

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 123

“The Achievements of the Cross - Part 1”

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The last newsletter No. 122 “Should Adventist Object to the Use of the Cross?,” has generated far more responses than I had anticipated. Many subscribers expressed strong disagreement to my comment that the Christian Cross is not a pagan symbol. I welcome disagreement when it is motivated by the desire to deepen the understanding of a subject. Unfortunately, some critics express their disagreement simply by asking to have their names removed from the subscription list.

This is not the first time that readers have unsubscribed after I presented a differing viewpoint. It is encouraging to know that for each request to unsubscribe, there are at least ten new requests to subscribe. The vast majority of our believers welcome the opportunity to take a fresh look at traditional views. The inability of a few people to examine a different viewpoint, reveals the unwillingness to recognize one’s limitations and to test the correctness of one’s own understanding.

The critical comments received have made me aware of my failure to clarify in what sense the Christian Cross is not a pagan symbol. What I meant is not that the cross was never used as an ornamental or religious symbol by ancient pagan nations. It is a well-known and established fact that crosses of all forms and shapes have been used since the dawn of civilization to represent such things as the four points of the compass, male/female sexual organs, the four winds, the cross-like corona of the sun during an eclipse, etc. Instead, what I meant is that the origin and meaning of the Christian Cross, derives, not from its pagan use and symbolism, but from the Christian’s desire to find an appropriate symbol to express their faith in redemption through Christ’s sacrificial death.

Pagan Use of the Cross Does Not Make the Christian Cross Pagan

The use of cross symbols among pagan nations, does not make the Christian Cross a pagan symbol, because the Christian meaning of the Cross has no parallel in pagan religion. No pagan cross represented

redemption through the sacrificial death of their god. The same is true of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is a known fact that in the popular Mithraic religious service, members were baptized and partook of bread and wine consecrated by the priests, called "fathers."

Furthermore, the Mithraists worshipped on Sunday and celebrated the miraculous birth of their sun-god Mithras on December 25. Since Mithraism reached Rome before Christianity and was made by Emperor Commodus (180-192) the official Imperial religion that became the main competitor of Christianity, some argue that all the religious rites of the Christian faith derive from Mithraism and/or other pagan religions. Ultimately, the Christian religion itself is nothing else than a refined form of paganism. The flaws of this contention by liberal critics will be explained in the next newsletter.

At this juncture it suffices to note that any comparison between the Christian Cross, or Baptism, or the Lord's Supper with their pagan counterpart, must take into consideration, not only the external similarities, but also the radical internal differences of meaning and function. The relation of Christian symbols to pagan symbols can be compared to the relation between Biblical Greek and classical Greek. Christianity could not invent new symbols any more than a new language, but it transformed the old symbols and practices, filling them with deeper meaning, and using them to proclaim Biblical truths.

Unfortunately, what began as a legitimate symbol of the Christian faith, it was soon prostituted into a pagan idolatrous object. The perversion of the Cross, as well as of other Christian institutions such as the Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, the Passover, and Baptism, does not negate their biblically sound beginnings. The reasons for my conclusion will be submitted in the next newsletter.

It was my sincere desire to post in this newsletter my study entitled "Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol?" In fact, I have devoted over 100 hours researching and writing on this subject. I have already written about 15 pages, but I still have a considerable amount of reading and writing to do. To do justice to this important subject, I decided to continue my investigation for the next few weeks before posting it in my next newsletter.

The Need to Reexamine the Origin of the Cross

The question of the historical origin and biblical legitimacy of the Cross, deserves careful investigation, because historically our Adventist church has embraced the view of the pagan origin of the Cross. Such a view has been largely influenced by such books like *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop—an old book first published in 1859, but still popular today. Some respondents cited this book as if it were the “Webster” authority on the definition of paganism in Christianity.

The multitude of notes and pictures gives credibility to the book. But a careful analysis of the sources shows that Hislop arbitrarily pieces together ancient myths and symbols, to build a case for the pagan origin of Christian symbols like the Cross. For example, he argue that the Christian Cross derives from the tau “T” symbol of the Babylonian and Assyrian god Tammuz.

This conclusion is discredited by two lines of evidences. First, the worship of the Babylonian Tammuz was hardly known in the Roman empire where Christianity arose. Second, the Romans despised the name and the sign of the cross, as shown by graffiti and literary texts to be cited in the next newsletter. The famous Roman orator Cicero wrote: “Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears” (*Pro Rabirio* 5).

In the light of these evidences, we may ask: How could the Christian’s adoption of the Cross have been influenced by its pagan use, when the Romans despised the cross as a shameful symbol? The truth is that to avoid exposing themselves to ridicule and danger, the early Christians before the peace granted by Constantine, were extremely reticent to portray the Cross, often choosing to disguise it as an anchor or a trident.

