, *TD* 4:348.
60. Balthasar, *TD* 4:495; *GL* 7:131, 148, 150, 226.
61. Balthasar, *GL* 7:540. Healy and Schindler note that the Eucharist is the “universalization” of Christ’s self-gift. “Balthasar on Church as Eucharist” 57. See also Nicholas J. Healy, *The Eschatology of Hans Urs von Balthasar: Being as Communion* (New York: Oxford University, 2005) 148–55.
62. I use the term “substance” here in all its polyvalent ambiguity, signaling both self and wealth, and with an eye to its deployment in sacramental theology.

It is for this reason that Balthasar insists that “the doctrine of the covenant or of the church (even including the doctrine of the sacraments) must not be construed as merely a result of the cross event, but rather as an intrinsic moment of it.”<sup>63</sup> Christ has come to bring about human salvation, which means that the church, as the community of salvation's realization, must itself share an intrinsic relationship with his saving activity, rather than being a mere aftereffect. Through partaking of the Eucharist, the church enters more deeply into the dispossessive reality of Christ's life and death, and comes itself to share in his life-giving and eucharistic poverty.<sup>64</sup> Such a church, in other words, will be a church on mission, giving itself fully to the world for the sake of the world's salvation.

### Triune Dispossession

In order to complete the picture, I must bring one more component of Balthasar's thought into view. It is this component which, I believe, most strongly underwrites the evangelical poverty of the church. I refer to the grounding of all the foregoing in the intra-triune life of God. For Balthasar, Christ's history is an *ad extra* enactment of God's own life.<sup>65</sup> This includes the event of the cross, which, by its scandal demands that we radically rethink who God must be in order for this to have been his act.<sup>66</sup> So while this is an exercise in speculation, and perhaps a Christology from above, it is at the same time filled out in its content by continual recourse to the events of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>67</sup> While its perspective is not history's underside, there is nothing inherent

63. Balthasar, *Theodramatik* 3:296–97 (my translation).

64. Balthasar, *GL* 7:97, 100–1, 175, 429. See further Healy and Schindler, “Balthasar on Church as Eucharist” 59; Casarella, “*Analogia Donationis*” 148–50; Kereszty, “Eucharist and Mission” 9.

65. Balthasar, *GL* 7:214–396. See also David Luy, “The Aesthetic Collision: Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Trinity and the Cross,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13 (2011), doi:10.1111/j.1468-2400.2010.00550.x; Sturm-M. Wittschier, *Kreuz, Trinität, Analogie: Trinitarische Ontologie unter dem Leitbild des Kreuzes, dargestellt als ästhetische Theologie* (Wurzburg: Echter, 1987) 95–104; Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 241–42; Healy, *Eschatology of Balthasar* 105–9; Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* 37–50 at 37–39. Ellacuría also views history as an *ad extra* enactment of the Trinity. Ellacuría, *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013) 151–54. See also Valiente, *Liberation through Reconciliation* 78.

66. Balthasar, *GL* 7:215; *TD* 4:322–24.

67. See Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 183–99; Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2015) 180–81; Williams, “Balthasar and the Trinity” 37–38; Vetö, *Du Christ à la Trinité* 222–24; Karen Kilby, “Hans Urs von Balthasar on the Trinity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011) 208–22 at 208–14. Note, though, Kilby's critique that Balthasar leaves his economic starting point behind more readily than he would like to admit (214–18).

to Balthasar's methodology that precludes adopting this perspective, particularly as he desires to take Christ's concrete history into account.

