

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 167

“The Achievements of the Cross - Part 2”

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UPDATE ON MY MEDICAL CONDITION

In the last newsletter I reported on the three hours surgery that took place on Tuesday afternoon, February 20, 2007, to remove both my colon cancer and gallbladder. Some of you had a good laugh reading my misspelling “**gold** bladder.” Somebody joked that I must be poorer now that the **gold stones** have been removed from my bladder. (Please laugh!)

The surgery has been very successful and the recovery is proceeding faster than anticipated with no complications. Frankly, I feel great and were it not for the presence of cancer in the liver, I would be ready to resume my itinerant ministry immediately.

Both the Cat Scan and a biopsy of the liver at the time of the surgery, clearly reveal the presence of cancerous cells widespread in my liver. This means that by God’s grace I won the first battle with colon cancer, but I have yet another battle to fight with liver cancer. With divine I look forward to declare victory.

This battle against liver cancer will be a tough, because the cancer is widespread in the liver. My strategy is to attack the cancer in the liver using three methods: 1) faith in divine healing, 2) the latest conventional remedies, and 3) natural products that can boost my immune system. Our daughter Loretta, a Professor of Nursing at the Florida School of Nursing, has laid out a plan to boost my immune system with diet and supplementary products.

The Search for a Cancer Treatment Center

During the past three weeks I spent a considerable time looking for a reputable cancer treatment center. I sent a package with the results of my tests, including the CD with the Cat Scan, to half a dozen cancer centers in Chicago, Kalamazoo, and Goshen, Indiana.

This past week we had two consultations, the first with an oncologist at a Cancer Treatment Center in Kalamazoo and the second with an oncologist at the Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, Indiana. I must confess that this has been an emotional roller coaster experience. Let me explain why.

The oncologist in Kalamazoo told my wife and I in frightening terms that my liver cancer was stage 4, that is, the worse stage, that allows a patient to live only for a short time. Chemotherapy was the only treatment that could contain the spread of cancer, but offer little hope of cancer total removal.

When we asked him if another Cat Scan could be taken before starting the treatment to see if the natural anti-cancer product I am taking now, have reduced the presence of cancer, he said that it would be a waste of time and money. In fact he warned us to stop using any natural anti-cancer product when the chemotherapy treatment would start.

His blunt directives, which ignored other possible conventional and unconventional treatments, reminded me of those old time professors who have lectured from the same set of old yellow notes for the past 30 years. They are too lazy or too self-confident to upgrade themselves.

The impact of the consultation was evident on my wife, Anna, face, which turned very sad. In fact on our ride home we were both pretty silent. We were only hoping that the next day consultation at the Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, Indiana, would be more hopeful.

The Consultation at the Center for Cancer Care

I learned about the Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, Indiana, from an email message I received from Vladimir Radivojevic, a Sev-

enth-day Adventist who serves as Vice-President of this medical institution. He subscribes to our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER and he wrote to reassure me of his prayers for my recovery.

When I noticed in his salutation that he was the Vice-President of the Center for Cancer Care in Goshen, I called him to find out what his center had to offer. He reassured me that his center is staffed by leading specialists and has the latest equipment for the treatment of cancer all under one roof.

We set up an appointment for Wednesday, March 7 for a consultation with Dr. Seza Gulec, who is a Nuclear Oncologist and a pioneer in what is called microsphere embolization. The consultation lasted about two hours and we came out of the meeting with renewed courage and hope. My wife was smiling again.

During the two hours consultation, Dr. Gulec showed us with powerpoint pictures projected on a screen, first the condition of my liver and then similar cases he had treated with liver cancer worse than mine. He explained to us how he plans to attack the cancer cells in my liver with a combined strategy of chemotherapy and microsphere embolization. He showed us with pictures how this would work. Half way through his presentation I told Dr. Gulec: "You have made me a believer of your strategy. There is no need for us to take more of his precious time. I am ready to set up the appointment."

My wife and I wish to thank God for leading to this Center for Cancer Care, which is less than one hour away from our home. What we appreciate about this Center is their holistic approach. While in Kalamazoo we were told to stop the use of natural anti-cancer products at the time of the chemotherapy treatment, at the Center they arranged for an interview with a Naturopathic specialist who is a member of the Cancer treatment team. The lady approved the products that I am taking and prescribed three additional ones boost my immune system and help in the reproduction of good cell.

