

## **ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 122**

### **“Should Adventist Object to the Use of the Cross?”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**

**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,  
Andrews University**

Historically our Seventh-day Adventist Church has avoided the use of the Cross in church buildings and schools. Adventist churches with a tower or a spire usually have a lightening rod on the top, not a Cross. The reason for objecting to the use of the Cross, is the temptation for some Christians, especially devout Catholic, to treat the Cross as a sacred object by which to worship Christ.

When our first Seventh-Day Adventist Church was inaugurated in Rome, Italy (near St. Peter), on the top of the iron gate of the church there was a Cross. Among the people waiting for the bus in front of the gate, there were always some devout Catholics, who looked at the Cross, and instinctively made the sign of the Cross and recited an *Ave Maria* or Lord’s Prayer. For them, the Cross, even on the top of an iron gate was a sacred object by which to worship Christ.

In view of the problems caused by the iron Cross, our church leaders decided to remove the Cross from the gate. It is this concern over the idolatrous use of the Cross, that has led our Adventist Church to discourage the use of the Cross outside or inside our churches. The situation has changed in recent times, especially in predominant Protestant countries, where the Cross is seen as the symbol of Christ’s sacrificial death, not as a sacred object of worship.

On our Andrews University campus, a rustic Cross is often placed on the church platform, when the pastor preaches sermons related to the Cross. Three large wooden crosses that not even Gibson’s Super Christ could ever carry, have been placed by the computer store and have become a permanent fixture of the Andrews campus landscape. I am told that they are used for the annual Passion Play.

### **The Cross is Not a Pagan Sign**

On numerous occasions concerned church members have asked me if it is appropriate to place a Cross on the pinnacle or in front of their

---

---

new church building. This past week I received an unusual message from a pastor in the Philippine expressing his anguish over the split caused by the Cross among the church members of his district. He reports that a good number of Adventists have left their churches and formed an independent church organization, because a Cross was placed in their church buildings. For them the Cross is a pagan symbol that our Adventist church should avoid.

The Filipino pastor wanted to know if the Cross is indeed a pagan symbol of worship, as alleged by the dissenting members. The answer is NO! In researching for my new book on *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, I found that pagans despised the Cross because it was the shameful symbol of execution of criminals. The Cross has never been a pagan symbol of worship.

While the celebration of Christ's birth on December 25 with the lights, Christmas tree, exchanging of gifts can be traced to the third century pagan celebration of the *Natalis Solis Invicto*—the birth of the invincible Sun-god, the adoption of the Cross as the symbol of the Christian faith, has no pagan roots. Christians adopted the Cross, as explained shortly, in spite of its shame and ridicule, simply because they understood that the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross was the foundation and core of their faith.

The problem is that the plain Cross, used initially as the symbol of the Christian faith, gradually became a Crucifix with the contorted body of Jesus, used as an object of worship. The idolatrous use of the Crucifix is still predominant in Catholic countries. This explains why Adventists in dominant Catholic countries generally avoid altogether the use of the Cross in their churches. They know that the presence of a Cross in an Adventist church will tempt Catholic visitors to kneel before the Cross and worship Christ by means of the Cross.

The perverted use of the Cross as an object of worship in the Catholic Church, should not be a reason for Adventists to object to the use of the Cross, as the symbol of Christ's sacrificial death for our redemption. A plain Cross placed at the top of a church tower or in front of an Adventist church simply serves to convey the message that the building is not a Masonic Lodge, or a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall, but a Christian Church that accepts Christ's sacrificial death for our salvation.

---

---

In Catholic countries where the Cross and the Crucifix serve as object of worship, it may be wise for our churches not to display the Cross in a prominent place. The reason is pastoral, not theological. We want to help new believers to make the transition from the visible worship of Christ by means of icons and Crosses, to the invisible worship of the Lord in Spirit and Truth.

To help us appreciate more fully the meaning of the Cross, I am posting in this newsletter a short essay excerpted from my newly released book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*. The excerpt is taken from Chapter Four on “The Cross of Christ,” where I deal with the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross.

This essay is shorter than the last newsletter which was rejected by numerous internet providers overseas for being too long. Some servers overseas automatically reject any message that exceeds the established limits. In view of this problem I need to shorten my newsletters. Some of you will say “Thank God!” (Please laugh!).

Several complained that the filter mechanism of their internet provider blocked the newsletter. If that should happen, instruct your provider to clear the address of this newsletter and/or download the newsletter from my website: [www.biblical.perspectives.com](http://www.biblical.perspectives.com). Note that all the previous newsletters can be easily accessed at my website simply by clicking the button saying “Newsletters.”

The need to write a chapter on “The Cross of Christ,” was dictated by the fact that in *The Passion of the Christ*, Mel Gibson makes no attempt to explain why Christ had to be brutally tortured unto death for our redemption. The result is that some people see the Cross as the symbol of the punitive nature of God, rather than of His redeeming love.