In any case, reasoning backwards from the cross-Eucharist to what God must be like in light of this, Balthasar articulates a theory of an intra-trinitarian kenosis.<sup>68</sup> The Father's *Ur-kenosis* involves his entire expropriation of being in the eternal generation of the Son. The Son, who eternally receives his being from the Father, might be said to exemplify the attitude of spiritual poverty articulated by Medellín (14.4), because of his open, receptive, and dependent posture. And as Christ is himself transparent to the Father, and since the Father is characterized by this fundamental kenosis, the Son immediately, eternally, and gratefully returns the gift by joining in the spiration of the Holy Spirit, a movement which Balthasar characterizes as an eternal Eucharist.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, it is this eternal dynamic of the divine processions which renders possible creation and redemption. The divine difference and even distance between Father and Son is the condition of possibility for creaturely difference. The creation occurs by participation in the Son's eternal generation.<sup>70</sup> Sin, then, is a "knot" in the Son's eternal Eucharist, by which the return gift is withheld, and redemption is a restoring of created reality into this eternal eucharistic dynamic in which it lives and moves and has its being.<sup>71</sup>

Two significant results follow from this trinitarian grounding of the economy. First, the fundamental shape of the universe is kenotic dispossession. It is crucial to note that for Balthasar, this dispossession and kenosis do not form a negative concept, but rather a positive one, namely the divine life.<sup>72</sup> This is significant because it means that we cannot simply gloss kenosis or self-gift as "loss." Instead, the movement of self-gift is one that fulfills the being of the giver. This is the import of my naming this dynamic a eucharistic poverty. It is a genuine giving away of oneself, which is poverty. And yet this self-gift is not a loss, but rather a fuller reception of oneself. The Son's return-gift of joining the Father in the spiration of the Holy Spirit constitutes his Personhood. His return to the Father occurs in the movement of going out from the Father.<sup>73</sup> The inmost

68. On the origins of Balthasar's notion of intra-trinitarian kenosis and his motivations for developing it, see Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* 160–97; Katy Leamy, *The Holy Trinity: Hans Urs von Balthasar and His Sources* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2015) 10–50.

69. Balthasar, *TD* 4:323–26. See further Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 231–35; Healy, *Eschatology of Balthasar* 3–4; Leamy, *Holy Trinity* 122–26; Vetö, *Du Christ à la Trinité* 308–11; Casarella, "Analogia Donationis" 162–63.

70. Balthasar, *TD* 4:323–26; *GL* 7:214, 396.

71. Balthasar, *TD* 4:328–30. See also Casarella, "Analogia Donationis" 148; Healy and Schindler, "Balthasar on Church as Eucharist" 51; Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 184–85; Vincent Holzer, *Le Dieu Trinité dans l'histoire: Le différend théologique Balthasar – Rahner* (Paris: Cerf, 1995) 16–169.

72. So Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* 190–91; Healy, *Eschatology of Balthasar* 128–34.

73. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2: *Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) 152–53.



reality of all existence is to give oneself away to and for another. In the light of such a trinitarian theology, in calling for a poor church that exists for the sake of the poor, the Latin American episcopal conferences are calling upon the church to live according to the grain of the universe. This is the strongest possible theological grounding for the poor church. And this call is not a call to loss, but to a fuller life.

Second, this ontology does not make suffering or violence necessary, and hence, does not underwrite regimes of suffering and violence. The triune kenosis is a life-giving dynamic wherein each of the divine Persons is fulfilled. Only with the distortion of sin does this kenosis take on the character of suffering or loss. The divine dynamic retains its eternal and immutable shape, but the contingency of sin gives it a different character in the economy.<sup>74</sup> This is significant, for it enables God to be intimately involved in the world process, without himself becoming mutably entangled in the world process. Indeed, once more, we must note that Balthasar's theology of triune kenosis was adopted specifically as a strategy for upholding the immutability of God, in contrast to the sort of theology of God's suffering found in Moltmann.<sup>75</sup> God does not need the created other (and hence the ability to suffer) in order to be loving, for already, in Godself, God has the divine other and, thereby a plenitude of love. For this reason, the particularities of the world and its history, and God's involvement in that history, are taken into account here without thereby making that history, with all of its violence, suffering, and horror, in any way necessary. Hence, from Balthasar we can gain an ontological grounding for Sobrino's theological agenda, which I have termed "eucharistic poverty," while at the same time avoiding the idea of a suffering God and all of the problematic metaphysical baggage it entails.

