

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 164**

**“The Centrality of the Cross”**

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You may be wondering how do I chose the topic for a

newsletters? The answer is found in different circumstances that alert me to the relevance of a topic. Sometimes I get the clue from email messages, which express concerns about issues debated by some Adventists. This was especially true of ongoing debate over the Trinity that led me to post 4 newsletters by different Adventist scholars. (See Newsletters Ns. 147, 148, 149, and 150).

Sometimes I read a perceptive article which I feel would benefit our readers. This was the case with the newsletter No. 162 “A Fresh Look at the Creation/Evolution Debate” by Allen Shepherd, M. D., Physician and Pastor. I found his article in the Adventist magazine *Perspective Digest* and immediately I asked Dr. Shepherd for permission to post it in our newsletter.

Sometimes is the rush of natural disasters like Tsunami and Katrina, that caused me to seek for answers to such troubling questions: Why is God allowing such a chain of disasters to occur in such a rapid succession? How can a benevolent God allow earthquakes and hurricanes to kill thousands of people and destroy entire towns and villages? Are these disaster senseless, freaks of nature or do they convey a message from God to mankind through the fearful scenes that have captured the attention of the entire world? You will find a discussion of these question in newsletter No. 138.

Sometimes is the continuous media coverage of a major crisis of our times such as “Islam and Terrorism.” This crisis caused me to investigate first the teachings of the Koran on the use of violence to advance Islam and then the possible prophetic role of Islam as an Antichrist power that persecutes God’s people and promotes false worship. The findings of my research were posted in

newsletters 84, 85, and 86. The demand of newsletter No. 86 on “Islam in Prophecy” continues unabated.

The circumstances that led me to post this newsletter on “The Centrality of the Cross,” are almost embarrassing. The inspiration came from the mistake that I made when I asked the printer to reprint twice the same book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. When I asked the printer to reprint *The Passion of Christ* for the second time, I forgot that he had already delivered me the reprint two weeks earlier.

If forgetfulness is a sign of old age, then it is evident that I am getting old. In fact this coming Sabbath, January 27, 2007 our extended family will all come home to celebrate “Nonno=Grandfather” 69th birthday. Other relatives will join us for the celebration. My wife has been cooking much of this week for this event. How nice it would be if I could invite you to enjoy some tasty (*delizioso*) Italian food.

When I became aware of the mistake that I made, I was reminded of Romans 8:28: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.” The more I thought and prayed about how to deal with my mistake, the deeper the conviction developed within my heart, that perhaps this was a providential mistake. Perhaps the Lord is telling me that the message of this timely book needs to reach many people around the world. To achieve this goal I have decided to offer *The Passion of Christ* as an outreach witnessing book at a bargain price. Before telling you about the bargain price, let me introduce you to the content of the book.

## **What is Special about *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History?***

The book *The Passion of Christ* first came off the press on November 2004 largely as a response to Gibson's movie on *The Passion of the Christ*. The first printing of 5000 copies was sold out in a matter of a few weeks, largely as a result of a two hours interview on 3ABN. In the interview I shared the highlights of the book, focusing especially on the major differences between the Catholic and the Adventist view of Christ's suffering and death.

The response to the 3ABN interview was overwhelming. For the next three weeks the telephone kept on ringing as viewers from different parts of the world were calling to order a copy of the book. At this time we have decided to offer you not only the book at a bargain price but also the 3ABN DVD album with the two hours interview FREE OF CHARGE. The details will be given shortly.

The book has two objectives. The first is to expose the unbiblical teachings found in Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. The movie is largely drawn from Catholic legends and mystical literature that grossly distorts the biblical view of the nature and meaning of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Gibson has produced a strict Catholic film with a distinctive Catholic message derived from Catholic legends and superstitious beliefs. For example, Mary is portrayed as a co-sufferer with her Son at the 14 Stations of the Cross in order to justify her role as a co-redeemer.

In accordance with Catholic teachings, in the movie Christ is brutally and relentlessly tortured from the time of His arrest until His death, in order to satisfy the demands of divine justice. In other

words, for Catholics, Christ had to suffer the punishment for all the sins ever committed by mankind in order to satisfy the demands of divine justice. Is this what the Bible teaches? Are we saved by the intensity of Christ's suffering or by His perfect life, sacrifice, and intercession for our salvation? This important question is discussed at length in the book *The Passion of Christ*.