The misleading information on the origin of the Christian Cross, has caused our Adventist church to frown upon displaying the Cross inside or outside church buildings. The situation is gradually changing, especially in non-Catholic countries, where an increasing number of Adventist churches are displaying the Cross.

For example, in the outdoor Garden of Prayer of Andrews University Pioneer Memorial Church—the flagship church of our denomination—there is an impressive 10 feet Cross placed in front of a recessed granite wall. Also on the facade of the brand new Andrews University Theological Seminary building, there is a massive stone Cross about 40 feet tall inset on the facade. To my knowledge nobody has complained about these impressive Crosses, or about the other Passion Play Crosses which have become a permanent fixture of our beautiful campus.

The gradual introduction of the Cross in Adventist buildings, is largely the result of cultural conditioning, rather than of a fresh understanding of the origin and nature of the Cross. The awareness of the importance of the subject, is compelling me to take more time to complete this research, which I hope will provide the starting point for a reexamination of our Adventist church position on the use of the Cross.

Objectives of this Newsletter

This newsletter continues the study we began in the previous newsletter on the reasons for Christ’s death. The study is excerpted from chapter 4 of *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, which is entitled “The Cross of Christ.” In the previous newsletter we considered the centrality and necessity of the Cross. We concluded that the centrality of Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross is the foundation and center of the Christian faith. 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.

In this newsletter we move from the necessity of the Cross to the achievements of the Cross. The question we intend to address is: Why did God take our place and bear our sins? In recent years some disagreement has emerged among Adventist theologians regarding the reasons for Christ’s death. Some are uncomfortable with the notion of the substitutionary function of Christ’s death to bear the punishment of penitent sinners. They prefer to view Christ’s death as a revelation of divine love designed to rekindle a loving response in the heart of sinners.

But, if Christ had sacrificed His life merely to demonstrate His love toward us, it is hard to understand why such cruel demonstration was necessary. Love is best demonstrated not by dying for someone, but rather by living for and serving that person. The Cross must be seen as a revelation of both divine love and divine justice. This study attempts to show that salvation is through divine expiation of human sin and not merely through a divine revelation of love.

To facilitate our understanding of the achievements of the Cross, we will consider five major word pictures used in Scripture to explain the results of Christ's sacrificial death: propitiation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, and intercession. For the sake of brevity, this essay deals only with the first two word pictures: propitiation and redemption. The study of the next three word pictures (justification, reconciliation, and intercession) will be posted in the next newsletter.

Are you eager to read the rest of this fascinating study on **THE CROSS OF CHRIST**? You don't have to wait to read bits and pieces in my newsletters, because you will find it all in the new book *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*. Just call us at (269) 471-2915 and we will mail you a copy right away. This timely book came off the press on November 15, 2004, and over 2000 copies were mailed out during the first 10 days.

LIST OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

At the suggestion of several subscribers, I am posting in this newsletter only a brief description of each announcement. You can access the details at my website simply by clicking on the URL address provided for each announcement.

APPEARANCE ON 3ABN ON DECEMBER 9, 2004

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

The time of the airing of the program given to me by 3ABN is as follows:

US Central:	8:00 pm	December 9th
Australia	11:00 am	December 10th
Europe	4:00 am	December 10th
S. Africa	4:00 am	December 10th
Far East	11:00 am	December 10th

The program will be re-broadcasted at the following times:

US Central:	1:00 am	December 10th
Australia	4:00 pm	December 10th
Europe	9:00 am	December 10th
S. Africa	9:00 am	December 10th
Far East	4:00 pm	December 10th

Your personal effort to inform your friends and to tape this two hour discussion of **THE PASSION OF CHRIST** is greatly appreciated. During my recent lecturing overseas, many have told me that they are eager to tape the program to share it with their friends and congregation at a convenient time.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month December 2004 and January 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

DECEMBER 9: 3ABN LIVE EVENING PROGRAM

The details of the program are given above

DECEMBER 10-11: INDIANAPOLIS SOUTHSIDE SDA CHURCH

Location: 4801 Shelbyville Road, Indianapolis, Indiana 46237

For information call Pastor Sergio Gutierrez at (317) 882-5019 or Amy Staton at (317) 966-6938.

JANUARY 14-15, 2005: CHARLESTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 2518 Savannah Highway, Charleston, SC 29414.

For information call Pastor Eli Rojas at (843) 766-9556 or 843-345-7950.

JANUARY 21-22: OCALA SDA CHURCH - FLORIDA

Location: 415 NE 41st Avenue, Ocala, Florida 34470

For information call Pastor Dale Martin at (352) 854-4800 or Attorney John Brooks at (352) 622-9051

FEBRUARY 4-5: ROLLING HILLS SDA CHURCH, LOS ANGELES

Location: 28340 Highridge Road, Rolling Hills Estates, California 90274-3405.

For information call Pastor Jeff Rosenthal at (714) 522-5280 or (714) 928-6596.

Thank you for informing your friends about the time and place of the seminars.