## Eucharistic Poverty and Sobrino

I am advancing my own Balthasarian account of eucharistic poverty as a corrective for Sobrino's theology. In addition to the metaphysical concerns about the necessity of suffering that I have already explained, I believe that this formulation advances Sobrino's vision specifically by its recourse to the Eucharist. As I noted above, a vision of the cross as expressive as self-giving love is central to both Sobrino and Balthasar. Yet they diverge when it comes to how the memory of the cross is carried forth into history.<sup>76</sup> For Balthasar the Eucharist plays a central role in the memory of the cross.

74. Balthasar, *TD* 4:190–91. See also Wittschier, *Kreuz, Trinität, Analogie* 95–104; Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 241–42; Healy, *Eschatology of Balthasar* 105–9.

75. Balthasar makes this his explicit motivation in *TD* 4:321–23. So also his *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) vii–ix. See further Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990) *passim*; Williams, "Balthasar and the Trinity" 37–39; Cichon-Brandmaier, *Ökonomische und immanente Trinität* 205–9.

76. "Diverge" is perhaps too strong a term, as both would most likely affirm the other's mechanism of anamnesis. The divergence is in the area of emphases.

For Sobrino, the memory of the cross is carried forward in the reality of martyrdom, wherein the martyrs bear within themselves the form of Jesus.<sup>77</sup> They, as individual concentrations of the crucified peoples (a concept to which I shall return in more depth below), are set in a mutually explanatory relationship with the crucified Jesus.<sup>78</sup> They derive their meaning from him, while the reality of his saving act of self-giving and kenosis is seen in their flesh throughout history.

Obviously, the witness of the martyrs is an important, and poignant, locus for carrying forward the memory of the cross. I want to suggest, though, that a eucharistic formulation also advances Sobrino's agenda, and provides a more comprehensive ecclesial vision. I might further add that in the post-apostolic church martyrdom and the Eucharist are thoroughly intertwined. At times, Sobrino approaches such a eucharistic formulation of self-giving love with statements to the effect that "the objective foundations of the Church were laid at the Last Supper. To interpret the Last Supper as laying the foundation of a new people grounded on the law of the 'for the many' is to have the germ of a truly profound theology of the Church."<sup>79</sup> Or that the gospel of Jesus's person and the gospel of the "shared [eucharistic] table" are mutually interpretive realities unique to Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

However, to my knowledge, Sobrino never makes this eucharistic understanding of Christ's identity explicit. References to kenosis abound,<sup>81</sup> but the Eucharist is mentioned only in passing. So while there is self-emptying, Sobrino makes no explicit connection between that self-emptying and giving life to another by means of it. He has an account of self-gift, and an account of poverty, but not an account of eucharistic poverty. A possible insight into this lacuna comes from Sobrino's statement that "liturgical celebrations . . . are all necessary in the church, and they can be good, although they sometimes are not. The important thing is that, good or not, they are not the primary real ecclesial substance."<sup>82</sup> The primary ecclesial substance of which he speaks is "making real *in actu* the church's response and correspondence to God today, in faith, hope, and charity as a community of believers," particularly in life-giving solidarity with the poor.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps Sobrino fears a sacramental obscuring of a fundamental priority. After all, many of the

77. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 73–85; Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 189, 217, 249, 279, 305–6, 340. For anamnesis more specifically see *Christ the Liberator* 245–47.

78. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 123, 154, 171–85; Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, Solidarity" 622, 633; Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 51–56, 79–80; Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 4–6, 43, 84, 310. See also Fagan, *Sobrino's Christology and Ecclesiology* 140; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 327–35. The fullest treatment of martyrdom in Sobrino's theology is probably Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 117–213.

79. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 262. Elsewhere Sobrino notes that the eucharistic institution narratives represent an interpretive grid for the death of Jesus. *Jesus the Liberator* 202–3.

80. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 218.

81. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 51, 95, 109; *Christ the Liberator* 180–83. Ritt notes that Sobrino's entire conception of Christ's lordship is rooted in kenosis. "Balthasar and Sobrino" 723.

82. Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, Solidarity" 620.

