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Theology of the Cross: Canadian Paradigms

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For well over ten years the name of Douglas John Hall has been associated with a theology of the cross. In a series of major books Hall has levelled a trenchant critique against the prevailing Christian triumphalism and opted instead for a gospel that reincorporates meaningful suffering and servanthood into the centre of things. His *Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross*, written in 1976, announced this conscious agenda. He begins with a scathing denunciation of the conventional wisdom of our consumer culture which he calls "an officially optimistic society". Crippled by this positivism and a blindness enhanced by the notion of "progress", North American society clings desperately to the gods of wealth, prestige, youth and success. Any cloud or shadow which threatens to expose this glitter is thrust out and denied, often with violence. Nonetheless, it is the ever-present negative in life—be it failure, poverty, death—that demands of us some poignant reflections. We need help in addressing the fundamental questions of existence, and for Douglas Hall, that assistance comes from a return to the theology of the cross. However, in Hall's mind, establishment Christianity is more resistant to than supportive of this agenda. It has become, in fact, the chief religious sanction of the successful consumerism of North American life. He calls Christianity "the official religion of the officially optimistic society." The churches are bound by goals and values to the dominant culture. Further, they view their identification with this ideology as intrinsic to their institutional survival.¹

In the midst of all this darkness Hall has his answer, and it is a light which finds its source only in that darkness. He

calls upon us to embrace a theology of the cross. Such would mean not brilliance but beggarliness, a faltering humble acknowledgment that life, faith, and even our theologizing about it are part of the broken world in which we live. It involves trust in God and the realization that faith abides in the darker corners of life. The height of the Christian gospel is manifest in the lowliness of the human Christ who became one with our poverty and who was butchered as a common criminal. It is this paradigm of suffering and dying servanthood that is our beacon for discipleship. Such an identification with the broken Christ means "*a real solidarity with those who suffer*" (italics his). This he calls "the point of departure" for social ethics under the cross.² Above all, it is an incarnate solidarity:

Only as the Christian community permits itself to undergo a continuous crucifixion to the world can it be *in* the world as the friend of those who are crucified. Apart from that, it always ends in a theology and an ethic of glory. For it imagines that it has something to bring, something to give, something that will enable *it* to master the situation. Real solidarity with those who suffer recognizes that their condition is our own: we are all beggars together. The possibility of *community*, which is the aim of Christian social ethics, is given at that point of recognition, and nowhere else. True community exists only at the foot of the cross.³

One form of this new existence under the cross is his diaspora church, spelled out clearly in the book *Has the Church a Future?* For him, that future lies not in the triumphalism and Constantian models of ecclesia found in our major religious bodies. After all, they market, in spiritual dress, the values trumpeted by the priests of consumerism. Instead, argues Hall, we must look for "Christ's little flocks" who are "a prophetic witness to truth", a grass-roots people of God and "a friend of the oppressed". They embody a winter spirituality, akin to Canadian life, rejecting the comfortable smug religiosity that has so infected the North American spirit. Finally, the diaspora people of God, who live under the shadow of the cross, identify with the justice struggles of the oppressed. The theology of the cross is on the side of those who are marginalized and victimized.⁴

Douglas Hall's perception of a theology of the cross is most compelling, yet if it is correct it does not need to be defended as much as it needs to be lived. If we ask the question of how

it can be given flesh in our faith and in our churches, then we must turn not to arguments but to description. After all, the theology of the cross is not something new. In spite of the Constantian model the crucified life of the church has been around for almost two thousand years. Hall's agenda is a call to return, not to build a new paradigm. In spite of the gods of success and power in our churches and society, Canada's people of God have paradigms both past and present on how one lives and embodies a theology of the cross. Highlighting a number of these takes Hall's theology out of the realm of theory and into the arena of flesh and blood.

An Alternative Spirituality

In an age where forms of spirituality and spiritual direction are becoming a theological commonplace, Canadian Christianity offers a number of spiritual models which embody a lifestyle under the cross. A recent poll (February, 1989) has indicated that Canadians are registering a growing concern for environmental issues, and there is an increasing resistance to the way a consumerist society abuses the created order. From the ever-present acid rain to the danger of nuclear obliteration comes a relentless warning that we must live differently or participate in a massive destruction of both life and beauty. Numerous sources in Canadian life provide models for a spirituality of beauty, simplicity and stewardship. These models embody a commitment to a loving care of God's world as well as a sacrificial resistance to our dominant culture of plunder and gluttony. Douglas Hall sees this as living the theology of the cross as stewards of God's creation.⁵