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), came off the press on November 15, 2004. Over 2000 copies were mailed out during the first 10 days.

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.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies until December 31, 2004, at the special offer of only \$5.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. You can order the book online at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/passionoffer.htm> or by calling us at (269) 471-2915.

STUDY HELP FOR NEW SABBATH SCHOOL QUARTERLY

Could be it providential that *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY*, came off the press just in time for the study of our new Sabbath School Quarterly for January, February, and March 2005? The title of the new Quarterly is HIS WONDROUS CROSS. THE STORY OF OUR REDEMPTION. As stated in the lesson “focus is on the meaning of the Cross, on what happened there, and what it offers us.”

Providentially, a major portion of my newly released book on *THE PASSION OF CHRIST* explores the meaning of the Cross, especially its necessity, centrality, and achievements. In fact, in this newsletter you will read a brief excerpt from my book dealing with “The Achievements of the Cross.” If you find that this study offers many fresh insights into the meaning of the Cross that are missing in the Sabbath School Lessons, be sure to announce the book to your Sabbath School members.

Let your Sabbath School class know that by ordering *THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY* by the case of 30 copies, the price is only \$5.00 per copy, mailing expenses included, instead of \$20.00. To order a case at the special price, just call us at (269) 471-2915. We will ship the books immediately so that they can be distributed in time for the study of the new quarterly.

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 online at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/passionoffer.htm> or by calling us at (269) 471-2915.

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 \$1,695.00, 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.

BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND

Are you planning to travel to London, England in the near future? If you do, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best bed and breakfast service for only £20.00. I stayed with this couple for the fourth time from November 19 to 29, 2004, while speaking at three rallies. They treated me so well that I promised to announce their services in this newsletter. They have three nice rooms, a lovely garden, and nice bathroom. The home is close to Heathrow airport and at a walking distance from the Subway. You will be treated royally at a bargain price. You can see the pictures and read the details at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

NEW MP3 AUDIO RECORDING

For the first time you can now 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 hold 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 MP3 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 online at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/mp3audio.htm> If you have a problem ordering the MP3 AUDIO DISKS 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 by phone and mail you the package immediately.

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 an incredible interactive multimedia CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

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.

SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF CD-ROMS, MP3 AUDIO DISKS AND DVD/VIDEO RECORDINGS

For the first time we offer until December 31, 2004, the complete package of all my recordings for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$450.00. The package includes the TWO CD-ROM with all my research (over 7000 pages) and all my PowerPoint lecture, TWO MP3 AUDIO disks with 22 messages, and the FIVE DVD DISKS or FIVE VIDEO TAPES with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, taped few months ago by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$450.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package 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 by phone and mail you the package immediately.

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“The Achievements of the Cross - Part 1”**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,****Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,****Andrews University**

The heart of the Cross is God in Christ substituting Himself for the salvation of sinners. In the previous newsletter we noted that the necessity of the Cross stems from the holiness of God and the gravity of sin. We need now to move from the necessity of the Cross to the achievements of the Cross.

Why did God take our place and bear our sins? The New Testament offers two major answers to this question, which may be summed up as *revelation* and *salvation*. *Revelation* is the subjective aspect of Christ's death, namely, how Christ's atoning death reveals God's love in a way that can rekindle a loving response in the heart of sinners. *Salvation* is the objective aspect of Christ's death, namely, how Christ's atoning death satisfied divine justice by dealing with the objective reality of sin. For the sake of clarity, we examine the achievements of the Cross under these two main categories:

1. The Revelation of God
2. The Salvation of Sinners

1. THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

God has revealed Himself in various ways, but, as Hebrews 1:1-3 points out, through His own Son He has spoken to us in a special way. This means that Christ's life, suffering, and death offer to us a unique revelation of God's love, character, and nature. Being the culmination of Christ's life, the Cross is also the supreme revelation of God's love. This truth is emphatically stated in the New Testament.

The Cross Is the Supreme Revelation of God's Love

Twice John affirms that Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross is the supreme manifestation of true love. “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). For John the true definition of love is

to be found at Calvary, not in a dictionary. John's second verse is still more precise: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God's love is true love because it was manifested in sending His only Son to die the death that we deserve "so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

Paul also writes about the love of God twice in the first part of Romans 5. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). These two texts point to the subjective and objective aspects of God's love. Paul says that we know God's love objectively because He has proven His love through the death of His Son, and subjectively because He continuously pours His love into our hearts through the indwelling of His Spirit.

The Cross is a supreme revelation of God's love. First because it tells us that He sent *His own Son*, not a third party. Second because God sent His Son, not merely to teach us or to serve us, but *to die for us*—undeserving sinners that we are. The value of a love gift is determined by what it costs to the giver and how deserving the recipient is. In the gift of His Son God gave everything for those who deserved nothing from Him.