83. *Ibid.* 620–22 at 620.

soldiers and officials responsible for the violence against the poor and those who stood with them were regular communicants. If one can receive the Body and Blood of Christ week after week and still order or carry out assassinations, something is indeed being obscured.

However, I want to suggest that making the eucharistic connection more explicit better serves the purpose of promoting action on behalf of the poor. First, it makes more explicit that kenotic self-dispossession is in the service of giving life to others. Jesus empties himself to give himself as food for the life of the world. Similarly, the church does not dispossess itself as an end in itself, but for the sake of giving life to others. It is, in short, a eucharistic poverty. Second, such a formulation better connects itself to the prevailing ecclesiological and ecumenical consensus that the church realizes itself in the Eucharist. And yet it does so in such a way as to render unmistakable that the Eucharist that makes the church is the enactment of a self-divestment for the sake of others.

Moreover, the Eucharist is central to the ecclesiological outlook of the Second Vatican Council. To take but one prominent example, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* identifies the eucharistic celebration as “the high point towards which the activity of the church is directed, and, simultaneously, the source from which all its power flows out.”<sup>84</sup> And, indeed, as Massimo Faggioli has persuasively argued, the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II is deeply tied to the liturgical reforms of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.<sup>85</sup> In point of fact, the recovery of the authority of episcopal conferences, which proved vital for the development of the outlook articulated in the CELAM conferences, has its roots in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.<sup>86</sup> The point is that the flowering of Latin American theology is often construed as a fruition of the Council's ecclesial vision. To the extent that this is true, this other aspect of conciliar ecclesiology ought also to be embodied. Moreover, it can be embodied in such a way as to advance the particular theological vision and concerns of Latin American theologians.

I wish to stress three considerations at this juncture. First, there is no reason inherent to Sobrino's theology why such an account of eucharistic poverty could not be adopted, particularly because his approach to theoretical frameworks is an ad hoc one,

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84. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963) 10 (hereafter cited as *SC*), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html). Note, though, that this affirmation directly follows the recognition in *SC* 9 that the church has more activities to undertake than the liturgy. Indeed, some council fathers were hesitant about the language of high point and source precisely because they feared that this might obscure the provisionality of the liturgy. On this see Josef Andreas Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Lalit Adolphus, vol. 1 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 1–87 at 15. See further *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964) 7, 10, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html). *GS* 38.

85. Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012).

86. *SC* 22. On this see Faggioli, *True Reform* 73, 80, 90, 130.

interested primarily in the praxis that such frameworks generate. Indeed, and second, such an account of eucharistic poverty actually advances Sobrino's own agenda because it provides a basis for the sort of praxis that is the orienting *telos* of Sobrino's outlook, and does so in a particularly strong sense—this is the nature of reality. Third, adopting this framework helps Sobrino's theology to avoid the metaphysically troubling implications of a theology of the suffering God, which wind up making suffering necessary. As an added advantage, it provides a greater continuity with the ecclesiological horizons of Vatican II.<sup>87</sup>

## Mercy's Corrective

My considerations thus far have stressed the ways in which Balthasar's theology can help to advance Sobrino's theological vision, and do so in a way that corrects some of Sobrino's shortcomings. However, this movement of correction is by no means one-directional. The perspective afforded by the underside of history, from which Sobrino works, and which, by and large, Balthasar neglects, exposes a serious shortcoming of Balthasar's own theology, and offers a corrective to it.

### *The Principle of Mercy and the Eucharistically Decentered Church*

In *The Principle of Mercy*, Sobrino articulates perhaps more clearly the sort of *in actu* ecclesial engagement that he sees as the true ecclesial substance (on which, see above). Jesus's life was preeminently structured by mercy, which means that the church's life should likewise be so structured.<sup>88</sup> Mercy, which is not simply a feeling, but rather an interiorization of another's suffering that leads immediately to action, is an irreducible motivation. Merciful action is not for the sake of any other goal. It is its own sufficient cause. This is what it means for mercy to be a principle, and this is what ought to motivate the church.<sup>89</sup> Mercy necessarily decenters the church, for mercy moves it beyond itself to the suffering other.<sup>90</sup>

This means, then, that a church centered on the Eucharist ought to be necessarily decentered. For the Eucharist is an encounter with the merciful Christ in his act of self-sacrifice. More than that, the Eucharist is an incorporation into that act of self-sacrifice, for the ecclesial body, as part of the *totus Christus*, is itself the body of Christ

87. See also Michael E. Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation: The Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009) 135–56, for an attempt at *rapprochement* between radical orthodoxy's more Eucharist-centric methodology and Ignacio Ellacuría's soteriology.

88. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 15–16. On the centrality of mercy and its grounding in the relationship between Christ and the church in Sobrino's ecclesiology see Kelly, "Rooted in Mercy" 156–58.

89. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 16–18.

90. Ibid. 21–22. This theme of decentering is taken up by Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 225–28.

which is offered to the Father, out of mercy, for the life of the world.<sup>91</sup> Of course, merely celebrating the Eucharist is insufficient. As Sobrino notes, such activities require their own verification in praxis.<sup>92</sup> There could be any number of reasons why eucharistic practice might fail to issue in the merciful praxis of which it partakes, into which it incorporates the faithful, toward which it impels its communicants. It is not my purpose to diagnose these issues, but rather to argue what ought to be the case, so that abortive eucharistic practice might be clearly seen as a distorted perversion of the church's sacramental life.

Thus far, Balthasar would agree with all of these statements. The church, in contrast with Israel, is decentered.<sup>93</sup> It lacks its own form, and is instead determined by the Christ form as its inmost identity.<sup>94</sup> It is atopic, lacking its own place. Its reception of the Christ form demands that it transcend its own boundaries and put itself at the service of the Lord and of all peoples.<sup>95</sup> There is no prior moment during which the church could be abstracted from its missionary engagement with the world. Rather, the church's identity is in its mission.<sup>96</sup> Where Balthasar fails, though, is his lack of attention to history, which de-forms his theology in crucial ways.

### *History and Deromanticized Poverty*

Balthasar has been accused of working in abstraction from actual history, with the Christ form as a somewhat idealized notion.<sup>97</sup> While these criticisms may not always be fair, Balthasar's treatment of poverty does evince this shortcoming. The discussion of poverty in *Glory of the Lord 7* is almost exclusively a spiritual poverty, which is seen as commendable. Jesus is exemplary of the proper poverty.<sup>98</sup> Balthasar acknowledges Jesus's utter poverty, and that it is an act of solidarity with the poor. In particular, this solidarity with the poor led Jesus to the cross.<sup>99</sup> Jesus's poverty is connected to his saving role: "Jesus is the bringer of salvation, who is equipped only to share. For himself, he has nothing."<sup>100</sup> All of this is true, and beautiful, and affirmed by the CELAM conferences in their treatment of spiritual poverty. And yet it is dangerously incomplete.

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91. Sobrino makes explicit connection to the church's mission and the paschal mystery in *Church and Poor* 110, 184.
  92. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 136. See also Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 44–99, for a treatment of the epistemological function of praxis for Sobrino's thought.
  93. Balthasar, *TD* 4:464; *GL* 7:486–89.
  94. Balthasar, *GL* 7:92–97.
  95. Balthasar, *TD* 4:464, 468; *GL* 7:507.
  96. Balthasar, *GL* 7:495.
  97. Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 13; Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Praxis" 62–63.
  98. Balthasar, *GL* 7:129–42; see also Balthasar, "The 'Beatitudes' and Human Rights" 442–43.
  99. Balthasar, *GL* 7:133–38.
  100. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit* 3/2:120 (my translation). Note the eucharistic logic to Jesus's saving poverty.