### **The Subjective and Objective Aspects of the Cross**

The second objective is to investigate the biblical teachings regarding the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross. The study shows that the Cross has both a *subjective* and an *objective* dimension. *Subjectively*, through the Cross God reveals the depth of His love in being willing to offer His Son for undeserving sinners.

*Objectively*, the Cross reveals how God dealt with the objective reality of sin, not by minimizing its gravity, but by revealing its costliness in assuming its penalty. God did not cause His Son to suffer the harsh punishment portrayed in Gibson's movie to meet the demands of His own justice, but was willing through His Son to become flesh and suffer the punishment of our sins in order to redeem us without compromising His own character.

To understand the achievements of the Cross, I have examined in their socio-historical content the following five word pictures: *propitiation*, *redemption*, *justification*, *reconciliation*, and *intercession*. These word pictures take us from the sacrifices in the Temple court (*propitiation*), to the price paid for the manumission of the slaves in the marketplace (*redemption*), to a law court where a judge pronounces an accused person "not guilty" (*justification*), to

the renewal of relationships with family and friends (*reconciliation*), to Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (*intercession*). These word pictures represent partial attempts to capture glimpses of the significance and value of Christ's death for our present life and future destiny.

### **An Ideal Book for Witnessing Outreach**

*The Passion of Christ* is an ideal book for witnessing, because on the one hand it helps people to understand the prevailing misconceptions regarding Christ's suffering and death, and on the other hand it leads people to appreciate the unique, biblical Adventist view of the suffering, death, and heavenly intercession of Christ.

Since the proof is in the pudding, I decided to offer you a taste of *The Passion of Christ* by posting in three newsletters excerpts from chapter 4 where I deal with "The Cross of Christ." The chapter is divided in the following three major parts:

1. The Centrality of the Cross
2. The Necessity of the Cross
3. The Achievements of the Cross

Each part will be posted on a separate newsletter. Judge for yourself the value of this Bible Study on the Cross of Christ. If you feel that this study is greatly enriching your understanding and appreciation of Christ's suffering, death, and intercession for our salvation, then you may wish to hasten to order copies of *The Passion of Christ* for yourself and for witnessing to your friends. You can view the attractive cover of the book and read its

description, by clicking at this link:  
<http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/PassionOffer>

### **Special Offer on the Book *The Passion of Christ***

To facilitate a large distribution of the book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*, we are offering for the next 30 days until February 28, 2007, the book at a special “witnessing outreach” price. With the purchase of two or more copies of the book, you will also receive a FREE 3ABN DVD album with my interview on *The Passion of Christ*. The album regularly sells for \$50.00.

**This is the special offer for quantity orders of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.**

**1 copy** of the book for **\$25.00**, postage paid.

No free 3ABN DVD album included.

**2 copies** of the book for **\$40.00**, postage paid. (\$20.00 each).

Plus ONE free 3ABN DVD album included.

**5 copies** of the book for **\$50.00**, postage paid. (\$10.00 each).

Plus ONE free 3ABN DVD album is included.

**20 copies** of the book for **\$100.00**, postage paid. (\$5.00 each).

Plus TWO free 3ABN DVD albums are included.

**50 copies** of the book for **\$150.00**, postage paid. (\$3.00 each).

Plus THREE free 3ABN DVD albums are included.

### **Four Ways to Order *The Passion of Christ***

**(1) Online:** By clicking here:  
<http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/PassionOffer>

**(2) Phone:** By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your

credit card number and postal address.

(3) **Email:** By emailing your order to [<sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com). Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

(4) **Regular Mail:** By mailing a check to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

### **BENEDICT XVI CLAIMS THAT CHRIST ESTABLISHED SUNDAY OBSERVANCE**

Both the late Pope John Paul II and the current Pope Benedict XVI have made determined efforts to defend Sunday as a biblical and apostolic institutions. In my book *The Sabbath Under Crossfire* I devoted the first chapter to an analysis of John Paul II's Pastoral Letter "*Dies Domini—The Lord's Day.*" In his Letter John Paul makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sundaykeeping by appealing to the moral imperative of the Sabbath commandment to justify Sunday observance. He calls upon the international community of nations to promulgate civil legislation to protect its observance.

Benedict XVI is following the footsteps of John Paul II by making the participation in the Sunday Eucharist the keystone of his program for Catholic renewal. The emphasis of his homilies has been on the need of Christians to be nourished every Sunday by the Eucharistic Bread which contains the body and blood of Christ. "Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week."