Calvary must be seen as a revelation of the love of both the Father and the Son, because God initiated and participated in the self-giving of His Son. As Paul puts it: "All is from God who through Christ reconciles us to Himself. . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:18-19). At Golgotha, the Father was not a spectator, but a participant in the anguish and suffering of His Son. Consequently, Christ's experience of the limitations, sufferings, agony, and death of human flesh is a supreme revelation of both the Son and the Father's love.

The Cross Kindles a Loving Response. The revelation of divine love through the life, suffering, and death of Christ is designed to kindle a loving response in the hearts of sinners. The human heart responds to a genuine manifestation of sacrificial love. Jesus said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The sinner who hears the Good News of the Savior who died to rescue

humankind from the penalty and power of sin is moved to respond by repenting of sin and accepting divine forgiveness and salvation.

Paul emphasizes the compelling power of Christ's love revealed at the Cross: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all" (2 Cor 2:14). Similarly John writes: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Passages such as these clearly emphasize the moral influence exercised on the human heart by God's love exhibited at the Cross.

The "Moral Influence" Theory

The unique demonstration of God's love at the Cross has led many theologians during the history of the Christian church to find atoning value in the moral influence of the Cross. To them, the efficacy of the Cross lies not in any objective satisfaction of divine justice through Christ's death, but in its subjective inspiration to respond to God's love by changing our attitudes and actions.

The most famous promoter of the "moral influence" view of the Cross was the French theologian Peter Abelard (1079-1142). He was a popular lecturer who attracted large audiences at the University of Notre Dame, Paris. He strongly disagreed with his contemporary, Anselm, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109), on the reason for Christ's death. In his epoch-making book *Cur Deus Homo? (Why God Became Man)*, Anselm explains that Christ had to suffer in His mind and body the exact equivalent of the punishment due for all of humankind's sins in order to satisfy the demands of divine justice.

Abelard rejected Anselm's satisfaction view of Christ's death, proposing instead what is known as "the moral influence" view of the atonement. He wrote: "How cruel and wicked it seems, that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of His Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world."

Instead, Abelard explained the function of Christ's death in exclusively subjective terms, namely, as a revelation of divine love designed to move human hearts to repent and turn to God. He wrote: "Redemption is the greatest love kindled in us by Christ's passion, a love which not only delivers us from the bondage of sin, but also acquires for us the true freedom of children, where love instead of fear becomes the ruling affection."

A favorite text that Abelard quoted to support his view is Luke 7:47, where Jesus, referring to the adulterous woman who anointed His feet, says: "I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Abelard misunderstood this text. He made love the ground of forgiveness, rather than its result. For him, Christ's death offers forgiveness by evoking a loving response. When we love Christ we show that we are forgiven. As Robert Franks put it, "Abelard reduced the whole process of redemption to one single clear principle, namely, the manifestation of God's love to us in Christ, which awakens an answering love in us."

Supporters of the Moral Influence Theory. The moral influence view of Christ's death has enjoyed considerable support throughout the centuries. Peter Lombard, who became Bishop of Paris in 1159, defended the view in his famous *Book of Sentences*. Other proponents of this view were Socinus, a sixteenth-century theologian who also denied the Trinity, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, regarded as the father of nineteenth-century liberal theology. At present, the moral influence view has been repropounded by evangelical theologians who find the substitutionary view of Christ's death no longer acceptable today. In their view, the notion of substitution reflects the ancient Roman court setting, rather than that of a family love relationship.

The new model being promoted is that of a family relationship, in which God deals with sinners as parents deal with disobedient children. In an article in *Christianity Today* entitled "Evangelical Megashift: Why You May Not Have Heard About Wrath, Sin, and Hell Recently," Robert Brow, a prominent Canadian theologian, explains that "One of the most obvious features of new-model evangelicalism is an emphasis on recalling the warmth of a family relationship when

thinking about God. It prefers to picture God as three persons held together in a relationship of love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it argues, made humans in their image with a view to bringing many children to glory. So instead of being dragged trembling into a law court, we are to breathe in the atmosphere of a loving family.”

According to this new model, as Robert Brow explains, the Cross is no longer God satisfying the demands of His justice by being willing to bear through His Son the punishment of our sins, but “the inevitable cost of loving. God is love, and love always gets hurt. We can hold back from getting hurt, or we can go through Gethsemane to accept the sacrifice that is involved in loving.”¹⁵ Sins are allegedly forgiven out of the bounty of God’s loving tolerance, which elicits a loving response from the sinners’ heart. No substitutionary sacrifice for sinners is necessary.

The Limitations of the “Moral Influence” View of the Cross.

The moral influence theory is correct in affirming that the love of Christ shines through the Cross and elicits our loving response. But it is faulty in denying the substitutionary function of Christ’s death. We know that Christ loved us because He gave Himself for us. His love awakens ours. In John’s words, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). But the question is: *How* does the Cross demonstrate Christ’s Love? Did Christ suffer and die merely to show His love toward us? If that were true, it is hard to understand why Christ would choose to show love in such a cruel way.