Concretely one finds this lifestyle practised within the spirituality of our native Canadians. Throughout the land the aboriginal population is assaulted by the production- and profit-oriented powers of our nation. The Inuit people fight for the autonomy of their territory where they have hunted, fished and wandered for centuries. It is a land where they "feel more free... without having to stop at a stop sign, without having to wait for a car to pass." The land is a provider; it gives "moss, grass or whatever we want without having to ask permission." And why? Because "we know about this land... We must know about this land, because it is ours." Like the Inuit

this sense of a community's faithful marriage to the land stands behind the struggles of the nation's tribal bands to resist the mega-development projects of government and business which will ravage and destroy the land, leaving it barren. In the last decade white southerners among some politicians, trade unionists and Christian people have linked hands with their native brothers and sisters. In that process the recent Indian allies have sat at the feet of their native spiritual directors and have begun to learn a lifestyle of resistance to the dominant culture.⁶ They have recaptured a sense of the Biblical God who unites us with and reconciles us to creation. An Ojibway leader puts it this way in a prayer to The Great Spirit:

Grandfather
 Look at
 Our brokenness

Now we must put
 The sanctity of life
 As the most sacred principle
 of power,
 And renounce
 The awesome might
 Of materialism.

We know that in all creation
 Only the human family
 Has strayed
 From the sacred way

Grandfather
 Teach us how
 To heal
 Our brokenness.⁷

A similar sense of creation spirituality which gives communion with the land a priority over both mass production and mass consumption are the issues surrounding the survival of the family farm and the values that go with it. R. Alex Sim's *Land and Community: Crisis in Canada's Countryside* and the recent issue on "Rural Ministry Today" published by *Practice of Ministry in Canada* testify to the tenacity of a values' tradition that goes back to the early years of this century

when the prairie wheatgrowers organized to save their way of life against the bankers, railroad owners and power brokers of the east. The struggle continues today throughout the land as people's lives are broken by the vested interests of so-called land developers and the machinery, petro-chemical, and food-processing forces of agribusiness. Pioneer values of frugality, honest toil, neighbourliness and the connectedness of land and community are threatened at their very core as megabusiness swallows farm after farm leaving a string of lives broken by violence and loss.⁸ In a woman's plea to her husband, crushed after the loss of their farm, we can see the shadow of the cross:

I wish I could crawl into your mind and throw out all of your feelings of quiet and inferiority and fear. I wish I could wave a magic wand and put all of the pieces of your life back together again. I can't do these things and I feel so helpless. I do know that I will not let you destroy yourself or our family.⁹

At the centre of this survival struggle, led by conscious farm organizations with the help of some Christian groups, is a sense of God's land and nature's rhythms that feed "an unquenchable longing for spiritual experiences, for an understanding of the meaning of life itself, for ways of coping with the mysteries of creation and of death."¹⁰

Inherent in religious orders is a structure that can enable one to challenge prevailing value systems both through worship and daily living. Of course, there is always the danger that this format can be a permanent retreat from life's anguish and injustice into a cocoon which acts as a narcotic against a vital theology of the cross. Quebec society from the very beginning has produced a plethora of communities dedicated to the religious life. Some of them are characterized by a vain attempt to recreate a safe society patterned after the days of Quebec's triumphalist church, but there are others. The province's Capuchins are just one of these. In their reflection, their worship, and their daily life they embody what they call a "theology of the feet". A number of them developed a *reseau* (network) in the 1970s which was dedicated to a communal examination of the quality of their daily life "as both rupture and seed for a new world". More specifically it meant a prayerful analysis of their "manner of daily life" and their "poverty". "We want to begin living now the very things we want to change," they vowed. Toward that end the priests and lay brothers of

the network plunged into the daily life of the poor and the oppressed. There they lived and practised their faith in the midst of poverty's pain and struggle. Through the rhythm of their prayer and worship life they addressed their call through their hearts and their feet. Whether living in the poor ghettos of Hull or working in the grim sweatshops of hotels, hospitals, and restaurants, they celebrated Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection by fighting for fair housing, by resisting political tyranny, and by organizing militant unions. They remain both activists and contemplatives. Behind their justice struggle lies this spirituality of "the feet". Their whole life is to walk the "Via Dolorosa" with others along the road to resurrection and the kingdom of God.¹¹ Benoît Fortin, Quebec's Capuchin provincial, put it this way:

If I am truly a member of oppressed humanity, my prayer shall become a sorrowful challenge to bear. My whole body must become a prayer and participate in this immense Passion of Christ, in this murdered body of humanity, which in Gethsemane's Garden, sweats blood and begs that the chalice be removed. When the workers of my place of toil have a true union, when the residences for the aged are built, when the Chileans can return to their land, when Lucien gets out of prison and regains his liberty, when people no longer die of hunger, when... when... Prayer makes us enter into this new world according to the dream of God. To sing, Alleluia, we must, with all the might of God, have given already a concrete face to the hope in the midst of the poor.¹²