From a Catholic perspective Christians draw their strength primarily, not from the Sunday proclamation of the Word or from the daily study of the Bible, but from the partaking of the Eucharistic Bread which at the priestly consecration becomes the very body and blood of Jesus. The study of the Bible is still largely unknown to Catholics. The essence of Catholic Sunday worship is a *physical reception of the sacraments*. Catholics worship what they can see, touch, and eat. This attempt to objectify the sacred into something that can be manipulated, is at the root of every idolatrous religions.

Our immediate concern is not to discuss the idolatrous nature of Catholic worship (which I may address in a future newsletter), but rather to respond to Benedict XVI's attempts to promote Sunday as an apostolic institution. In a recent letter (January 9, 2007) addressed to Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, Benedict XVI commends the plans of the congress "to examine in depth the theme: 'Sunday Mass for the sanctification of the Christian People.'"

To give biblical sanction to the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, Benedict XVI states: "Sunday was not chosen by the Christian community but by the Apostles, and *indeed by Christ himself*, who on that day, "the first day of the week", rose and appeared to the disciples (cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16: 9; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; I Cor 16: 2), and appeared to them again "eight days later" (Jn 20:26)." (Emphasis supplied).

### **Evaluation of the Resurrection**

In the Pope's view, Christ established Sunday observance by resurrecting on the first day of the week and then appearing to the disciples "eight days later." Numerous Catholic and Protestant Scholars share the same view. In spite of its popularity, the alleged role of the Resurrection in the adoption of Sunday observance lacks biblical and historical support. A careful study of all the references to the Resurrection, reveals the incomparable importance of the event, but it does not provide any indication regarding a special weekly or annual day to commemorate it.

The New Testament attributes no liturgical significance to the day of Christ's Resurrection simply because the Resurrection was seen as an *existential reality* experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a *liturgical practice* associated with Sunday worship. The very designation "Day of the Resurrection" is absent in the New Testament, obviously because the first day of the week on which Christ arose, was not viewed or observed as the memorial of the Resurrection.

Had Jesus wanted to memorialize the day of His Resurrection, He would have capitalized on that day to make it the fitting memorial of that event. When He appeared to the women first and to the disciples later, He would have invited them to come apart and celebrate His resurrection. But none of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize the day of His Resurrection by making it the new Christian day of rest and worship. Biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But there is no such divine act for the institution of a weekly Sunday or an annual Easter Sunday memorial of the Resurrection.

The silence of the New Testament on this matter is very important since most of its books were written many years after Christ's death and Resurrection. If by the latter half of the first century Sunday had come to be viewed as the memorial of the Resurrection, as the Pope claims, we would expect to find in the New Testament some allusions to the religious meaning and observance of the weekly Sunday and/or annual Easter-Sunday.

### **Easter-Sunday Introduced by the Bishop of Rome**

There are no references in the New Testament even to Easter-Sunday. In fact, when the Bishop of Rome introduced and promoted Easter-Sunday in the second century, he stirred up the so-called "Quartodeciman Controversy—Fourteenth Controversy," because many Christians refused to accept Easter-Sunday. They insisted on observing Passover according to the biblical date of Nisan 14, thus rejecting the Easter-Sunday celebration demanded by the Pope.

The total absence of any allusion in the NT to a weekly-Sunday or annual Easter-Sunday celebration of the resurrection, indicates that such developments occurred in the post-apostolic period as a result of an interplay of political, social, and religious factors. These factors are examined at length in my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*.

Prof. Vincenzo Monachino, S. J., who directed my dissertation, had no problems in acknowledging the possible post-apostolic origin of Sunday. In the PREFACE to my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, he wrote: "We gladly mention the thesis that Bacchiocchi defends regarding the birth-place of Sunday

worship: for him this arose most probably, not in the primitive Church of Jerusalem, well-known for its profound attachment to Jewish religious traditions, but rather in the Church of Rome. The abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday as the Lord's Day, are the result of an interplay of Christian, Jewish, and pagan factors" (pp. 7-8). These factors are examined at length in my dissertation.