In talking about the movie with a United Airline ticket agent, the lady told me: “After viewing Gibson’s movie, the lingering question in my mind is, ‘Why Christ had to be brutally tortured unto death to save us from sin?’” I reassured her that the notion of salvation through the intensity of Christ’s suffering is a Catholic heresy. In the Bible we are saved by Christ’s sacrificial death, not by the intensity of Christ’s sufferings.

---

---

To appreciate the meaning of the Cross, it is imperative to understand why Christ's suffering and death were necessary in the first place. The Bible does not give us a systematic explanation of the meaning of the Cross. Trying to piece the scattered references to Christ's death into one meaningful explanation is like attempting to assemble a puzzle without the picture of the puzzle on the cover of the box.

I have attempted to develop an accurate picture of the scope of Christ's death by taking into consideration the relevant biblical references. For the sake of brevity, I will post in this newsletter only a short excerpt of my study on the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross. In the next newsletter I will continue this vital study, by posting another excerpt from the chapter on "The Cross of Christ." Interested readers are encouraged to read the full treatment found in my newly released book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*.

### **A THANK YOU NOTE**

Thank you also for sharing this newsletters with your friends. As a result of your efforts, we receive an average of 200 new subscriptions every week. Let your friends know that this newsletter is FREE. To subscribe they only need to email a message to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>, saying SUBSCRIBE ME.

### **A METHODIST PASTOR/PROFESSOR FROM SINGAPORE VISITING ANDREWS UNIVERSITY**

In the last newsletter I reported the visit to Andrews University of a Methodist Pastor and Professor, Noel Goh, from Singapore. He attended my meetings in Singapore and became so interested in our Adventist message, especially the Sabbath, that he decided to visit Andrews University during his sabbatical in order to become better acquainted with the message and mission of our Adventist church.

During the past two weeks Pastor Goh has faithfully attended major doctrinal classes at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. He found the professors, not only very knowledgeable but also extremely

---

---

friendly and helpful. He likes the place, the people, and the message so much that he is extending his stay on campus to three weeks, instead of two, as originally planned. He confided to me that he is thinking seriously to come back to Andrews University with his wife for a whole year of study. To this end he has asked to see the housing facilities for families.

Pastor Noel Goh, is a Methodist pastor who also teaches classes at the Methodist Seminary in Singapore, which is the largest in that country. He told me that in Singapore there is a group of ministers, including the Anglican bishop who attended my meetings, who are eager to recover the biblical roots of the Christian faith, including the Sabbath. He promised to arrange a special meeting with these church leaders in occasion of my next visit to Singapore. In fact, during our supper meal he told me that he will arrange for me to share my Sabbath research in some of the seminary classes. Let us remember these people in our prayers.

## **LIST OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **ENGLAND LECTURE TOUR FROM NOVEMBER 19 TO 27, 2004**

From November 19 to 27, I will speak at four rallies in Manchester and London, England. For the sake of our British subscribers, I will briefly list the location and the time of each meeting. Thank you for informing your friends about these meetings.

#### **NOVEMBER 19-21: MANCHESTER SOUTH SDA CHURCH**

Location: 13 Wilbraham Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6JS.

All the four churches in Manchester are participating in this rally. In fact, on Sabbath morning, November 20, during Sabbath School I will speak at the Manchester Central SDA Church and during 11:00 o'clock service at the Manchester South. On Sabbath afternoon and Sunday morning, the meetings will be held for all the churches at the Manchester South SDA Church. For more information call Pastor Richard Brooks at 0121 356 2302 or Pastor Michael Simpson at 01204 531 661.

#### **NOVEMBER 23: TUESDAY - READING, BERKSHIRE**

Location: The rally will be held at the Amersham Road Community Center, in Lower Caversham, Reading, Berkshire. The meeting will start at 7:30 p. m. For more information call Daniel Cudjoe at 0118 939 4494 or

---

---

Pastor Everett Picart at 01189 755 110.

**NOVEMBER 24: WEDNESDAY - WILLESDEN SDA CHURCH**

Location: 361 High road, Willesden, London NW10 2JD.

For more information call Elder Keith Allen at 019 2344 0081 or Pastor Steve McKenzie at 020 8558 9216

**NOVEMBER 26-27: SOUTHEAST LONDON COMMUNITY SDA CHURCH**

Location: Brockley Baptist Church, 60 Upper Brockley Road, Brockley SE4, London. Several Ghananian churches are participating in this rally.

For more information call Pastor E. Sackey at 020 8804 2438

**APPEARANCE ON 3ABN ON DECEMBER 9, 2004**

3ABN has extended me an official invitation to present the highlights of my forthcoming book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* on Thursday evening, December 9, 2004 during the two hours popular live program.

The program will be aired twice. The first time on Thursday evening December 9, at 8:00 p. m. Central Standard time and the second time on Friday, December 10, at 1:00 a. m Central Standard Time. In the next newsletters I should have the time for the overseas airing.

**SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY***

The long-awaited book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* (208 pages), has just come off the press. A special note of thanks goes to PATTERSON PRINTING for completing the printing of this book in a record time of two weeks. For any printing need, feel free to call Greg Patterson at 269-925-2177 extension 571. The press is owned and operated by an Adventist family who offers excellent service at an economical price.