Perhaps the alternative spirituality of natives, monks, and even family farmers sounds a bit exotic. At the very least, these forms of spirituality are distant from most of those who practice the Christian faith. This should not be alarming, for a theology of the cross is not about majorities or dominant groups. It is an alternative, and it is practised over against the prevailing value systems. Nonetheless, it would be useful to discover in the Canadian experience parallel models of spirituality among middle-class Christians which link naturally with the religiosity of Indians, Capuchins, and those who till the land. Mary Jo Leddy, a leader among the Sisters of Sion and a former editor of the *Catholic New Times*, finds hope that middle-class Christians can re-discover such a spirituality. She sees its rebirth in the growing awareness of the relatively affluent that our culture is a dehumanizing prison that numbs us to beauty and to love. She is convinced that a reawakening of the

human among us will open the door to bonds with the broken and marginalized. "Let the middle class cast off its invisible chains," she affirms. "Let the poor break their most visible chains. And let them hold hands together."¹³

Diaspora Communities

Of course, there is the risk that a spirituality adopted as an alternative for middle-class Christians will continue to mirror the individualism and consumerism of the dominant culture. Also, success and triumphalism may tarnish any attempt to break the shackles of old patterns. At this point, Douglas Hall's notion of "Christ's little flocks", the small diaspora churches he describes, stand out as an antidote to a former style that is difficult to shake. After all, the Capuchin spirituality was consciously communal. This context of small Christian community is embodied in the Canadian experience and serves as a model for those who would take up their cross and follow Christ. Cruciform community living is an effective medicine against the "Lone Ranger" mystique so powerful in our society, and the religious orders who live in small units among the poor of Montreal's working-class ghettos are a paradigm of that way of life. Following the spirituality embodied by Charles de Foucauld, the Petits Soeurs and the Petits Frères de Jesus and the Petits Frères de l'Évangile live in small groups of three or four dedicated to "communal life". They worship daily, celebrate the Eucharist, and reflect together on the extent of their fidelity "to the Nazareth model". The totally incarnate life of Jesus in its simplicity and solidarity with the poor and broken is also the road chosen by these women and men. This means simple lodging, sharing the humble chores of living, "an open door to welcoming the neighbour, ... the poor one", and "manual labour". Paul-André Goffard, a Montreal-based Petit Frère called his community "a presence of the church in the workers' milieu" and his factory work "a witness to God's Word, to the Good News". Petit Soeur Stephanie testifies, as well, to the unity of community life, worship, and daily toil with the poor and broken of her neighbourhood.¹⁴

The Daybreak community of L'Arche in Toronto, founded by Jean Vanier, brings together the physically well with the rejected handicapped into a bond of love that transcends the

prevailing values. The journey of spiritual leader Henri Nouwen from a successful Harvard professor to a ministry at Daybreak is one example of how a middle-class Christian learned to live Christ's preference for the least of these. Nouwen himself puts it this way: "Jesus speaks through the broken hearts of the handicapped, who are considered marginal and useless. But God has chosen them to be the poor through whom he makes his presence known. This is hard to accept in a success- and production-oriented society." Nouwen is right. His move to L'Arche and the life of the Montreal Petits Frères and Petites Soeurs retain a remote and heroic aura about them, but they are models of life under the cross in spite of this.

Even in the midst of middle-class life thoughtful Christians are adopting the small-group style as an alternative to religious and social triumphalism. For over two years a small group of Christians near Toronto have been publishing a periodical called *Wheat and Chaff* which describes itself as a "a magazine... to explore and describe" some "alternative ways of being a Christian in this country". For two decades Kitchener-Waterloo has been a centre for a Mennonite-inspired cluster of housechurches who seek to learn the way of Christ in an intimate and trustful mode. Combining worship, study, and personal sharing they are a spiritual haven for many middle-class Christians committed to spiritual growth and social justice.

The way of the cross may be lonely, but it is not walked in Promethean heroism. It is a journey of the little families of God who are everywhere in our midst. They are not easy to see, for the spotlights shine elsewhere. Instead they are found in the shadows and dark corners where the wounded and oppressed lie broken and forgotten.¹⁵

For the Oppressed

Alternative spirituality and small Christian groups are not an end in themselves. If they were this would be only one more form of religious consumption. To be a people of the cross requires identification with both the brokenness and the aspirations of the poor. The way of the cross is not undertaken for our good; rather it is undertaken for others, for the least of these. Jesus stated it with utmost clarity in the midst of his first Passion announcement: "For whoever seeks to save his

[or her] life will lose it, but whoever will lose his [or her] life for my sake and the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). *L'Arche* is not an end in itself, nor does the Capuchin *reseau* exist to serve its own hungers. Instead they live a theology of the cross for others, and these others are the rejects and oppressed, the victims of the dominant elites found in our consumer culture. One does not have to go to the Third World to find such Christians who embody by their lives the insights of this liberation theology of the cross. They exist and have existed in Canada for generations.