## **BACCHIOCCHI RESPONDS TO FALSE ALLEGATIONS**

It is evident that the findings of my investigation into the origin of Sunday are not popular with current Catholic authorities who are determined to promote Sunday observance as a biblical, apostolic institution. This may explain the recent attempt of the General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University to attack my moral integrity and to discredit my scholarly credibility. In an official document the General Secretary accuses me of having falsely claimed to have received the *summa cum laude* academic distinction, the gold medal donated by Pope Paul VI, and the *imprimatur* for the abridged and unabridged versions of my dissertation.

During the past three months I worked diligently to prepare an official response to these false allegations made against me. I shared my documented response in the Newsletters No. 159 and 160. If you missed these newsletter, you can read my official response by clicking at this link <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Gregoriana1>

On January 3, 2007 I sent by registered airmail my official documented response to the Rector (President) and to the General

Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University. On January 23 I called the office of the Rector to find out if the documents had been received. The response was that no documents had been delivered to the Rector's Office. Without delay, I printed another set of documents and this time I sent them UPS express. The trucking Number 4686 0863 232 indicated that they were delivered Friday morning, January 26, at 10:22 a. m. This is the official UPS report:

Tracking Number: 4686 0863 232

Type: Package

Status: Delivered

Delivered on: 01/26/2007 - 10:22 A.M.

Delivered to: IT

Signed by: DI CARE

Service Type: EXPRESS

From the delivery date of January 26, 2007, a period of 60 days is granted to examine my documented response of 46 pages. If no reply is received within 60 days, I will explore my options with legal counsel. I will keep you updated on future developments.

If you are interested to read my documented response sent to the Rector and General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University, just click this link:

<http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/Gregoriana1>

### **EDWARD READ'S INACCURATE STATEMENT ON 3ABN**

An Australian non-SDA minister just emailed me a message (January 26, 2007), asking me to explain an inaccurate statement made on 3ABN by Pastor Edward Reid, Stewardship Secretary for

the North American Division and author of *Sunday's Coming*. The 3ABN interview that was aired in Sydney, Australia between 6 to 8 p. m., on January 26, 2007.

The Australian minister writes: “Pastor Reid explicitly said that Martin Luther knew that the Sabbath was still Saturday. Pastor Reid said, ‘I suppose that many of the viewers would be asking the question that if Martin Luther knew that the Sabbath was Saturday and not Sunday, then why didn’t he start keeping the 7th-day Sabbath in line with the Bible?’ He answered and said that Luther had been championing salvation by grace and so not to contradict his position on grace he decided that although the Bible still advocates Saturday that he did not want to confuse the issue with Grace.”

Pastor Reid encouraged the viewers to go to GOOGLE and read article 28 of the *Augsburg Confession*, an official document of the Lutheran Church. This is exactly what the Australian minister did. He read article 28 of the *Augsburg Confession*, but he found that Luther did not believe that “the Bible still advocates Saturday .” On the contrary, Luther taught that “Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day.”

The minister quotes a lengthy section of article 28 which clearly indicates that Luther believed that the Sabbath had been abrogated with the rest of the Jewish ceremonies by the coming of Christ. The most relevant statement reads: “For those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord’s Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary, do greatly err. *Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day*; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of

Moses can be omitted.” (Emphasis supplied).

In his reaction against those who were promoting seventh-day Sabbathkeeping, Luther several times attacked the Sabbath as a Jewish ceremonial institution nailed to the Cross. He even wrote a booklet against the Sabbath in 1529. Adventist scholars have dealt with this question. See, for example, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* pp. 215-218, published by the Review and Herald in 1982.

In the light of these historical facts, the Australian minister asks me to explain how Edward Reid could say on 3ABN that Luther believed that “the Bible still advocates Saturday.” He writes: “This program was aired worldwide and if I am correct in my understanding Luther’s teachings on the Sabbath, then Pastor Reid has done the SDA church a great disservice by making that statement.”

There is no question that inaccurate statements made by church leaders on a TV program aired worldwide, do a disservice to our Adventist church. But we must remember that whatever pastors or church administrators say on historical or theological matters, reflected their limited study of the subject. Their busy schedule hardly allows them to do a thorough investigation. Consequently they often end up sharing their *feelings* rather than their *findings*. Let us be forgiving of their mistakes. It would be wise, however, to avoid airing gross mistakes to a worldwide audience. Ultimately these mistakes undermine the credibility of our Adventist Church.

**A NEW TOWNHOME COMMUNITY NEAR TO THE  
CAMPUS OF ANDREWS UNIVERSITY**

If you are planning to move to Andrews University, you will be pleased to learn about a new Townhome Community being developed less than a mile away from the campus of Andrews University.