This *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* is designed to meet the urgent need for Adventist publications that can help people appreciate the difference between the biblically-based Adventist beliefs and popular heresies. In fact, to meet this urgent need I plan to devote all my free time and energies to complete my research project

---

---

entitled *POPULAR HERESIES*. I started this project two years, but I had to shelve it temporarily to give priority to *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*.

You will be proud to have copies of this timely book for your personal study and to give with confidence to your friends. The book is factual, not confrontational. It is designed to help many people to recognize the fundamental Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. More important still, the book present in a clear and compelling way the unique Adventist understanding of the redemptive accomplishments of the Cross, within the context of Protestant and Catholic teachings.

A massive distribution of this timely book can help countless people who have viewed Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, to recognize the deceptive Catholic teachings embedded in the movie as well as to appreciate more fully the Passion of Christ as His passionate love to redeem us from the *penalty* (Gal 3:13) and the *power* of sin (Titus 2:14) through His sacrificial death—not the brutality of His sufferings.

If you or someone you know can help in marketing this book nationwide, I would be glad to use such help. Feel free to contact me. It has become impossible for me to do at the same time all the research, writing, lecturing, marketing, and shipping. I need some professional help to free my hands of the marketing aspect, so that I can devote myself more fully to research, writing, and lecturing.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book until December 31, 2004, at the followings introductory offers:

**ONE COPY:** \$20.00 postage paid.

**TWO COPIES:** \$30.00 postage paid

**TEN COPIES:** \$100.00 postage paid

**THIRTY COPIES (one case):** \$150.00, postage paid.

By ordering the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$150.00, postage paid, the price for single copies is only \$5.00, instead of \$20.00. Your personal effort to place this timely book in the hand of sincere people who wish to understand the meaning of Cross, is greatly appreciated.

---

---

You can order *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* in four ways:

**ONLINE:** by clicking -----

**PHONE:** by calling us at: (269) 471-2915

**EMAIL:** by contacting us at: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net

**MAIL:** by sending your order to: Biblical Perspectives,  
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

If your order reaches us by Tuesday, November 16, it will be processed immediately before I leave for England the following day, Wednesday, November 18. If your order arrives while I am overseas, the shipment will be done immediately upon my return on Nov. 30, 2004.

### **CLEARANCE OF OVERSTOCK VIDEO RECORDING**

Last January 16-17-18, 2004, a TV crew taped 10 of my popular PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent at the brand new Michiana-FilAm SDA Church at Andrews University. These messages have inspired countless congregations across North America and overseas. The 10 PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent are packaged in an attractive album containing 5 video tapes.

At present we have an overstock of the SABBATH/ADVENT VIDEO ALBUM, because there has been a greater demand for the DVD version of the recording. To reduce our inventory, we are offering for one time only, the attractive VIDEO ALBUM containing 10 one-hour PowerPoint messages on the Sabbath and Second Advent, for only \$35.00, mailing expenses included, instead of the regular bookstore price of \$150.00. This represents 75% discount.

You can order the SABBATH/ADVENT VIDEO ALBUM with 10 PowerPoint presentations in four ways:

**ONLINE:** by clicking -----

**PHONE:** by calling us at: (269) 471-2915

**EMAIL:** by contacting us at: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net

**MAIL:** by sending your order to: Biblical Perspectives,  
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

---

---

## **SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI LCD PROJECTORS**

If your church or school are looking for a outstanding LCD projector, you will be pleased to learn that the HITACHI Corporation of North America has agreed to offer to our Adventist churches and schools their line of projectors at over 65% discount on the factory suggested retail price.

Over 500 Adventist churches and schools have already purchased these outstanding projectors. Andrews University purchased 10 HITACHI CP-X328 High Resolution 2000 lumens, which has won the award of the best projector in the 2000 lumens category. The special price for this award winning projector is only \$1,795.00, including 3 years of 24/7 warrantee.

Read the rest of the story about the special offer on HITACHI projectors at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing my website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

## **NEW MP3 AUDIO RECORDING**

Several people have encouraged me to make available my popular lectures on MP3 AUDIO disks. Being an old-timer slow in catching up with the latest technology, it took me sometime to prepare this recording. The Good News is that this important project has finally been completed. Now, for the first time you can listen in two MP3 AUDIO disks, to 22 popular lectures on Marriage, Music, Temperance, Dress, Sabbath, Second Advent, and others.

MP3 AUDIO disks can be played on computers with CD drives, DVD players, MP3 players, newer CD players, and iPod. The advantage of MP3 disks is twofold. First, the sound is clearer than that of audio cassettes. Second, one MP3 disk can holds 11 one-hour audio cassettes. This means that instead of carrying 3 bulky audio albums with 22 audio cassettes, you can have all my lectures in a slim elegant case with two MP3 AUDIO disks.

---

---

The regular price for the attractive case containing 2 MPS disks is \$150.00, but until December 31, 2004 the special introductory offer is only \$50.00, airmail expenses included.