If a person dashes into a burning building to rescue someone, that rescue is seen as a demonstration of love, because it was designed to save a life. But if a person jumps into the burning building because he wants to be burned to death, that would be a demonstration of folly, not of love. In the same way, Christ’s death on the Cross can be a demonstration of love only if He gave His life in order to rescue us. The Cross can be seen as a proof of God’s love only when it is a proof of His justice.

Christ’s death on the Cross must have an objective purpose before it can have a subjective response. Paul makes this point when he says, “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Cor 5:14; NIV). The compelling

manifestation of Christ's love rests on the costliness of the Cross. When we recognize that He died that we might live, then His love grips our hearts, compelling us to live for Him.

The drawing power and moral influence of the Cross is one important function of Christ's death, which is only valid and valuable if it is understood as the *effect* rather than the primary cause of Christ's death. Scripture emphatically states that the purpose of Christ's death was to deal directly with the objective reality of sin: "He died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3). "His blood cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Summing up, the divine revelation of love at the Cross and our human response to it is determined by the recognition that Christ died not merely to show love, but to pay the penalty of our disobedience. If Christ had sacrificed His life merely to demonstrate His love toward us, it is hard to understand why such cruel demonstration was necessary. Love is best demonstrated not by dying for someone, but rather by living for and serving that person. The Cross must be seen as a revelation of both divine love and divine justice.

To limit the value and the function of Christ's death to its moral influence upon the human heart is to attribute to natural persons the capacity to save themselves merely by responding to God's love. Such a view ignores both the depravity of human nature (Rom 3:23) and the need of salvation from sin (Rom 6:23). Salvation is through divine expiation of human sin and not merely through a divine revelation of love.

2. THE SALVATION OF SINNERS

Scripture teaches that the sufferings and death of Jesus were not merely the *revelation* of His sacrificial love to elicit our loving response, but also the *salvation* of sinners through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. When we examine how Christ accomplished the salvation of sinful people, we find that Scripture presents multifaceted images, each designed to help us understand an important aspect of Christ's redemptive accomplishments. No single image could exhaust the many aspects of the Cross.

For the sake of clarity we will consider five major word pictures of salvation which are used in Scripture to illustrate the achievements of the Cross. The first is *propitiation*, which derives from the sacrifices offered in the Temple court. The second is *redemption*, which is taken from the release of slaves in the marketplace. The third is *justification*, which comes from the acquittal of an accused person in a law court. The fourth is *reconciliation*, which is inspired by family relationships. The fifth is *intercession*, which comes from Christ's heavenly ministry. In this newsletter we consider the first two word pictures: propitiation and redemption. The remaining three will be discussed in a forthcoming newsletter.

The foundation of all of these word pictures is the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice. As John Stott rightly points out: "If God in Christ did not die in our place, there could be neither propitiation, not redemption, not justification, nor reconciliation. In addition, all the images begin their life in the Old Testament, but are elaborated and enriched in the New, particularly by being directly related to Christ and His Cross."

Christ's Death as Propitiation

The central part of Christ's sacrificial death is removal of the guilt of our sins, known as expiation or propitiation. Paul affirms that the central purpose of Christ's shedding of blood is to make "expiation" for our sins: "Whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation—KJV] by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:25). Similarly, John declares that Christ is "the expiation [propitiation—KJV] for our sins" (1 John 2:2).

The English terms "expiation," used in the RSV, or "propitiation," used in the KJV, are a translation of the Greek verb *hilaskomai* (Heb 2:17), the noun *hilasmos* (1 John 2:2; 4:10), and the adjective *hilasterion* (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). The meaning of these word pictures derives from the lid of the ark which is called *kaphar* in Hebrew (Lev 16:20) and *hilasterion* in Greek (Heb 9:5). The sin was "covered," that is, it was expiated in the Old Testament through the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy seat, which symbolized forgiveness, atonement, through the satisfaction of divine justice.

In the New Testament antitype, sin is covered through the sacrifice of Christ who satisfies divine justice. Perhaps the most important text in this regard is Romans 3:25 (KJV), where Paul says that God has set forth Christ as the *hilasterion* (mercy seat) for sinners, designed to propitiate the divine displeasure (wrath) against sin. By means of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice, the guilty person is covered in the eyes of God and the guilt is removed. The sin is dealt with so effectively that it is no longer the object of God's condemnation.

The RSV translates the *hilasterion* word group as "expiation," because the translators were uncomfortable with the notion that Christ's death "propitiated," that is, appeased or pacified, God's wrath. But the New Testament use of *hilasterion* has nothing to do with the pagan notion of "placating an angry God" or "appeasing a vindictive, arbitrary, and capricious God."¹⁷ The text of Romans 3:25 tells us that "God in His merciful will presented Christ as the propitiation to His holy wrath on human guilt because He accepted Christ as man's representative and divine Substitute to receive His judgment on sin."