The treatment will start in two weeks, March 26, and will continue for about two months, with a procedure every two weeks. After two months another Cat Scan will be taken to see how the cancer has shrunk

in the liver. At that time the doctors will decide if additional treatments are necessary. I will be sure to keep you updated about the results of the treatments. We claim the promise in our prayers that “ He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

For the next two months I may not be able to meet my speaking engagements. I am waiting to see how the chemo-microsphere treatment will affect me. It may wise for me to reschedule my seminars for later this year. Regaining full health and strength is a priority at this time.

The countless messages we have received from fellow believers in different parts of the world, have been of great encouragement to us. We have been forcefully reminded that we belong to a caring family of faith, ready to pray and support anyone who hurts. Please keep me still in your prayers as my battle with cancer is not over yet. May the Lord grant me a few more years to live and serve Him. Thank you for your prayers.

THE GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY RESPONDS TO FALSE ALLEGATIONS

Those who have read my 50 pages response to the false allegations made against me by the General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University, will be pleased to learn that finally I did receive an official and gracious letter dated February 23, 2007, from Gianfranco Ghirlanda, the Rector (President) of the Pontifical Gregorian University.

The letter is written in a cordial, irenic tone. In a masterful way, Rector Ghirlanda apologizes for some of the incorrect statements made by the General Secretary of the Gregoriana in a letter dated June 11, 2004, but on the other hand he defends the accuracy of some other statements.

Regarding the false allegation that I never received *summa cum laude* and the Pope’s Gold Medal, Rector Ghirlanda explains that the General Secretary meant that I did not receive these awards for the doctoral degree. He writes: “In her letter to Bishop Murray (of Kalamazoo), Dr. Bergami does not say that you *never* received a *summa cum laude* or a gold medal of Pope Paul VI, in as much as the letter was limited to the

doctorate as its immediate object.” He goes on admitting that “In fact, you received the *summa cum laude* for the *Licentiate*, having earned the overall grade of 9.6, and for that distinction you received the gold medal with the figure of Pope Paul VI.”

I appreciate Rector Ghirlanda’s attempts to limit the statements of the General Secretary, Dr. Barbara Bergami, to the doctoral degree, but this is not the way her statements have been understood by the thousand of websites that defame me for falsely claiming to have received *summa cum laude* and a gold medal of Pope Paul VI.

Dr. Bergami simply wrote: “He did not receive *summa* from the Gregorian as he maintains.” This broad statement without qualification, suggests that my academic performance was not very good. This is confirmed by the “priest investigator” who wrote: “He never received a *summa cum laude*. . . . Also, FYI, his grades were not very good here.” Obviously this allegation is false, since I received 9.4 for the *Baccalareatus* which qualified me for the *magna cum laude* and a silver medal, 9.6 for the *Licentia* which qualified me for the *summa cum laude* and a gold medal, and 9.2 for the *doctoratus* which qualified me for the *magna cum laude*.

The reason I failed to explain that I received the *summa cum laude* and the gold medal for the *Licentia*, is twofold. First, the *Licentia* is an essential part of the doctoral program. It represents the completion of all the doctoral class work and the defence of an abridged version of the doctoral dissertation. This gives seminarians the license or authorization to teach in Catholic seminaries. Second, very few people in the English-speaking world, would understand the distinction between the *Licentia* and the *Doctoratus*. The fact is that I received the academic distinctions of *magna* or *summa cum laude* for all the three phases of the doctoral program.

Regarding the publication of my dissertation, Rector Ghirlanda apologizes for the inaccurate statement contained in Dr. Bergami’s letter to Bishop Murray of Kalamazoo. He writes: “With regard to the publication of the doctoral thesis, I do wish to correct what is stated in the letter to Bishop Murray (‘He was not allowed to publish his dissertation in whole’). Both the Director of the thesis, Prof. Vincenzo Monachino,

and the second reader, Prof. Martinez-Fazio, **certified that the thesis could be published, without being submitted to a second review, in part (Chapters IV, V, or VII) or in its entirety, indicating at the same time a series of obligatory corrections in their written judgement. . . . I apologize for this mistake, in the name of the University**” (bold in the original).

This apology is very important for me, because it puts to rest the false allegation I was allowed to publish **only** one chapter of my dissertation because “the dissertation had too many problems.” The fact is that I was allowed to publish both the abridged and unabridged versions of my dissertation because there was no need to submit for a “second review.”