You can order the two MP3 AUDIO DISKS containing 22 lectures in four ways:

**ONLINE:** by clicking -----

**PHONE:** by calling us at: (269) 471-2915

**EMAIL:** by contacting us at: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net

**MAIL:** by sending your order to: Biblical Perspectives,  
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

## **AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY**

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced a CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

The simplest way for me to describe this multimedia CD-ROM is for you to imagine having 100 documentaries compressed in one disk. You are guided through a virtual tour and given the opportunity to click what you want to watch or read. For example, if you want to see the Destruction of Jerusalem, or the Persecution of the Christians, just click, and you can watch these factual documentaries. You are in for months of pleasurable learning.

Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

---

---

**THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION**

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay members, have expressed their gratitude for informing them about the best SDA commentary on the Book of Revelation, recently published by Andrews University Press. If you missed the previous announcement, be sure to contact us to order your copy. We will mail it to you immediately.

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now our church did not have an authoritative commentary. Finally, Andrews University Press has published a Commentary on the Book of Revelation, that provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of the prophetic message of Revelation for our times.

The author is Ranko Stefanovic, Ph. D, currently serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. The publisher is Andrews University Press. Prof. Stefanovic spent two years producing this popular commentary, drawn largely from his doctoral dissertation presented with distinction at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

You can read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

**“The Centrality and Necessity of the Cross”****Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Church History and Theology****Andrews University**

The message of Scripture is that the solution to the human problem of guilt and sin is to be found not in human devices, but in God’s initiative to enter into human time and flesh to liberate us from the bondage of sin through the sacrificial death of His Son. The message of the Cross is that God has been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of dying on the Cross in the Person of His Son to pay the penalty of our sins and restore our broken relationship.

---

---

For the sake of brevity, this study focuses only on the centrality and necessity of the Cross. The full text and footnotes of this study are found in chapter 4 “The Cross of Christ,” of my newly released book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*.

### **THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS**

Religious and political movements usually have a visual symbol to represent their history or beliefs. Modern Judaism has adopted the so-called Star of David, which represents God’s covenant with David concerning the perpetual duration of his throne and the coming of the Messiah through his descendants. Islam is symbolized by a Crescent, which depicts a phase of the moon. It is a symbol of the expansion and sovereignty of the Moslem conquest.

The Lotus Flower is associated with Buddhism. Sometimes Buddha is depicted as enthroned in a fully open lotus flower. Its wheel shape is supposed to represent the emergence of beauty and harmony out of muddy water and chaos. In 1917 the Soviet government adopted a crossed hammer and sickle to represent the union of factory and field workers. The Swastika was adopted early in the twentieth century by a German group as the symbol of the Aryan race. Hitler took it over and made it the symbol of Nazi racial bigotry.

#### **The Cross is the Symbol of Christianity**

Christianity is no exception in having a visual symbol. The Cross in time became the universal emblem of the Christian belief in salvation through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. At first Christians avoided using the Cross as the visual symbol of their faith, though they boldly spoke about the Cross (1 Cor 1:23; Gal 6:14). Being the object of wild accusations and persecutions, they avoided associating their faith in Christ with the Cross, because it was the shameful symbol of execution of common criminals.

On the walls and ceilings of the catacombs, the earliest Christians used such noncommittal paintings as the peacock (symbol of immortality), the dove (symbol of the Holy Spirit), a palm branch (symbol of victory), and especially the fish. Only Christians knew that the Greek word

---

---

for fish, *ichthus*, was an acronym for *Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter*, that is, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.”

During the second century, Christians began painting such biblical themes as Noah’s ark, the Jonah cycle, the Good Shepherd, the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, and the resurrection of Lazarus. All of these pictures were intended to represent aspects of Christ’s redemptive mission. Eventually, Christians chose the Cross as the best pictorial symbol of their Christian faith in redemption through Christ’s sacrificial death.

A wide range of emblems were suitable for expressing the Christian faith. Christians could have chosen the manger to symbolize the incarnation, the empty tomb to symbolize the resurrection, the dove to symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the throne to symbolize Christ’s sovereignty. Instead, they chose a simple Cross, because it effectively represented the core of the Christian belief in redemption through Christ’s sacrificial death. The crucifix with Christ’s contorted body attached to it “does not appear to have been used before the sixth century.”

The Christians’ choice of a Cross to represent their faith is most surprising when we remember that the cross was the cruelest method of execution, reserved for slaves and foreigners who had been convicted as murderers or insurrectionists. The crucifixion was so shameful that Roman citizens were exempted from it. The early enemies of Christianity capitalized on the shame of the crucifixion to ridicule the Christian claim that Christ saved humankind by dying on the Cross.

A fitting example is a graffito from the second century discovered on Palatine Hill in Rome. It is a crude caricature of Christ’s crucifixion. It depicts a man stretched out on a cross with the head of a donkey. On the left stands another man with one arm raised in worship. Underneath are scribbled these uneven words: “*ALEXAMENOS CEBETE THEON*—Alexamenos worships God.” The accusation that Christians worshipped a donkey reveals the Romans’ contempt for the Christian worship of a crucified Savior.