God's wrath, as noted earlier, is not an irrational, capricious, emotional outburst of anger and "seeing red." Rather, it is His consistent and uncompromising reaction to the objective reality of moral evil. God's antagonism against sin is satisfied by Christ's "propitiatory sacrifice," which reconciles to God those who accept by faith His sacrifice. Expiation and propitiation are linked together, because expiation deals with sin by clearing the guilt in such a way that propitiation is effected toward God and the forgiven sinner is restored to fellowship with God.

Sacrificial Offerings. To understand the propitiatory function of Christ's sacrifice, we must consider the Old Testament sacrificial system, which typified the redemptive work of Christ (Col 2:17; Heb 9:23-24; 10:1). The animal sin offerings were designed to teach the need of vicarious atonement to expiate sin. The sin of the penitent Israelite was, by means of confession (Lev 1:4), transferred to a sacrificial animal that died in the place of the sinner. Through this process, the sin was expiated as punishment was met and God was propitiated as His displeasure terminated.

The vicarious meaning of the animal sacrifice was highlighted especially through the ritual of the blood which symbolized the atonement

through a substitutionary life: “The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life” (Lev 17:11).

This text makes three important affirmations about blood. First, *blood is the symbol of life*. For this reason God forbade the consumption of meat which still had its “lifeblood” in it (Gen 9:4; Deut 12:23). The emphasis in the sacrificial system was not on the bloody torture of the sacrificial victim, as in Gibson’s movie where the bloody body of Christ is reduced into a pulp. Instead, the focus is on the blood shed by the sacrificial victim for the penitent sinner. Simply stated, in Scripture blood stands for salvation through sacrificial death, not through the intensity of suffering portrayed in *The Passion*. The animal was not tortured before being sacrificed, because atonement for sin was accomplished by the sacrifice of the innocent victim.

Second, blood makes atonement because *the life represented by the blood is sacrificed in the place of sinner*. Thomas Crawford expresses this truth well: “The text, then, according to its plain and obvious import, teaches the *vicarious* nature of the rite of sacrifice. *Life was given for life*, the life of the victim for the life of the offerer, indeed, the life of the innocent victim for the life of the sinful offerer.”

Third, *blood was provided by God to make atonement*. God says: “I have given it to you.” The sacrificial system was God-given—not a human device to placate God, but a divine provision to save penitent sinners. The sacrifices were recognized as divine provisions, not human meritorious works. They were not intended to make God gracious, because God Himself provided them in order to be merciful toward His sinful people while at the same time meeting the demands of His justice. Salvation has always been a divine gift of grace, not a human achievement.

Atonement through Christ’s Blood. The meaning and function of blood in the sacrificial system helps us to understand two crucial text in Hebrews. The first says: “Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb 9:22). The second text says: “For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4).

These texts highlight two important truths. The first text tells us that *there is no forgiveness without blood*, because the penalty of sin has to be met by a substitutionary sacrifice. There had to be life for life. The second text explains that *the blood of animal sacrifices could not atone for human beings*, because, as Jesus Himself said, a human being has “much more value . . . than a sheep” (Matt 12:12). Only the “precious blood of Christ” was valuable enough to atone for the sins of humankind. Old Testament believers were taught through the shed blood of animal sacrifices to look forward in faith to “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

Peter reminds believers that they “were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from the 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). Hebrews explains more explicitly than any other New Testament book that Christ’s perfect sacrifice for sin on the Cross represents the fulfillment of the Old Testament substitutionary sacrifices. Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26; cf. 10:12, 14).

The Bearing of Our Sins. The substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice is also taught by those Scriptural passages which speak of our sins being “laid upon” Christ (Is 53:6; cf. 2 Cor 5:21) and of His “bearing” our sins (Is 53:12; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24). According to Scripture, our sins were imputed to Christ. This does not mean that Christ bore our sins by becoming morally guilty and affected by sin. He “knew no sin” (2 Cor 2:21). Christ bore our sins by assuming the legal obligation of our punishment. What can be transferred is not subjective moral sinfulness/guiltiness, but the objective punishment of sin. It is the latter that was imputed to Christ.

To appreciate this point, it is important to recognize that sin may be considered in terms of its nature, which is transgression (*culpa*—guilt) of the law (1 John 3:4), and in terms of its legal consequences (*poena*—punishment), which is punishment (Rom 6:23). It is only in the latter sense that Christ bore our sins vicariously by assuming our liability to punishment. Our punishment can be transferred because punishment is an objective reality which is not inherent in the person of the sinner. Christ then bore our sin by accepting the condemnation of our sins which is death (Rom

6:23); by being willing to die “the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18).