Due to time constraints, I will limit myself to above few comments. I plan to prepare a fuller response and to post the scanned letter of Rector Ghirlanda at my website. Interested readers will soon find the full dialogue and documentation at my website.

I would like to express my gratitude to Rector Ghirlanda for taking time to examine my response and rectify some of the false allegations. Though some allegations still remain unresolved, in the spirit of Christian forgiveness I consider the case closed.

HAVE RESEARCHERS FOUND “THE LOST TOMB OF JESUS”?

Several Adventists have asked me to comment on the newly released book and movie that allege that the tomb of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and Mary Magdalene have been found in East Talpiot, a suburb of Jerusalem. The documentary promoting this view is entitled “The Lost Tomb of Jesus,” and/or “The Jesus Family Tomb.” It was aired on the Discovery Channel on March 4, 2007.

The documentary was spearheaded by a well-known Emmy-winner TV Director Simcha Jacobovici and produced by Oscar-winner “Titanic” Director James Cameron. These men argue that the bones of Jesus, Mary, Mary Magdalene, along with lesser-known relatives, were found in 1980 in a Jewish burial cave containing 10 bone boxes, called ossuaries.

In many ways the movie and the book expands the *Da Vinci Code* fiction that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and the had children. The difference between the two is that while in the *Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown builds his case by using late gnostic heretical gospels, Jacobovici and Cameron use names inscribed in some bone boxes as well as gnostic gospels. Both movies and books attempt to destroy the foundation of the Christian faith by denying the Resurrection of Jesus. If it were true that Jesus never resurrected because his very bones and those of his family have been found, then as Paul puts it, “our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain . . . and we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:14, 19).

The 1980 Ossuaries’ Discovery

The documentary is based on several bone boxes (ossuaries) that were found in an ancient tomb unearthed by a construction crew in 1980. That year marked a construction boom in Jerusalem. The result was that hundreds of tombs were uncovered containing thousands of bone boxes (ossuaries).

In Christ’s time it was common for wealthy Jewish families to build tombs in the hills throughout Judea and place the remains of their loved ones in those caves. The procedure was to place a newly dead body on a rock shelf for about a year. When the flesh had desiccated it was customary to gather the bones and place them in a small limestone chest called “ossuary.” Sometimes the name of the deceased would be inscribed onto the outside of the box. Eventually the caves became so crowded with bone boxes, that to conserve space several skeletons were placed in the same box. First century limestone bone boxes are so common in Israel today that they are used as planters in gardens and living rooms.

Though tombs’ discoveries are very common, the Talpiot construction crew immediately stopped their work when they unearthed an ancient tomb. They called the Israel Antiquities Authority, that sent a small team of archeologists to excavate the site. Under pressure from the builders, the archeologists worked fast. The human remains in the cave, were given over to the religious authorities to be reburied in accordance with Jewish law.

Ten bone boxes (ossuaries) were taken away to the Israel Antiquities Authority warehouse. Six of them had inscriptions to remind family members of whose bones the boxes contained. Here are the names found carved on the bone boxes of the Talpiot tomb: Jesus, son of Joseph; Maria; Mariamene; Matthew; Judas, son of Jesus; and Jose, a diminutive of Joseph.

One of the bone boxes even bears the title, “Judah son of Jesus,” hinting that Jesus had a son. The claim that Jesus even had an ossuary of His wife and children, contradicts the Christian belief that he was resurrected and ascended to heaven.

Criticism of Archeologists

Archeologist Amos Kloner who oversaw the original archeological dig and wrote the official report, found nothing remarkable in the discovery. He says: “The names on the ossuaries are very common names or derivatives of names.” In a *Newsweek* report he dismissed any possible connection with Jesus’ family as “impossible.” “It makes a great story for a TV film, but it’s completely impossible. It’s nonsense.”

Joe Zias, the archaeology curator of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, dismissed the documentary as a “hyped-up film which is intellectually and scientifically dishonest. . . . Projects like these make a mockery of the archaeological profession” (*Newsweek*).