What is missing in Balthasar's theology of poverty is attention to the actual conditions and effects of poverty affecting real women and men in history. Concrete and historical poverty is dehumanizing and objectively sinful (Medellín 14.4).<sup>101</sup> In light of this, Balthasar's romanticized notion of poverty is not only inadequate and incomplete. It can actually do harm. For insofar as the Christ form is exemplary, and insofar as it is mapped onto poverty without noting the distinction between dehumanizing material poverty and spiritual poverty, appeal to the Christ form runs the very real risk of valorizing deplorable conditions and underwriting systems of injustice and oppression.<sup>102</sup> In this light, Balthasar's statement that on the basis of Christ's poverty the Synoptic Gospels contain "outrageous, seemingly *inhuman* demands [of poverty]" is chilling.<sup>103</sup>

I should note, though, that Balthasar's recourse to the Christ form does not necessarily underwrite dehumanizing injustice. It is, after all, grounded in the triune life, and any suffering involved is a contingent result of sin, rather than anything necessary.<sup>104</sup> Suffering and injustice remain horrific distortions of reality, rather than receiving metaphysical support. However, in light of concrete history, we must be sure that our use of such concepts makes it clear that it does not involve a valorization of sinful realities, nor does it endorse acquiescence to the dehumanizing status quo.

### *Merciful Praxis: Taking the Crucified Peoples Down from Their Crosses*

So the first corrective Balthasar's account of eucharistic poverty needs is to be purified of any false romanticism by recourse to concrete history and a distinction between material, spiritual, and evangelical poverty. This leads naturally to a second corrective. Sobrino's theology has frequent recourse to Ignacio Ellacuría's notion of "crucified peoples," the innocent victims of history, almost always the poor.<sup>105</sup> Jesus dies on the

101. Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 21–39.

102. See Lee, *Soteriology of Ellacuría* 85–94, for a treatment of how a consideration of the crucified peoples deromanticizes Christ's passion.

103. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit* 3/2:122 (my translation, emphasis added).

104. So, for instance, Balthasar's recognition that poverty is woven into the world order, not in a metaphysical sense, but rather in terms of how the world's history actually plays out. Balthasar, "The 'Beatitudes' and Human Rights" 453.

105. For the concept's genesis, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," in Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis* 580–603. Perhaps the most detailed elaboration of how this notion has influenced Sobrino is Jon Sobrino, "Ignacio Ellacuría, the Human Being and the Christian: 'Taking the Crucified People Down from the Cross,'" in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke and Robert Lassalle-Klein, trans. Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2006) 1–67. See further Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* esp. 289–336; Stålsett, *The crucified and the Crucified* 125–78, 493–570; Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 129–80; Crowley, "Theology in Light of Suffering"; Luciani, "Sobrino's Christology" 109–10; Costadoat, "Sobrino's Christology" 125–27.

cross as one of the victims of history, poor, crushed, and oppressed by the powers that be. He and the crucified peoples are mutually explanatory.<sup>106</sup> The resurrection, then, shows the sort of praxis in which God engages towards history's victims. "What is specific about Jesus's resurrection is, therefore, not what God does with a dead body but what God does with a victim."<sup>107</sup> In other words, God is the God who raises the crucified peoples.<sup>108</sup>

As I have noted, Balthasar's theology is not inimical to praxis. The church is moved beyond itself to engagement with the world. So the second corrective I propose is not merely the addition of praxis to our considerations, but rather to spell out the shape of that praxis. As Sobrino insists, the principle of mercy demands that in our encounter with the crucified peoples of history we take them down from their crosses.<sup>109</sup> In other words, our praxis must aim towards undoing the conditions that create dehumanizing poverty.<sup>110</sup> Balthasar acknowledges that such activity may be a necessary "prerequisite" for evangelization, but insists that the liberation brought by Christ is "deeper" than the merely political.<sup>111</sup> However, a reduction to the political is not in view, but rather a recognition of the sort of concrete demands made by the form of the crucified and risen Christ. A recognition that poverty dehumanizes and that Christ's salvation aims at the integral healing of humanity will not allow spiritualizing reductions any more than it allows for political reduction.