The fact that the Cross became the symbol of the Christian faith, in spite of its shame and ridicule, shows that the early Christians understood that the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross was the foundation

---

---

and core of their faith. They were not prepared to exchange it for something less offensive. They firmly clung to it, because it was the symbol of their loyalty to their Savior and acceptance of His sacrificial death for their redemption.

### **Christ's Death Is the Central Theme of Scripture**

Christ's death is the central theme of Scripture. While walking to Emmaus with two of His disciples on the evening of His Resurrection, Jesus gave what must have been one of the most exciting Bible studies of all time. "Beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:26). Jesus explained to them how the prophets wrote about His death, without knowing who He was or when He would come.

The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a symbolic portrayal of the sacrificial death of Jesus for humankind's sins. Similarly, the Passover lamb sacrificed by each believing Jewish family celebrated not only the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, but also the future Messianic redemption from the bondage of sin. As Paul puts it: "Christ, our paschal lamb has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).

Christ was the fulfillment of the promise of redemption typified by the Passover lamb and the sacrificial animals offered at the Temple on behalf of penitent sinners. John the Baptist understood the Messianic typology of the sacrificial system. When he saw Jesus coming toward him at the Jordan River, John the Baptist said: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29).

Those who in faith offered animal sacrifices in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would redeem them with His own blood. In the same way, we today look back by faith to Christ's sacrificial death. The blood of animal sacrifices did not save, but faith in what the shed blood symbolized did. In the same way, we are saved not through the bread and wine, symbols of Christ's broken body and shed blood, but through the sacrificial death of Jesus represented by these symbols.

---

---

## Christ's Perception of His Mission

At the age of 12 when Jesus was left behind at the Temple by mistake, He already appeared to be conscious of His mission. He asked His anxious parents: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). By speaking of God as "my Father," and by expressing His inner compulsion to occupy Himself with His Father's affairs, Jesus revealed His mission at an early age. His Father had sent Him into the world for a special purpose.

At His baptism, and when enduring temptation, Jesus revealed His commitment to fulfill His mission, rather than follow the Devil's plan. He was prepared to go the way of suffering and death, rather than the way of comfort and acclamation. Later in His ministry, three times Christ attempted to explain to His disciples the so-called "Messianic secret" regarding His death. The first time was when Jesus and His disciples were traveling through the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way Jesus ". . . began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly" (Mark 8:31-32).

Jesus gradually revealed to His disciples the plan for His sacrificial death, because the Jews expected the Messiah to be a revolutionary political leader. The second unambiguous reference to His death occurred when Jesus was passing secretly through Galilee. He said to the Twelve: "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise" (Mark 9:31). The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant and "they were greatly distressed" (Matt 17:22). Probably this was the time when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). He was determined to fulfill His mission.

Christ made the third and most explicit prediction of His death on the way to Jerusalem with His disciples. "And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'Behold, we are going to go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him,

---

---

and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise” (Mark 10:32-34; cf. Matt 20:17). Luke adds that “everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31-34).

### **Christ’s Determination to Fulfill His Mission**

The most impressive aspect of these three predictions is Christ’s determination to fulfill His mission. He *must* suffer, be rejected, and die, so that everything written in the Scripture *must* be fulfilled. It is evident that Christ understood that the purpose of His coming into this world was to accomplish the redemption of humankind through His death, as predicted by the prophets.

John omits the three precise predictions about Christ’s death, yet he bears witness to the same event, by his seven references to Jesus’ “hour” (John 2:4; 7:8, 25; 8:12; 12:20-28; 13:1; 17:1). He says that “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father” (John 13:1). Lifting up His eyes to heaven, Jesus said: “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee” (John 17:1). In these statements, Christ speaks of His death as the moment of His glorification by His Father. This vision of the Cross differs radically from Gibson’s movie in which Christ’s brutal suffering and death serves to meet the demands of a punitive God. In the Bible, as we shall see, God is not a spectator, but a participant in the death and glorification of His Son.

The evidence supplied by the Gospel writers indicates that Jesus knew that He would die a violent but purposeful death. He knew that He would die because of what the prophets had predicted about His death and resurrection. There was no martyr complex or fatalism in Jesus’ mind. He was determined to fulfill the revealed purpose of His coming, however painful that may be. He had come “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) and “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44). He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, not allowing anything to deter Him. He freely embraced the eternal purpose of His Father for the salvation of sinners through His own sacrificial death.

Despite the great importance of Christ’s teachings, miracles, and perfect life, none of these was the fundamental reason for His coming

---

---

into this world. As John Stott put it, “What dominated his mind was not the living but the giving of his life. This final self-sacrifice was the ‘hour,’ for which he had come into this world. And the four evangelists, who bear witness to him in the Gospels, show that they understand this by the disproportionate amount of space they give to the story of the last few days on earth, his death and resurrection. This event occupies between a third and a quarter of the three Synoptic Gospels, while John’s Gospel has justly been described as having two parts, ‘the Book of the Signs’ and ‘the Book of the Passion,’ since John spends an almost equal amount of time on each.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Apostles’ Understanding of the Cross**

The centrality of the Cross is evident in the preaching and writing of the Apostles. They frequently emphasize that Christ died and was resurrected according to Scripture. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul summarizes the Gospel in this way: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3).