Jacobovici disagrees very strongly with this criticism. He advances various arguments to prove the bone boxes found at Talpiot belong to Jesus Family. Competent archeologists find his arguments preposterous. For example, William G. Dever, a leading American archeologist who has been excavating ancient sites in Israel for the past 50 years, said to the *Washington Post*: “I have known these ossuaries for many years and so have many other archeologists, and none of us thought it was much a story, because there are rather common Jewish names from the period. It’s is a publicity stunt, and it will make these guys very rich, and it will upset millions of innocent people because they don’t know enough to separate fact from fiction.”

Discrediting Considerations

The claims of the movie and book that the bones of Jesus's family have been found at the Talpiot tomb excavated in 1980, are discredited by the following factual considerations:

- 1) As far as we know, the earliest followers of Jesus never called Him "Son of Joseph." As a matter of fact, this is how Jesus was called by His opponents. This means that His family members would have never inscribed such a name on His bone box.
- 2) The ancestral home of Joseph was Bethlehem and his adult home was Nazareth. The family continued to live in Nazareth even after the death of Joseph. Why in the world would the family choose to carve an elaborate tomb to place their bones in a suburb of Jerusalem?
- 3) Even assuming that Jesus was buried, it would be most unlikely that He would be buried in or around Jerusalem, where Roman and Jewish authorities were searching for His body to disprove the widespread report of His Resurrection.
- 4) Jesus' family was a poor, peasant family from Nazareth, with an ancestral lineage in Bethlehem. There is no logical reasons for their bones to end up in a middle class tomb in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the picture of the Talpiot's tomb shows it to be ornately decorated. Only a middle class family could have paid for the carving of such elaborate tomb. Jesus' family did not have the resources to purchase the land and build an a decorated tomb.
- 6) The two Mary ossuaries do not mention anyone from Migdal (Magdalene), but simply Mary. This was the most common of all the ancient Jewish female name.
- 7) The tomb includes the names of people like Matthew, which do not match with the list of Jesus' brothers' names. In other words, the tomb includes names that should not be there and lacks the names of people who should be there.

Factual considerations such as these discredit the claims that the Talpiot tomb contains the bones of Jesus' family. All the ancient accounts confirm that Jesus' tomb was empty because He resurrected. Jewish and Roman authorities acknowledged this fact. It takes a year for the flesh to desiccate before the bones can be placed in an ossuary. Jesus' body was long gone from Joseph of Arimathea's tomb before then.

To believe that Jesus' body was placed in another tomb, desiccated, and then put in an ossuary, means to accuse James, Peter, and John of fraud and cover up. Could they have perpetrated a fraudulent religion for which they and others were prepared to die?

Prophetic Significance of *The Lost Tomb of Jesus* and *The Da Vinci Code*

We are witnessing today a concerted effort to destroy the credibility of the Christian faith, especially by attacking its Founder, Christ Himself. Hollywood has been at the forefront in launching these attacks. For example, in the movie *The Last Temptation*, Martin Scorzese depicts Jesus imagining Himself engaged in sexual activities.

In the *Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown attempts to prove that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, and they had a daughter named Sarah, whose royal bloodline survives to this very day. In *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, Jacobovici and Cameron argue that the bones of Jesus' family have been found. The names inscribed in the bone boxes allegedly show that Christ married Mary Magdalene and fathered their son Judah.

These sacrelegious movies are popular today because they appeal to our secular, postmodern, humanistic, new age culture which rejects *moral absolutes* of the Christian faith, such as the Ten Commandments, creation, final judgement and destruction of evildoers. Our postmodern culture promotes instead *moral relativism*, where truth is subjective, based on personal beliefs.

The moral relativism of our time that promotes a self-centered worship, has prophetic significance. It represents a clear fulfilment of Christ's prediction: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). The false worship promoted today by books and

movies like *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, must be seen as players in the prophetic endtime battle between true and false worship. God's final appeal in Revelation is to come out of the false worship promoted by spiritual Babylon: "Come out of her my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" (Rev 18:4).

Revelation portrays Satan like a monster with many tentacles, using different strategies (beasts) to win the battle over worship. Sacrilegious movies like *The Last Temptation*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, are one of the significant Satanic strategies. Our calling is to proclaim to the world God's final warning message: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountain of the water" (Rev 14:7).

For a fuller understanding of the endtime deceptions we are witnessing today, I would urge you to view my two hours DVD recording, *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*. This is an intriguing, informative and challenging video that addresses the deceptions of our time and a host of questions many people are asking today. I invested over \$5,000.00 and six months of diligent research to produce this live DVD recording. What motivated me to invest so much money and time in this project, is the awareness of the urgent need to warn believers about the unprecedented endtime deceptions of our time.