One such example is the labour church experience which grew out of the dark days of the Winnipeg General Strike (1919). Outgrowth of social gospel visions, these churches of the working poor sprang up in Winnipeg and Brandon, and from there spread westward across the Prairies. Clergy of the Methodist tradition, such as William Ivens, A.E. Smith, and James Shaver Woodsworth, moved beyond the facile optimism of liberal social reform panaceas to work directly with the radical forces who were prepared to refashion Canadian society along just and humane lines. These ministers lived and served first hand among the exploited and immigrant workers of Manitoba's two major railroad towns. Refusing to be caught up in the urban boosterism of the railroad and business elites, they toiled instead among the wounded of the cities' ghettos. Middle-class congregations repudiated their ministries, so they turned to grass-roots churches which formed links with the working-class movements and were prepared to resist oppression in the name of justice. They saw the gospel as solidarity with the "workingman's movement" and as commitment to act for "a better day for human society". Realizing that the more successful established churches were often owned by the powerful, they sensed that the gospel resided with the exploited who were willing to risk their lives in the name of justice. None of these labour church pastors ever repudiated his hope for a better society that would put people above profit and cooperation above competition. Certainly, they reflected the optimistic liberalism of social gospel Christianity. Yet, in spite of this, they experienced a theology of the cross because of the very fact that they sided with the oppressed toilers of Winnipeg and elsewhere. Like the Lord they served they were made to feel the full weight of the church, business, military, and governmental elites ranked against them. They were harassed out

of local churches, branded as Communists and traitors, pursued by an alliance of church leaders and the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and arrested and imprisoned for union activities and subversion. During Iven's stay in prison, his young son died. Though their visions reflected the broad optimism of the day, their bold solidarity with the oppressed insured that they would walk a Via Dolorosa of their own. And they knew it. In a sermon preached to William Iven's labour church by James Woodsworth, while Ivens was languishing in jail, the plucky radical had this to say with his characteristic good humour: "I feel somewhat re-assured [when I am told] that probably the only one of the apostles who had not been arrested was Judas Iscariot."¹⁶

Among the marginalized farmers and fishers of upland Nova Scotia emerged a Christian presence of solidarity with Christ's "least of these". It was called the Antigonish movement, and its spearhead was a Catholic priest named Moses Coady. The centre for the Antigonish spirit was St. Francis Xavier University where Father Coady, beginning in 1928, directed its extension programme for adults. Seven years earlier Father "Jimmy" Tompkins had used his experiences and vision to call for such an effort. Coady built upon the dreams of his mentor, and for over thirty years he would drive from town to town setting up grass-roots schools to empower exploited people to take charge of their own destinies. Against staggering odds, Father Coady and the fishers and farmers who populated his schools created a massive cooperative movement that would be hailed and duplicated world-wide. With the passage of time the Antigonish movement would pressure government for social change, would form a link with the labour movement and would train Third World leaders in practical ways to construct a just and humane society in their own lands. The university's exchange programme and the internationally-directed Coady Institute survive as monuments to the gospel dream of a Scottish priest who gave his life for his marginalized brothers and sisters.¹⁷

Moses Coady found inspiration for his vision of empowering adult education in the teachings of Christ. His Catholic faith remained the basis for his life-long ministry in the Nova Scotia he loved. For him true religious convictions had to be grounded in the most pragmatic concerns of life—good roads,

rural electrification, indoor plumbing. Building upon the traditional Catholic links of justice and charity Coady insisted that, without the cooperative spirit practiced through economic democracy, charity would remain simply a pious dodge to avoid justice.¹⁸ One would be forced to look long and hard to find in Coady an explicit theology of the cross, but it is there in his two-fold break with ecclesiastical triumphalism. On the one hand he took sides openly with the poor against their oppressors, and on the other hand, he cried out against the smug and satisfied theologies of the clerically comfortable:

Woe to him whom this world charms from Gospel duty! Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather than to appall! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe to him who, in this world, courts not dishonour! Woe to him who would not be true, even though to be false were salvation!¹⁹

The words are Coady's, but they are reminiscent of the one who said: "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12a).

Identification with the oppressed workforce of Quebec is the chosen vocation of the worker-priests, worker-nuns and worker-lay brothers of that province. One model they all share is incarnation, the full identity of life and work with the industrial proletariats of Montreal, Quebec City, Hull and elsewhere. During the late 1960s a handful of priests began to earn their living at factory toil. Jacques Couture, a Jesuit, Jacques Brissette, a secular, and two Fils de la Charité priests Claude Julien and Ugo Benfante were among the first. Within a decade the number of priests and religious who worked full-time in exploitative situations had increased with some rapidity. In May, 1976 this diverse group, scattered among a number of industrial centres, created a network called Le Groupe PRROQ (prêtres, religieux et religieuses ouvrier(e)s du Québec). From that time until the present they have met periodically to share their life as working people and to reflect upon its meaning. They sensed that they were among the marginalized within the church, and they struggled to live and articulate the most effective incarnate witness that they could among the oppressed proletarians of Quebec society. Although their conscious articulations

more on the broader notion of incarnation, both their language and their daily existence portrayed features of the Passion and diaspora communities that coincide with Douglas Hall's "theology of the cross". In his study of their work in the proletarian milieu, the Oblate worker-priest Guy Boulanger quotes one of his comrades who calls this incarnation "a total marriage with working-class life" an identification of daily life and struggle in order "to realize that the bottom line of this is that Jesus Christ lives there from the inside."²⁰