Our treatment of engagement with the crucified peoples would be incomplete if we did not also take into account what Sobrino notes as their evangelizing potential. For one thing, the crucified people embody genuinely humanizing values. This invites the Global North to embrace a more human existence and leave behind the dehumanizing distortions of Western culture.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, the crucified peoples allow their oppressors to see their own sin in bold relief. They show the cruel inhumanity of Europe, the United States, and others, which invites repentance and conversion.<sup>113</sup> Finally, engagement with the crucified peoples serves to mediate Christ's presence. They embody something of the grace of Christ. "To go forth to the poor with the

106. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 123, 154, 171–85; Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, Solidarity" 622, 633; Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 51–56, 79–80; Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 4–6, 43, 84, 310. See also Fagan, *Sobrino's Christology and Ecclesiology* 140; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 327–28. Stålsett describes the relationship as a "constitutive relatedness." *The crucified and the Crucified* 521–36.

107. Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* 84.

108. See Crowley, "Theology in Light of Suffering" 18, 29; Luciani, "Sobrino's Christology" 114–15; Costadoat, "Sobrino's Christology" 126–27.

109. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 53.

110. *Ibid.* 59–62; Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 73–74.

111. Balthasar, "Liberation and Salvation History" 139. Elsewhere, Balthasar explains that his reservations have to do with confining ourselves to immanent approaches to salvation and liberation. See Balthasar, "The 'Beatitudes' and Human Rights" 452–59.

112. Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 80; Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 46.

113. *Ibid.* 54–55, 70–71, 79; Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 119–20; Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 59. See further Bedford, *Gekreuzigte Volk* 148–53.

intention of liberating them is to understand God's vision for the world and to conform to the reality of God. In this historical way the evangelizer becomes ever more Christian and, in the deepest sense of the term, is divinized."<sup>114</sup> Because of the evangelizing potential of the crucified peoples, we fundamentally misunderstand matters if we think exclusively in terms of giving to the poor and not also of receiving from them.<sup>115</sup> Hence, the self-giving in view when we speak of a eucharistic poverty runs in two directions. It is not only the rich giving to and for the poor. The poor also give to and for the rest of the world.

### Conclusion: Eucharistic Poverty Beyond Paternalism

The church, then, is not just a church for the poor, but a church of the poor.<sup>116</sup> Apart from this recognition, the eucharistic poverty I have articulated will remain at the level of paternalism, and will not have the proper liberating effect. The poor are not merely the patients of the church's merciful activity. Unless they are also agents, then their integral liberation has not occurred.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, even on Balthasar's terms, redemption consists in restoring the proper creaturely response to the eternal eucharistic dynamic, and does not bypass creaturely agency. Instead of paternalism, the relationship is reciprocal.<sup>118</sup> The poor, and the rich who enter into solidarity with them, give a complementary witness to Christ.<sup>119</sup> My hope is that this juxtaposition of Balthasar and Sobrino has served to highlight this reciprocity and complementarity, and to do so in a way that corrects the shortcomings of each approach. Apart from such correctives, each theologian's approach risks inadvertently underwriting the world's suffering, whether metaphysically in Sobrino's case, or by ahistorical romanticism in Balthasar's. From Balthasar, Sobrino's outlook gains a more adequate metaphysics, which avoids the notion of divine passibility, as well as a eucharistic expression of the church's poverty-for-others. From Sobrino, Balthasar gains a more nuanced and differentiated notion of "poverty," and thereby avoids inadvertently underwriting human suffering with a romanticized notion of poverty. With these correctives in place, the church is better positioned to more faithfully embody the form of the crucified and risen Christ enacted and given to it in the eucharistic

114. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 295. See also Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 54–56. Lassalle-Klein points to the importance of joining with God in this praxis of taking the crucified peoples down from their crosses for Sobrino's theology of deification. Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink* 328–35.

115. Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 41–44.

116. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 86–98.

117. Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor* 17–19. See Costadoat's treatment of Sobrino's "impressive theological turn" whereby the poor themselves are given agency in the work of liberation. Costadoat, "Sobrino's Christology" 127.

118. Sobrino, *Church and Poor* 114–15; Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy* 156–57.

119. Sobrino, "Communion, Conflict, Solidarity" 633.



action, and to, embodying this form, engage in the merciful praxis of taking the crucified peoples down from their crosses.

### **Author biography**

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