For a description and a picture of the Townhome Units, click at this link: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/danny>

### **A CHANGE FROM VALUE WEB TO TAGNET**

Due to the constant problems I was having with VALUE WEB, I have moved my website, shopping cart, and internet service to TAGNET, which is the largest Adventist networking service.

Hopefully now there will be fewer interruption of service. Truly I can say that the technicians of TAGNET have been most helpful. If you are looking for a web-hosting company or internet service, I would recommend you to contact TAGNET. You can visit their website at <http://www.netadventist.org> or <http://home.tagnet.org/> You may also call their office 800 - 9TAGNET. They are ready and eager to help you.

**ALL THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF WEEKEND SEMINARS AND THE SPECIAL HOLIDAY OFFERS ARE PLACED AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER.**

**“The Centrality of the Cross”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.**

**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History**

**Andrews University**

A question that has troubled thinking Christians over the

centuries is: Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer and die to pay the penalty of our sins? Can the guilt of a sinner be legitimately transferred and expiated by an innocent person?

Since the release of Mel Gibson's movie in 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*, thousands of articles and books on the meaning of Christ's sufferings and death have been published or posted on websites. The movie has inspired both professional Bible scholars and lay Bible students to take a fresh look at the meaning of the Cross of Christ for twenty-first-century Christians.

A fundamental question many are asking is, Did Christ need to be brutally tortured from the time of His arrest until His death—as portrayed in Gibson's movie—in order to satisfy the demands of a punitive God? According to the Catholic "Satisfaction View of the Atonement," Christ had to suffer the punishment of all the sins ever committed by mankind in order to satisfy the demands of divine justice? Is this what the Bible teaches? Are we saved by the intensity of Christ's suffering or by His perfect life and sacrifice for our salvation? These are important questions that we wish to examine.

### **The Presence of Sin and the Need for a Savior are Largely Dismissed Today**

The question of Christ's suffering and death to pay the penalty of mankind's sins, is especially relevant today when the presence of sin and the need for a Savior are largely dismissed as outmoded concepts. No psychology textbooks ever mention "sin" or "divine grace" as factors influencing human behavior.

Our humanistic society has reached the point where social customs have displaced the law of God, social mores have replaced biblical morals, moral relativism has substituted biblical moral absolutes, and belief in human progress has taken the place of faith in divine redemption.

Throughout its history the Christian church has taught that our fundamental human problem is sin and that the Cross of Christ provides the only hope to solve the sin problem. Today, however, the concept of “sin” is regarded by many as an outmoded holdover from the days of simplistic religious beliefs.

Sin implies some form of disobedience against an absolute moral law that governs the relationship between human beings and God. However, many people today question the existence of such a relationship. By accepting Darwinistic teachings regarding the accidental and materialistic human nature, many no longer see the need for believing in an absolute moral law that governs our relationship with God and fellow beings.

### **The Persistent Awareness of the Reality of Sin**

The problem with the materialistic evolutionary view of human nature is that it has *not* succeeded in eliminating the awareness that there is something transcendent about our human nature—a reality that transcends our physical bodies. We recognize that there is within ourselves a moral nature that expresses itself through our conscience. We know when we say or do things which are wrong or when others do wrong things.

Despite the contemporary dismissal of the reality of sin, guilt

remains a constant reality in the human psyche. Psychologist Karl Menninger writes: “I believe there is a general sentiment that sin is still with us, by us, and in us—somewhere. We are made vaguely uneasy by this consciousness, this persistent sense of guilt, and we try to relieve it in various ways. We project the blame on others, we ascribe the responsibility to a group, we offer up scapegoat sacrifices, we perform or partake in dumb-show rituals of penitence and atonement. There is rarely a *peccavi* [a confession: I have sinned], but there is a feeling.”

This is a phenomenon of our times. Many live under the burden of guilt, fully aware that they have acted against the moral directives of their conscience, yet they dismiss the notion of sin and of the existence of a moral law that stands outside them and above them. They try all sorts of ways to rid themselves of guilty feelings, only to recognize that human remedies do not work. The reason we cannot clear our consciences of guilty feelings is because, as Paul explains, the principles of God’s law are written in the human heart (Rom 2:15).

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.