In the first place this full adoption of the workers' life is a solidarity of pain, and in this sense it is a *Via Dolorosa*. Guy Cousin, a *Fils de la Charité* worker-priest, called his mindless toil "a veritable jungle" of oppression, and Jacques Tanguay, a diocesan worker-priest, spoke of perpetually aching shoulders, arms, legs and kidneys. "Sadness and fatigue are always there," he wrote, but after awhile, "we don't see them anymore. We don't feel them anymore. And this crazed cadence, we pursue it for eight hours endlessly." Benoît Fortin, the Capuchin monk who worked as a Hotel Hilton dockloader, called himself "a beast of burden" who "learned much by my hands, by my feet, by my aching muscles and my blisters. I learned to carry the weight of the day." And most important, he stated, "what I learned in my flesh, I would never be able to forget." In some cases, worker-priests would link the oppression of the toiling masses with the Passion of Christ. Father Jean-Paul Asselin felt that he saw in the working class's oppression "a sense of Jesus' sacrifice", of the very "Paschal mystery which is at the heart... of the gospel". He discovered this in the workers' lives, in their sacrifices and in their unquenchable hopes. Whether these priests and religious referred directly to the cross as their vocational paradigm or not, they were unanimous in their identification with a class that lived daily under the yoke of oppression. They spoke of a world of "physical labour, fatigue", the high "cost of living", and the crushing load of living day after day with injustice and danger, and they affirmed also that "it is this working class life that we wish to share". Their collective religious commitment was stated this way: "The deepening of our faith requirements, concrete solidarity with the least of these, with the most exploited, leads us to share more and more the destiny of the manual laborers."²¹

Their life and vocation were not simply a Good Friday experience. Their full identity with the workers' Golgotha had the whole journey of Christ in mind. For the worker-priests and religious, solidarity embraced the struggle for justice as well. Resurrection, the kingdom of God, and even the Exodus became symbols of militant hope which they shared with the organized workers' movement. Resistance to oppression and the building of small base communities were the eschatological cutting edge of their lives. They linked up with local co-operative movements, joined the neighbourhood *groupes populaires* and laid down their tools along with the other workers who went on strike. In some instances they risked their jobs and lives to organize radical unions in place of those who sold out the toilers to corporate interests. Jacques Tanguay, Guy Cousin and Benoît Fortin are among these latter, and for them Christ's incarnation was manifest where the battle for full justice was engaged. For all the worker-priests and religious active support of avant-garde trade unionism meant joining the workers struggling "for the construction of a more just and fraternal society".²² It is in this incarnate linkage of suffering and struggle that one finds the rebirth of a church defined by Good Friday and Easter:

A new Church is in the process of being born from the soil of the poorest and those who struggle. This Church wants to become Good News for the poorest. In every little corner of Quebec... has sprung up this decision to bring to the world a Church where the workers and the poor feel at home.²³

Suffering and struggling solidarity for and with the oppressed has been a daily reality for Christian women from the earliest days of the church's life. The conscious identity with oppressed and marginalized people by women mirrors the lives they have walked themselves both within and outside of the church. In their own journey they have borne the cross unwillingly in the countless oppressive ways through which they have been marginalized. However, when they joined their own cries with the remainder of the poor and oppressed, they have embodied a theology of the cross which serves as a rich and inspirational paradigm for all Christians male and female. Canada has offered its share of such models from the early days of New France.

Marie Guyart, later called Marie de l'Incarnation, gave up a prosperous business in France to join the Ursalines as a contemplative nun. In 1639 she settled in the male-dominated raw

life of Quebec City. Against overwhelming odds she founded schools for both native and French girls, wrote an Iroquois catechism, constructed Iroquois and Algonquian dictionaries, and penned theological and spiritual treatises. Her contemporaries Marguerite Bourgeoys and Jeanne Mance met resistance from male leaders both civic and ecclesiastical, but their deep religious convictions insured a dauntless resilience. Between them they built schools, hospitals, and churches in a colony where profits from the alcohol and fur trades and power brokering dominated the life of these small settlements in the wilderness.