Paul defines his Gospel as “the message of the Cross” (1 Cor 1:18), his ministry as “we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:22), baptism as initiation “into his death” (Rom 6:3), and the Lord’s Supper as a proclamation of “the Lord’s death till he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). So convinced was Paul of the centrality of the Cross that he decided “to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

The testimony of Peter is equally clear. He introduces his first letter by reminding readers that they have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood (1 Pet 1:2). A few verses later he tells his readers: “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19). Later in his epistle Peter explains how Christ’s suffering and death enable believers to die to sin and live righteously. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet 2:24).

The Book of Hebrews explains to Jewish Christians tempted to

---

---

relapse into Judaism that there is no need to offer the same sacrifices continuously, because Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26). Like Peter, Hebrews mentions the sanctifying power of Christ’s sacrificial death: “For by a single offering he has perfected for all times those who are sanctified” (Heb 10:14).

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as “the Lamb” 28 times, not so much because of the meekness of His character, but rather because He was slain as a sacrificial victim and by His blood He has set His people free. In Revelation 5, one heavenly choir after another praises the Lamb. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, who most likely represent the whole church of both the Old and New Testaments, sang a new song, saying: “Worthy are thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation . . .” (Rev 5:9).

In Revelation, Christ as the Lamb occupies center stage, not only in worship but also in salvation history. At the end, unbelievers will try to escape from the wrath of the Lamb while the redeemed are invited to celebrate the marriage of the Lamb. The lost will call upon the mountains and rocks, saying: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16). By contrast, the great multitude of the redeemed will shout for joy, saying: “Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come” (Rev 19:7).

Christ as the Lamb is presented at the side of God, mediating God’s salvation. He is worthy to serve as our mediator because He was slain and by His sacrificial death secured our salvation. By presenting Christ as “the Lamb that was slain” before the foundation of the world, John is telling us that from eternity past to eternity future, the center stage belongs to the Lamb of God who was slain for our salvation (John 17:24).

**Conclusion.** The centrality of Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross is the foundation and center of the Christian faith. We have found that Christ understood His saving mission not in terms of living to teach moral principles, but in terms of dying to save people from their sins. The

---

---

apostles clearly understood the centrality of the Cross. In their preaching and teaching, they proclaimed the message of the Cross—salvation not through human devising, but through “the precious blood of Jesus, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

The recognition of the centrality of the Cross led Christians to adopt the emblem of the Cross as the symbol of their faith, because it effectively represented their belief in salvation through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross. Note, however, that the early Christians adopted a plain cross, not a crucifix with the bleeding and contorted body of Jesus attached to it. Why? Simply because they believed that Christ saved us, not through the intensity of His suffering, as portrayed in Gibson’s movie, but through His voluntary sacrificial death.

In his book *The Cruciality of the Cross*, P. T. Forsyth aptly observes: “Christ is to us just what the Cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth, was put on what he did there on the Cross. . . . Christ, I repeat, is to us just what the Cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand His Cross.” The Cross is the prism through which we understand Christ, because it reveals the ultimate purpose of Jesus’ incarnation, perfect life, and atoning death.

### THE NECESSITY OF THE CROSS

The biblical emphasis on the centrality of the Cross as the only ground on which God forgives sinners bewilders many people. Some argue that if God does not pardon sin without requiring the death of Christ, He either must not be an all-powerful God or else He must be a punitive God, concerned more about enforcing His law than expressing His love. The latter is the picture of God portrayed in Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, in which Christ is brutalized beyond recognition to meet the demands of justice of a punitive God.

Does God need to submit His Son to brutal torture to meet the demands of His justice? Is redemption in the Bible achieved by the intensity of Christ’s suffering, as portrayed in Gibson’s movie, or by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross? Can God forgive sin out of His pure mercy without the necessity of the Cross? Since God expects us to forgive those who sin against us, why doesn’t He practice what He preaches? These are legitimate questions that need to be addressed. We

---

---

shall attempt to answer them in the light of God's holiness and the gravity of sin.

### **God Deals with Sin in Accordance with His Holiness and Justice**

The analogy between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness ignores the fact that God is not a private, sinful being. It is true that Christ taught us to pray: "forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." But the point of Christ's teaching is that we cannot expect to be forgiven by God if we are unforgiving toward fellow beings. To argue that God should forgive us unconditionally, as we are expected to forgive wrongdoers, is to ignore the elementary fact that we are not God.

John Stott rightly explains: "We are private individuals, and other people's misdemeanors are personal injuries. God is not a private individual, however, nor is sin just a personal injury. On the contrary, God is himself the maker of the laws we break, and sin is a rebellion against him."