### **The Objectives of this Bible Study**

This Bible Study investigates the reasons for Christ’s death,

its achievements, and its benefits for our life today. Unfortunately, Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* makes no attempt to explain if or why Christ had to be brutally tortured unto death for our redemption. The result is that some are led to believe that God is a punitive Being determined to inflict punishment for every sin ever committed. He is to be feared rather than to be loved.

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 problem is that the Bible does not give us a systematic explanation of the meaning of Christ's sacrificial death. Trying to piece the scattered references to Christ's death into one coherent and meaningful explanation, is like attempting to assemble a puzzle without the picture of the puzzle on the cover of the box. We shall attempt to develop an accurate picture of the scope of Christ's death by taking into consideration the relevant biblical references.

For the sake of clarity, I have divided this study into the following three major parts:

1. The Centrality of the Cross
2. The Necessity of the Cross
3. The Achievements of the Cross

Each of these parts will be posted in a separate newsletter. This will reduce considerably the length of each newsletter, to the relief of those who complain about the excessive length of the newsletters.

## **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 Swastica 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. In the newsletter No. 124 entitled "Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol," I have shown that the primitive 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). The reason is that by associating their faith in Christ with the Cross—the shameful symbol of execution of common criminals—they would expose themselves to the wild accusation of worshipping a criminal.

Thus, 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 Catholic crucifix with Christ’s contorted body attached to it “does not appear to have been used before the sixth century.” It represents an evolution from a plain Cross representing one’s belief in salvation through Christ’s sacrificial death, into an elaborate Crucifix venerated as an object of idolatrous worship.

## **Why the Early Christians Chose the Cross to Represent their Faith?**

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.

## **Should the Cross be Reclaimed?**

It is unfortunate that during the history of Christianity, the Cross has been used in contradictory ways from the sign of redemption, to an ornament to decorate tombs, monuments, churches, or bodies, to an object of idolatrous worship, to a magical relic to protect people from sickness and temptation, and to a sword to slaughter the infidels. During the Crusades, the Cross emblazoned on the tunic of each crusader, became a clarion call to murder the Jews at home and the Moslem in the Holy Land.

It is not surprising that Christians are divided over the use of the Cross. Some venerate the Cross as an object of worship or magic relic, while others (especially Seventh-day Adventists and some Calvinistic churches) reject it as a sign of idolatry and of past atrocities.

In her insightful article “The Cross: Should a Symbol Betrayed Be Reclaimed?” Mary Boys briefly traces the paradoxical history of the Cross. She argues that the Cross is a symbol that has been betrayed and needs to be reclaimed. During the Crusades the Cross was used as a weapon to kill infidels, rather than as an anchor to bring hope to lost sinners. She proposes that “It is now time to ask whether the cross itself can be redeemed.”

Boys concludes her article saying: “Like all symbols, the Cross evokes more than one can explain. It condenses death and life into one symbol. It enfolds some of the deepest fears of humanity—vulnerability, betrayal, pain, forsakenness—and transfigures them into expressions of hope. When Christians proclaim the power of the Cross, they are voicing their confidence that death is not the end, that the grip of evil has been broken, and that the powers and

principalities who seem to control this world will be banished. When Christians proclaim the power of the cross, they are declaring, albeit often with tremulous voice, that at times one must simply endure suffering, that certain things in life must be borne. And they are declaring that in the passion of Jesus we find a model for our fidelity.”

But, she continues noting that because the Cross has been abused, “it is not a symbol that can be reappropriated without repentance. The story I have traced serves to remind Christians of their betrayal of Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth, and their defilement of the symbol of His suffering. Too often have Christians become, in Paul’s words, ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Phil 3:18).

She closes, saying: “Just as a church building that has been profaned by a violent or blasphemous deed needs rededication, so too, the symbol the church carries must be purified by its people’s repentance. Only then can the cross embody the power of reconciliation for which Jesus lived and died.”

### **Should Adventists Object to the Use of the Cross?**

Boyd’s appeal to reclaim the Cross, by repenting for its abuse, is a timely message for all Christians to heed, especially Seventh-day Adventists. The many critical comments that I received to my newsletter No. 122, “Should Adventists Object to the Use of the Cross?,” suggest that even our Seventh-day Adventist church needs to reclaim the legitimate meaning and use of the Cross.

Historically Adventists have objected to the use of the Cross outside and inside their church buildings. Until recent times most

Adventist churches placed on the top of their church spires what looks like a lightning rod. The absence of a Cross on Adventist church building has led critical onlookers to conclude that Adventists must belong to some strange sectarian non-Christian movement.