In the struggles of farmers and workers to organize in the first thirty years of this century one can find Christian women militants at the forefront. Nellie McClung used her writing and speaking skills to advocate in a wide range of justice causes. She was a suffragette, a peace activist, an ecumenist and an ally of the farm and labour causes. Beatrice Brigden was a radical Methodist who became a leader in the labour church movement, and Agnes Macphail, the first woman in parliament, was a tireless champion for peace, penal reform and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.²⁴

Today, the witness of women for justice and against oppression is equally as strong. The testimony of Quebec Catholic women is a striking example of this. Increasingly, nuns are emerging from more traditional settings to serve among the poor and broken. In some respects, this is a continuation of earlier caretaking tasks in the fields of health, education, and welfare, but in other ways, it is a model of women religious assuming leadership roles in the name of justice both for themselves and for others. Sister Dolorès Léger, formerly of Granby, was active in educational reform and social work, and she was a member of the committee charged with women's issues in the Parti Québécois. She became a worker-nun in two different factories, and her total incarnation into this life included leadership in neighbourhood groups and delegate responsibilities in her local trade union. A Montreal counterpart Marie-Paule LeBrun worked full-time in a factory that made toys where she was a union militant. She supported neighbourhood reform and was the superior within her own religious community, the Petites Soeurs de l'Assomption. In the adult working-class Catholic Action group, the Mouvement des Travailleurs Chrétiens (MTC), women are increasingly conscious

of their own struggles and link these with female workers both in Quebec and around the globe. They are more frequently promoted within the movement, they have created their own caucuses, they hold their own consciousness-raising sessions, and their published material is given an increasingly higher priority. Nonetheless, in all of this, they never lose sight of the total working-class struggle. They have lived the way of the cross in their own suffering, and they have taken up the cross in the name of others who struggle for justice.²⁵

Doing a Theology of the Cross

In spirituality, in the small community of Christ's "little flocks", in the struggles with and among the oppressed one can find living paradigms of a theology of the cross. They are not theoretical or speculative. Instead they are the very stuff of life, models for inspiration and practical vocation. However, in all our reflections we must acknowledge most humbly that we "see through a glass darkly" (I Corinthians 13:12). Living a theology of the cross involves abandoning triumphalism and power plays in every aspect of our religious life. And that includes the way we theologize. Is there a way to do theology that embodies the theology of the cross? I believe that there is, and the most striking example of this in recent church life is the controversial statement on sexuality promulgated by the 32nd General Council of the United Church of Canada. Over twenty years earlier Anglican Pierre Berton, in his *The Comfortable Pew*, signalled the importance of the homosexuality question for the church. He wrote of the centrality of Christ's concern for the outcast and suggested that "the homosexual is the modern equivalent of the leper".²⁶

Two decades later Berton's allegation still rings true. The United Church is embroiled in a struggle about the issue of the possible ordination of gay and lesbian pastoral candidates. However, this is neither the chief characteristic of the General Council's statement nor is such controversy the dominant style of the document. Called "Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality", this profession of faith is a call to repentance, reflection and dialogue. It is characterized by humility rather than triumphalism, and in that sense, it can teach us much about how one can do a theology of the cross. The beauty of

creation and sexuality is affirmed in the statement, and it recognizes openly that consensus on sexual issues and the nature of Scriptural authority demands further dialogue. "We confess that we are a broken and hurting community," the document states, and this is described in terms of the church's obsession with "sexual morality", participation in persecution of homosexuals, and the refusal to face up to the church's own ignorance and homophobia. The desire to exercise compassion in the midst of uncertainty and struggle is a welcome contrast to authoritarian and triumphalist ecclesiastical position papers. Perhaps it is at this point that we as Lutherans need to reflect upon the way we develop our own church's social statements. Currently we are wrestling with two very difficult and painful issues popularly called "ordination of gays" and "abortion". In the heat of our passionate positions the temptation is great to use explosive rhetoric to excoriate and caricature "the other side". It is so easy to forget that the struggle involves brothers and sisters and is not a battle between angels and devils. Love, compassion, and humility are absolutely necessary. Truth without them is not truth. My systematic theology professor Martin Heineken used to paraphrase St. Paul by saying, "we see through a glass *very* darkly." The kind of humility he advocates in this way is essential for us as a church. Often in mutually opposed positions reside particles of fundamental truth which dare not be drowned in the rancor of shrill self-righteousness. Behind the "red flags" of "homosexuality" and "abortion" lie basic gospel questions of compassion and the affirmation of life. It is the style and humility of the United Church's document that can assist us in employing a pattern of cruciform servanthood in place of triumphalistic debate. In both this statement and in the one on native land claims the United Church has shown a model which blends repentance and hope. Its willingness to risk moving forward in compassion even without all the answers is, in part, what it means to live under the shadow of the cross.²⁷

In a consumer and success-oriented society theology and church life are inclined to fall into line rather than resist the dominant culture. However, ever since Constantine supplanted Christ, pockets of Christians have remained loyal to the cross of their master. They have provided alternative models to the way of prestige and privilege, and they have paid for this by

being marginalized, oppressed, and even killed. Christ never promised that it would be different than this. Of course, this living theology of the cross can be co-opted and often is. We write and buy books about it, and we discuss it in our comfortable settings. However, it is chiefly a way of life, a discipleship on the margins and against the ruling "principalities and powers". One of its strongest appeals is not only that it is true to the gospel but also that it has had its practitioners throughout history. It is a difficult lifestyle but eminently possible, for many in our land have chosen it and choose it still.