To appreciate the nature of God's forgiveness, we need to keep in mind the contrast between God's perfection and our human rebellion. The problem God faces in forgiving sin is reconciling His loving mercy with His perfect justice. For, although "God is love," we need to remember that His love is "holy" and "just;" it is a love that yearns to forgive sinners, without compromising His justice and holiness.

At the Cross, God's mercy and justice are equally revealed and reconciled. His mercy is revealed in offering His Son to pay the full penalty of our transgressions, and His justice is manifested in taking upon Himself the punishment that we deserve in order to offer us the forgiveness that we do not deserve. In the Cross of Christ "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps 85:10).

At the Cross, as A. H. Strong puts it, "Mercy is shown not by trampling upon the claims of justice, but by vicariously satisfying them." It is important to realize that God exercises all His attributes in harmony with each other. In His holiness God demands atonement for sin, while in His mercy He provides it. God's attributes are not antagonistic to each other, but work together in full and complete harmony.

---

---

## God's Holiness Requires the Punishment of Sin

Those who object to the necessity of Christ's death on the Cross to atone for our sins fail to understand that God is merciful and just at the same time. This is the problem with those who say: "Why doesn't God forgive and forget? Shouldn't God forgive people who are sorry for their wrong doings and endeavor to become better persons? Isn't it unreasonable to claim that only the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross can remove sin?"

These questions ignore that God cannot overlook sin, pretending that it does not exist, because He is righteous and just. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne" (Ps 89:14). "His work is perfect; for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut 32:4).

God's ethical absolutes are not philosophical abstractions existing in ideal realms. They are rooted in God's very being and thus are as immutable as God Himself. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God can only do what is right because His nature is altogether just. Human beings have a sense of right and wrong only because they have been created in God's image (Gen 1:26) and, thus, have the principles of God's law written in their hearts (Rom 2:15).

The just, holy, and righteous nature of God is incompatible with sin. God's "eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab 1:13; NIV). Consequently, our sins effectively separate us from God. "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear" (Is 59:2).

## The Meaning of God's Wrath

The reaction of God's holiness to sin is frequently described as the "wrath of God." "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18; cf. John 3:36; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; Rev 14:10). The wrath of God in the Bible is not an irrational, capricious,

---

---

emotional outburst of anger and “seeing red.” Rather, it is His consistent and necessary reaction to the objective reality of moral evil. In the words of Leon Morris, God’s wrath is His “personal divine revulsion to evil,” and “his personal vigorous opposition to it.”

Contrary to human wrath, which is usually arbitrary and uninhibited, divine wrath is principled and controlled. It is free from personal animosity or vindictiveness. It is always accompanied by undiminished love for the sinner. God’s wrath in the Bible is always judicial in the sense that it is the wrath of the judge who administers justice (Eph 5:6). It is His intense displeasure and condemnation of sin. It issues not from passion, but from God’s holiness and righteousness which is the basis of the administration of the universe.

John Stott rightly observes that “What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God, is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God and God cannot tolerate sin.” This biblical understanding of God’s nature is unpopular today. Most people prefer an easygoing God who is tolerant of their offenses. They want God to be gentle, accommodating, without any violent reaction. They want to bring God down to their level and raise themselves up to His, so that ultimately there is no need for the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross on their behalf.

To counteract this misconception of God, it is imperative to recover the biblical revelation of the God who hates evil, is angered by it, and refuses to compromise with it. It is essential to understand that God’s holiness requires that sin be punished. If God failed to punish sin, then He could not claim to be perfectly just. His infinite justice demands the punishment of the sinner or of an appropriate substitute. Frequently the Bible reminds us that God cannot excuse or overlook sin. “I will not acquit the wicked” (Ex 23:7). “I will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34:7; cf. Num 14:18).

### **The Gravity of Sin**

To appreciate the necessity of the Cross, it is essential to under-

---

---

stand not only God's holiness, but also the gravity of sin. The biblical notion of sin has been largely rejected by our secularized society. Wrongdoers are no longer called "sinners," but persons with behavioral disorders to be treated as sicknesses rather than sin.

In the Bible, however, sin is not a regrettable lapse from accepted social standards, but an active rebellion against God. The New Testament uses five Greek words for sin which help us to understand its various aspects. The most common is *hamartia*, which signifies "missing the mark." *Adikia* signifies "unrighteousness" or "iniquity." *Poneria* means a vicious or degenerate kind of evil. *Parabasis* means "transgression," the stepping over a boundary. *Anomia* is "lawlessness," "the violation of a known law." Each of these terms implies the violation of an objective standard of conduct.

In Scripture, the objective standard of conduct is God's law which expresses His own righteous character. It is the law of God's own being, as well as the law that He has implanted in the human heart (Rom 2:15). Thus, there is a vital correspondence between the moral principles of God's character and the moral principles that should govern our relationship with God and fellow beings.