The Prepositions *Huper* and *Anti*. The substitutionary meaning of Christ’s sacrifice is also expressed in those passages which use the Greek prepositions *huper* and *anti* to describe Christ’s work *for* sinners. The preposition *huper* can mean both “in place of” and “for the benefit of.” The latter meaning is probably found in passages such as John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for [*huper*] his friends” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb 2:9).

In other passages, however, the preposition *huper* clearly means “instead of.” For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul says: “The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died *for* [*huper*] all. Therefore all have died.” Obviously, Christ’s death here is substitutionary because it would be nonsense to say that because “one has died for the benefit of all, therefore all died.” (See also Gal 3:3; John 11:50; Mark 10:45; 1 Pet 3:18; 2:22; Heb 4:15). It is only on the assumption that Christ’s death was substitutionary that Paul could have drawn the immediate inference “therefore all have died.”

The meaning of substitution is conveyed unequivocally by those passages which use the preposition *anti*, which clearly means “instead of” or “in place of.” For example, Christ said: “The son of man came to give his life a ransom *for* [*anti*—in the place of] many” (Mark 10:45; emphasis supplied; cf. Matt 2:22; 5:38; 20:28). 1 Timothy 2:6 provides an interesting example in which both *anti* and *huper* are used in the same text: “Christ Jesus . . . gave himself as a ransom [*antilutron*] for [*huper*] all.” Here the use of *anti* together with *huper* suggests that Christ’s death is a substitute ransom for the benefit of all. Thus, Scripture clearly teaches that Christ endured suffering and death not only *for the benefit of* but also *in the place of* sinners.

The substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice helps us understand Paul’s description of Christ’s death as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2; cf. Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9). “Christ’s self-sacrifice is *pleasing* to God because this sacrificial offering took away the barrier between God and sinful man in that Christ fully bore God’s wrath on man’s sin. Through Christ, God’s wrath is not turned into love but is turned away from man and borne by Himself.”

The Innocent Cannot Suffer for the Wicked. Some argue that it is illegal to make an innocent suffer for the guilty. Consequently, Christ's death cannot justly be a substitutionary sacrifice of "the righteous for the unrighteous" (1 Pet 3:18). This objection fails to recognize that it is not God imposing a vicarious punishment upon a third party, His Son, but it is God Himself willing to suffer in and through the person of His Son for sinners: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor 5:19). The Father did not impose on the Son an ordeal He was reluctant to bear, nor did the Son extract from the Father a forgiveness He was reluctant to give. "There was no unwillingness in either. On the contrary, their wills coincided in the perfect self-sacrifice of love."

It is not unjust for a judge to choose vicariously to pay the penalty for someone else's disobedience. The transference of penalty from a guilty to an innocent person is unjust in a human court because no human judge can remove the causes of disobedience by paying its penalty. However, Christ's substitutionary sacrifice not only pays the *penalty of sin*, but also breaks the *power of sin* (1 John 1:9); it not only declares the penitent sinner just (*justification*), but it also enables the sinner to become just (*sanctification*).

The Need for Repentance Excludes Substitution. Others object to the substitutionary view of Christ's death because God still expects us to confess and to repent of our sins. If Christ's sacrifice vicariously paid the penalty of our sins, then God should release us altogether from punishment without any preconditions.

This objection ignores the fact that the substitutionary payment is made not by a third party, but by God Himself. Christ is both the vicarious sacrifice and the judge (Rom 14:10). Consequently, God has the right to determine upon what basis forgiveness is to be granted. Christ's obedience does not make ours unnecessary, but possible. Thus, Christ has the right to require repentance and faith as conditions for forgiveness and salvation.

The Father Would Be Unjust in Sacrificing the Son for the Sins of Humankind. Another objection to the doctrine of vicarious atonement is that it makes God guilty of injustice because He would have sacrificed the Son to meet the demands of His own justice. This objection, like the previous one, ignores the fact that the plan of redemption was conceived

by the triune God and was not an imposition of the Father upon the Son. Christ *voluntarily* undertook to pay the human penalty for sin and to satisfy the demands of the divine justice: “I lay down my life for the sheep . . . for this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:15, 17-18).

The objection also fails to recognize that in the drama of the Cross, the Father is not the Judge punishing His Son, the innocent victim. Instead, both of Them are mysteriously united in carrying out our redemption. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). God “did not spare his own Son” (Rom 8:32). “We were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). In giving His Son, God gave Himself. God is the Judge who in the person of His Son bore the penalty which He Himself inflicted. As Robert Dale puts it, “The mysterious unity of the Father and the Son rendered possible for God at once to endure and to inflict penal suffering.”

In order to save us in a way consonant to His justice, God substituted Himself through Christ for our salvation. The self-sacrifice of God on the Cross reveals the simultaneous blending of justice and mercy. There is nothing unjust in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, because the substitute for the lawbreaker is none other than the divine Lawgiver Himself.