Notes

- ¹ Douglas John Hall, *Lighten Our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 19-103.
- ² Ibid. 115-152.
- ³ Ibid. 162.
- ⁴ Douglas John Hall, *Has the Church a Future?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 15-18, 30-31, 37; Douglas Hall, *The Canada Crisis* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1980) 71-115; Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 134-142. It is at this point of concern for the marginalized and oppressed that both the theologies of the cross and of liberation link arms. Much could and needs to be written on the interrelationship of these two. For the moment, suffice it to say that the theology of the cross is a corrective to triumphalism within the liberationist camp, whereas the latter position can protect a theology of the cross from becoming merely a theoretical construct.
- ⁵ Hall, *God and Human Suffering*, 67-70.
- ⁶ *Innuït Tapirisat du Canada*, brochure provided by this organization, n.d., 14; *The Dene*, A Statement of Rights (Yellowknife, N.W.T.: the Dene Nation, n.d.); *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*, Council for Yukon Indians (Whitehorse, Yukon: Council for Yukon Indians, n.d.) 1-16; "Presentation of George Manuel, president of the National Indian Brotherhood to the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry," April 13, 1976, pp. 1-15; GATT-Fly, "We Stand on Guard... For Whom?" (Toronto: GATT-Fly, 1976) 1-28.
- ⁷ Art Solomon, Ojibway elder for the World Council of Churches, February, 1983.
- ⁸ R. Alex Sim, *Land and Community* (Guelph: University of Guelph, 1988); "Rural Ministry Today," *Practice of Ministry in Canada* 5/2 (May, 1988); David Pfrimmer, "The Future of Farming and Farming the Future," *Consensus* 14/2 (1988) 49-59.
- ⁹ The Rev. Fred Ludolph, "Queen's Bush Rural Ministries," *Eastern Synod Lutheran* (Nov., 1988) 4.

- 10 Jim Taylor, "A raft in the rapids," *Practice of Ministry in Canada* 5/2 (May, 1988) 9.
- 11 Leon Gahier, *Avec Francois d'Assise... au coeur d'un peuple*, n.d., 53-67; Benoît Fortin, "Le Dieu de nos luttes," *Culture et Foi*, Oct., 1980, 19-23; Benoît Fortin, private papers, Montreal, Quebec; personal interviews of Quebec Capuchins granted to the author: Father Benoît Fortin (May 13, 1988); Father Isidore Ostiguy (May 9, 1988); Brother Michel Plamandon (May 10, 1988); and Brother Gaëtan Ouellet (May 10, 1988).
- 12 Benoît Fortin, quoted in André Arteau, "Le combat pour la justice un appel aux religieux," *L'Église Canadienne*, March 7, 1985, 406.
- 13 Mary Jo Leddy, "The Liberation of the Middle Class," *Catholic New Times*, May 6, 1984.
- 14 *Constitutions des Petits Frères de l'Évangile* (Montreal; n.d.); *Une Vie religieuse sur les traces de Charles de Foucauld*, brochure of the Petites Soeurs de Jesus, the Petits Frères de Jesus and the Petits Frères de l'Évangile; interviews granted to the author by Petit Frère de l'Évangile Paul-André Goffard (June 2, 1988) and Petite Soeur de Jesus Stephanie (May 25, 1988).
- 15 Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 19; "Wheat and Chaff" *Magazine: Towards a New Vision of the Church in Canada* (Pakenham, Ont.: Wheat and Chaff, 1988). For a sense of the life and values of the Kitchener-Waterloo housechurches, see Lois Barrett, *Building the House Church* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1986) or talk to housechurch pioneers Dr. John Miller, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo and/or Mark Yantzi, city hall, Kitchener. I have allowed my quoted material to retain its exclusive language so that the reality of the distance we must continue to travel stands out in its starkness.
- 16 Vera Fast, "The Labour Church in Winnipeg," in *Prairie Spirit* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985) 233-249; Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (1975); W. Irvine, "The Labour Church in Canada," *The Nation*, May 1, 1920, 583-584; "Notes of the Labour Churches," United Church Archives—Department of Evangelism and Social Services, Box 7, assorted files; William Ivens, Personal Papers, United Church Archives, Immanuel College, Toronto, Ontario; "All People's Mission" (1909), 191-205 in Alan Artibise, ed., *Gateway City* (1979); J.S. Woodsworth, *The First Story of the Labour Church* (April 5, 1920), 7. My use of the prairie labour churches, the Nova Scotia Antigonish movement and the worker-priests and worker-religious of Quebec as paradigms of a lived theology of the cross is reminiscent of my employment of them as models in a previous *Consensus* article (13/2, 1987, 58-61). In this current essay, however, I have expanded my material and used it in a slightly different context.
- 17 Alexander F. Laidlaw, ed., *The Man from Margaree* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971) 11-20; M.M. Coady, *Masters of Their Own*

Destiny (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); Jim Lotz, "The Historical and Social Setting of the Antigonish Movement," *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 5/2 (June, 1975) 99-116; Gregory Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1980) 189-204.