The emphasis of Scripture is on the godless self-centeredness of sin which results in active violation of God's law. "Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness: sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Every sin that we commit reflects a spirit of rebellion against God. David acknowledges this fact in his confession: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment" (Ps 51:4). Emil Brunner sums it up well: "Sin is defiance, arrogance, the desire to be equal with God, . . . the assertion of human independence over against God, . . . the constitution of the autonomous reason, morality, and culture."

### **Forgiveness through Christ's Sacrifice**

The fact that sin is an act of defiance against God poses a question: "Could sinners be forgiven by other means than Christ's sacrifice on the Cross?" In theory, God could have saved humankind by other means. But in practice, any other method would not have been consonant

---

---

with the exigencies arising from the perfections of His character which are reflected in His law.

God's law necessitated the sacrificial death of Christ, because law carries with it the penal sanction of death for the transgressors. These sanctions are immutable and eternal because they reflect God's nature and character. God's holiness causes Him to condemn sin, and His justice requires Him to punish sin. And the penalty for sin prescribed by God's law is death. "In the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17). "The soul that sins shall die" (Ezek 18:20). "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). "Sin when it is full-grown brings forth death" (James 1:15). "Since God is true and cannot lie, these threatenings must necessarily be executed either upon the sinner himself or upon a surety."

The Good News is that God in His mercy has offered His own Son as the "surety" for our salvation. The New Testament explains the necessity of Christ's death in terms of the sacrificial shedding of blood for the remission of sin. For example, the Book of Hebrews affirms: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Heb 9:22). If the method of salvation depended solely upon God's arbitrary decision, then He could have devised a bloodless redemptive plan. But God's decisions are not arbitrary. They are consonant with His inner Being.

The writer of Hebrews explains that the shedding of blood is necessary for the remission of sin, and that only the blood of Jesus can accomplish this purpose. "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). "And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:11-12, 14).

### **Only Christ's Death Meets the Demands of Divine Justice**

If God could have forgiven sin by a mere act of volition, without first demanding the satisfaction of the penalty of sin, then the whole biblical teaching of remission of sin through Christ's sacrificial death would be totally untrue. Furthermore, the Cross of Christ would hardly be the

---

---

supreme demonstration of God's love (Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10) if the redemption secured by it could have been achieved without it.

If it had been possible for the cup of Christ's suffering and death to pass from Him, then surely the Father would have answered His Son's prayer in Gethsemane. The fact that it was not possible shows that only the sacrificial death of Jesus could fulfill the exigencies of divine justice. The ordeal of Calvary reveals the depth of God's love for lost sinners. When the Cross is viewed in this light, then the love of God manifested at Calvary takes on new meaning and fills us with adoring amazement.

Although God is almighty and omniscient, there are certain things that He cannot do. For example, God cannot lie (Tit 1:2; Heb 6:8); He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13); He cannot tempt people to sin (James 1:13). Neither can He violate the moral principles that govern His own nature. When God determined to save human beings from the consequences of sin, He could only design a plan consistent with His moral law that envisions death as the punishment for sin.

God's plan for the salvation of lost sinners could only be carried out through the incarnation and sacrificial death of His Son. This is indicated by the fact that Christ is presented as "The Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev 13:8). Through this plan of salvation, as Paul puts it, God is able to demonstrate that "He himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

### **God Is Just in Justifying Penitent Sinners**

In Romans 3:21-26, Paul explains that by offering His Son as an expiation for our sins, God was able "to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous" in justifying those "who have faith in Jesus." The reason is that God acts in harmony with His whole character. On one hand, He shows His complete abhorrence of sin by punishing it, while on the other hand He reveals His mercy by offering to pay its penalty.

The notion of God offering His Son to die for our sins as an innocent victim for guilty sinners is regarded by some as immoral and unjust. In a human court, an innocent person cannot assume the guilt and punishment of a wrongdoer. This reasoning, however, ignores two important considerations. First, Christ was not an unwilling victim. The glory of

---

the Cross is to be seen in the voluntary nature of Christ's incarnation, life of suffering, and sacrificial death. "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but . . . humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross" (Phil 2:7-8). Christ's sacrifice was a voluntary act, not an imposition.

Second, God is just in acquitting penitent sinners (Rom 3:26), because, through Christ's atoning death, He not only acquits sinners, but also empowers them to become righteous. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be *made righteous*" (Rom 5:19; emphasis supplied). This is something a human judge cannot do. A judge's declaration of guilt or innocence does not change the behavior of the dependent. But the Good News of the Gospel is that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

We could say that from a biblical perspective, *justification* through Christ's death entails not only a *declaration* of acquittal, but also a *transformation* into newness of life. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). The new life in Christ, made possible through the acceptance of His atoning death, proves that God's plan of salvation is both just and effective. It accomplishes both the reconciliation and the transformation of the penitent sinner—or to use more technical words, the justification and sanctification of believers.

## Conclusion

The necessity of the Cross stems from the holiness of God and the gravity of sin. God's holiness requires the punishment of the sinner or of an appropriate substitute. Christ's sinless life and sacrificial death were the only way for sinners to be saved. Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:7). The Cross serves as a constant reminder that "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).