Moreover, Christ’s sacrifice must be viewed not only in terms of pain and suffering, but also in terms of gain and glory. It has resulted in a countless multitude of the redeemed praising Him with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Rev 5:12). Finally, if Christ’s death was not a substitutionary sacrifice, His bitter suffering and shameful death would truly be an unjust, irrational, and cruel exhibition.

Conclusion. Our discussion of the propitiatory function of Christ’s sacrifice has shown that Christ did not die to placate God’s anger and persuade Him to forgive sinners. The initiative was undertaken by God Himself who put forth His own Son to be a propitiatory sacrifice. God did not offer an animal or an object, but Himself in the person of His Son. Thus, God Himself in His loving mercy took the initiative to appease His

righteous anger by bearing it Himself in the person of His own Son who took our place and died for us. The sacrificial system clearly shows that Christ's substitutionary death paid the penalty of sin and averted God's wrath "so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated." God is both the provider and the recipient of the propitiation.

Christ's Death as Redemption

In seeking to understand the achievements of the Cross, we now move from the word picture of *propitiation* associated with the sacrifices in the Temple to that of *redemption* that comes to us from the marketplace. The term "redemption" translates the Greek *apolutrosis*, which derives from *lutron*, the "ransom" which was the "ramson," or "price of release" paid in the marketplace for the purchase or manumission of a slave.

While *propitiation* views the Cross from the perspective of divine *wrath or displeasure* satisfied by Christ's sacrifice, *redemption* sees the Cross as the *release from the bondage* to which sin has consigned us. It views the work of Christ not simply as deliverance from the bondage of sin but also in terms of the ransom price paid for our deliverance.

The meaning of redemption is clarified by Christ's words: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his love as a ransom [*lutron*] for many" (Matt 20:28; cf. Mark 10:45). In this declaration Christ explains that His mission was one of ransom—*lutron*, which is also translated "redemption." The ransom price was His life, and the payment of the ransom price was substitutionary in nature. The same idea is expressed in numerous other passages that deal with redemption.²⁴ Leon Morris warns against reducing the biblical concept of redemption to cheap deliverance. "The language of redemption is that of securing release by the payment of a price, and it is this concept that is applied expressly to the laying down of Jesus' life and the shedding of His blood. Jesus shed His blood in order to pay the price of our ransom. Redemption cannot be reduced to lower terms."

In the Old Testament, property, animals, persons, and the nation could be "redeemed" by the payment of a price. The right to redeem belonged to a "kinsman redeemer." An impoverished Israelite compelled

to sell himself into slavery could later redeem himself or be redeemed by a relative (Ex 30:12-16; 13:13; Num 3:40-51; Lev 25:47-55). In either case, the “redemption” was a costly intervention. Somebody paid the price necessary to free the person from slavery.

Israel as a nation was redeemed from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6:6; Deut 7:8; 15:15) and from exile in Babylon (Is 43:1-14; 48:20; Jer 31:11). Redemption always involved the payment of a price, and Israel’s redemption was no exception. “I am the Lord, and I will bring you from under the burden of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment” (Ex 6:6; cf. Deut 9:26; Neh 1:10).

In the New Testament, the meaning of “redemption” is expanded to include two new concepts. First, the plight of those needing redemption is moral, not material. It is a deliverance not from physical or political oppression, but from the spiritual bondage of sin. Second, the price paid for our redemption is not monetary, but is the precious blood of Jesus. “You were ransomed from your futile ways . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18).

The Scope of Redemption. The scope of Christ’s redemption through His sacrificial death includes three areas, all of which are related to our bondage to sin. First, there is deliverance from the *penalty of sin*. Paul explains that Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14).

In this text Paul describes redemption both as deliverance and purification. Deliverance from all iniquities is defined by Paul elsewhere as “the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7). In other words, Christ’s death secures our legal acquittal and penal release from our transgressions of God’s law. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). The curse of the law is the condemnation it pronounces upon transgressors (Gal 3:10).

Second, Christ’s redemption delivers believers from the *power of sin*. Through His substitutionary death, Jesus not only pays the

penalty of our sins, but also enables us through His Spirit to break the grip of sin in our lives. Christ gave Himself “to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Tit 2:14). Redemption and purification go together. “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with his word” (Eph 5:25-26).

Thomas Taylor writes: “Redemption and sanctification are inseparable companions; none is redeemed who is not purged. The blood of Christ has this double effect in whomever it is effectual to salvation; for he is made to us righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor 1:30).”

Third, Christ’s redemption reassures us of the *final consummation* to be realized at Christ’s glorious coming. That is the “day of redemption” (Eph 4:30) when we will be made perfect. This includes “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23) from sin, sickness, and death. Only then will Christ complete the redemption of the human and subhuman creation from sin, sorrow, and death. This shows how closely related is the present redemption accomplished by Jesus on the Cross to the final consummation of redemption that will take place on the glorious day of His Coming.