18 Coady, *Masters*, 139-153; Laidlaw, *The Man*, 181-200.

19 Laidlaw, *The Man*, 182-183.

20 "The Worker-Priests," *Time* (Canadian edition), 103, April 8, 1974, 8-9; "Galerie historique des P.R.R.O.Q.," Guy Boulanger, Aug. 20, 1984, 1-2 in Guy Boulanger, private papers; "Des prêtres, des religieux, des religieuses... Ouvriers au Québec," 1-9 in Guy Boulanger, private papers; *Le Groupe PRROQ, le monde ouvrier et l'Église*, brochure of P.R.R.O.Q., p. 3; Guy Boulanger, *Missionnaires en milieux populaires*, May, 1974, 33-34 in Guy Boulanger, private papers.

21 Guy Cousin, "La Mission ouvrière," 60 in Guy Cousin, private papers; Jacques Tanguay, *Travailler dans l'frigo, pis manger d'la manne* (Montreal: CSN, n.d.) 13; Benoît Fortin, "Le Dieu de nos luttes," 19, copy of article in Benoît Fortin, private papers; Jean-Paul Asselin, interview granted to the author (May 19, 1988); *Le Groupe*, p. 1.

22 Interviews granted to the author by Jacques Tanguay (June 21, 1988); Sister Dolorès Léger (June 6, 1988), Guy Boulanger (June 15, 1988), Sister Marie-Paule LeBrun (May 24, 1988), Benoît Fortin (May 13, 1988) and Gilles Morissette (May 16, 1988); Asselin interview; Guy Boulanger, "Sortir de l'Église pour y entrer," *Prêtres et Laïcs XXIII* (Nov., 1973), 572-578; Rosaire Tremblay, "Vie et travail en quartier populaire," *Dossiers "Vie Ouvrière" XXVIII*, 128 (Oct., 1978) 485-487; Gilles Morissette, "Travailleur parmi les travailleurs," *Communauté Chrétienne* 19, 109 (Jan.-Feb., 1980) 26-27; Tanguay, *Travailler*, 44-144; Guy Cousin, personal interview granted to the author (May 7, 1988); Paul des Rivières, "La victoire de l'abbé Cousin," *Le Devoir*, Feb. 15, 1988, 7; Carol Neron, "La glorieuse bataille d'un capuchin en 'blue jeans'," *La Semaine*, Dec. 1, 1984, 52-53; *6 ans de lutte... ça ne s'oublie pas*, 4th edition in Benoît Fortin, private papers; *Le Groupe*, p. 6.

23 Benoît Fortin, "De naissance en naissance," *Dossiers "Vie Ouvrière"*, XXIX, 140 (Dec., 1979) 633.

24 "Nellie McClung," "Agnes Macphail" and "Marie de l'Incarnation" in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985) 1047, 1068-1069, 1090; "Marguerite Bourgeoys," "Marie de l'Incarnation" and "Jeanne Mance" in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography I* (Toronto: University Press, 1966) 115-119, 357, 483-487; J. Marshall, ed. *Word from New France: The Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation* (1967); Candace Savage, *Our Nell* (1979); Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (1915), *My Own Story* (1935), *The Stream Runs Fast* (1945); Beatrice Brigden papers, Box 3, Department of Evangelism and Social Service in the United Church Archives; Margaret Stewart and Doris French, *Ask No Quarter* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1959).

- 25 Personal interviews with Sister Dolorès Léger (June 6, 1988), Sister Marie-Paule LeBrun (May 24, 1988) and the MTC militants Diane Levasseur (May 17, 1988) and Joyce Samson (May 25, 1988); Dolorès Léger, "Curriculum Vitae," p. 5 in Dolorès Léger, private papers; Jacynthe Desjardins, "La vie du mouvement..." *Option Ouvrière*, Jan., 1987, pp. 6-9; "Journée internationale des femmes," *Option Ouvrière*, March 8, 1988, p. 1; Reina Comte, "L'engagement de la femme," *Présence Chrétienne*, Sept., 1979, pp. 2-3.
- 26 Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965) 90-93.
- 27 *Membership, Ministry and Human Sexuality A New Statement of the United Church of Canada by the 32nd General Council* (1988), 4 pp.