The Adventist position has largely been influenced by two major books that argue for the pagan origin of the Christian Cross. The two books are *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop and *Babylon Mystery Religion* by Ralph Woodrow. An Adventist wrote: “Alexander Hislop’s, *The Two Babylons*, clearly proves that the cross was the sign of the false messiah, Tamuz. I was surprised that your scholarship on this subject did not extend that far back into history.”

The fact is that my scholarship extends beyond the Babylonian god Tamuz into the dawn of civilization. Crosses of all sizes and shapes have been used during human history as ornaments, religious symbols, representations of the four points of the compass, the four winds, the cross-like corona of the sun during an eclipse, and even the unity between the male phallus (vertical bar) and the female vagina (horizontal bar).

What my critics ignore is that none of the pagan crosses relate to the meaning and message of the Christian Cross. None of them were used to represent salvation through the sacrificial death of a god. Building an argument from external similarities while ignoring the internal differences of meaning and function, is an unsound method of research. It is like arguing that Italian spaghetti derive from Chinese noodles because they look the same.

It is a well-known and established fact that crosses of all sizes and shapes have been used since the dawn of civilization. But the origin and meaning of the Christian Cross, derives, not from its pagan usages, but from the Christian's desire to find an appropriate visible symbol to represent their faith.

The early Christians chose the symbol of the Cross to express their faith in redemption through Christ's sacrificial death, not because of pagan influences, but in spite of the scorn and taunt of the pagans for using such a shameful sign.

Unfortunately, what began as a legitimate symbol, it was gradually prostituted into an 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 legitimate beginnings. The reasons for this conclusion are submitted in this study.

### **Evolution of the Adventist Attitude Toward the Cross**

The Adventist attitude toward the Cross 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 black 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 in the facade. To my knowledge nobody has

complained about these impressive Crosses, nor about the large Passion Play Crosses which have become a permanent fixture of our beautiful campus.

The gradual acceptance of the Cross by Adventist churches, has been influenced mostly by conformity to religious trends, rather than by a fresh reexamination of its historical origin and of its biblical legitimacy. It is unfortunate that some Adventists have been misled to believe that the Cross is a pagan symbol, which should not be used in the external design or internal symbols of Adventist churches. The fact is that, contrary to the Christmas tree, which was a pagan symbol used to celebrate the birth of the Sun-god, the Cross was never used by pagans to worship their gods. After this digression on the origin and use of the Cross, let us continue our Bible Study on the centrality of the Cross.

### **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."

### **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).

## **Christ as the Sacrificial Lamb in Revelation**

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.

In the next newsletter we plan to move from the centrality to the necessity of the Cross. Some of the questions we plan to address are: Did 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 will be addressed in the next newsletter.

### **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of January and February 2007. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

#### **JANUARY 5-6: ROCHESTER SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1100 37th Street NW, Rochester, Minnesota 55901.

For information call Pastor Stanley Wilkinson at (507) 289-6550 or (507) 261-5140.

#### **JANUARY 12-13: KITCHENER-WATERLOO SDA CHURCH**

Location: 235 Williamsburg, Kitchener, ON N2E 1K8, Canada.

For information call Pastor Jiwan Moon at 519-893-6818

#### **JANUARY 19-20: ST. LOUIS: NORTHSIDE SDA CHURCH**

Location: 9001 Lucas-Hunt Drive, St. Louis, MO 63136

For information call Pastor Eddie Polite at (314) 868-0707 or (314) 226-3186

**FEBRUARY 2-3: COLUMBIA FIRST SDA CHURCH**

Location: 243 Riverchase Way, Lexington, South Carolina 29072

For information call Pastor Dean Carlisle at (803) 356-6769 or (803) 791-1135

**FEBRUARY 9-10;: DENVER: ARVADA SDA CHURCH**

Location: 7090 West 64th Avenue, Arvada, Colorado 80003

For information call Pastor Gordon Anic at (303) 437-6636.

**FEBRUARY 16-17: ENGLAND: EDMONTON SDA CHURCH**

Location: The Friday evening service will be held at the Edmonton SDA Church located at 11 Cuckoo Hall Lane, Edmonton, London N9 8SD. On Saturday the services will be held at St. Peter's Church Hall, Bounces Road, Edmonton, London N98LE.

**FEBRUARY 23-24: LONDON: PLUMSTEAD SDA CHURCH**

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