The recording was done in the media studio of Andrews University by Leonard Brown, Prof. of Filming at Andrews. The setting of the lecture is a very modern virtual studio with a wide screen surrounded by several TV monitors. It looks as if the lecture is delivered from a multi-million dollars Hollywood studio, when in reality the taping was done in the modest studio of Andrews University. Digital technology makes it possible to superimpose my lecture on an impressive virtual modern studio and the results are incredible.

You can view to a three minutes trailer of the lecture by clicking here: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=bookstore&Product_Code=AV-DaVinci&Category_Code=audio_video

To facilitate the wide circulation of *CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE*, we are offering the two hours DVD album at the following special offer:

ONE DVD ALBUM for \$40.00 instead of regular price of \$100.00.

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“The Achievements of the Cross -Part 2”

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This newsletter concludes our study of the Cross. In the previous three newsletters we examined the *centrality*, *necessity*, and *achievements* of the Cross. In the last newsletter we looked at two word pictures used in Scripture that 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.

In this newsletter we continue our study of the achievements of the Cross by examining the remaining three word pictures: *justification*, which comes from the acquittal of an accused person in a law court; *reconciliation*, which is inspired by family relationships; *intercession*, which comes from Christ’s heavenly ministry.

The study is excerpted from my book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*, which we are offering until March 31, 2007, for as low as \$2.95 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$25.00. As explained in the previous newsletters, I made the mistake to ask the printer to reprint the book twice within a month. This may have been a providential mistake that will help many of our Adventist and non-Adventists to reflect afresh on the meaning of the Cross at this Passover/Easter season.

Several churches have ordered the book by the case of 34 copies for only \$100.00, that is \$2.95 per copy. If your church has not yet received a case, let us know it. We will gladly process your order immediately. As a special bonus we will add TWO FREE DVD ALBUMS with the two hours 3ABN live interview, where I share the highlights of the book. The DVD ALBUM regularly sells for \$50.00, but you will receive it free with your order. You can order the book online clicking here: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=25> If you have a problem ordering on line, call us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your postal address. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

CHRIST'S DEATH AS JUSTIFICATION

The third word picture used to describe the achievements of the Cross is “*justification*.” This picture takes us from the marketplace (*redemption*) to a law court, because the word was used to describe the verdict of a judge who pronounced an accused person “not guilty.”

The term “justification” is a translation of the Greek *dikaioma*, which means “righteous requirement,” “judicial sentence,” and “act of righteousness.” It also translates *dikaiosis* which signifies “justification,” “vindication,” “acquittal.” The related verb *dikaio* means “to be pronounced and treated as righteous,” “to be acquitted,” “to be set free, made pure.” The basic meaning of justification is the act of God that declares penitent sinners righteous or regards them as righteous. Justification is the opposite of condemnation (Rom 5:16).

There is a logical progression in the order we are reviewing the great achievements of the Cross. *Propitiation* comes first, because God’s

displeasure and condemnation of sin (wrath) must be appeased by the sacrificial death of Jesus before salvation can be extended to human beings. Once the demands of divine justice have been met, *redemption*, that is, the rescue of penitent sinners, takes place at the high price of Christ's blood. The next picture, *justification*, expands on the divine deliverance by depicting God as Judge who imputes the righteousness of Christ to a believer and declares that person to be forgiven of all sins, thus pronouncing the person righteous in His sight (Acts 13:38-39; Rom 4:5, 24).

Justification is best understood in the context of a judicial court of law (Rom 8:33-34). Being sinners, we deserve the death punishment (Rom 6:23). Justification is the act of God as the universal judge who acquits penitent sinners of their guilt and declares them righteous (Rom 5:8). Justification is the opposite of condemnation. By means of Christ's righteousness, God justifies penitent sinners by forgiving their sins and reconciling them to Himself. In an attempt to better understand Paul's teachings on the divine justification of sinners, we will consider four of his key phrases which relate to the source, ground, means, and effects of justification.

The Source of Our Justification

The source of justification is indicated by the phrase *justified freely by his grace*: "We are *justified freely by his grace* through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24; NIV; emphasis supplied). Justification is an undeserved favor because "None is righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10). Self-justification is utterly impossible because we cannot declare ourselves righteous before God (Rom 3:20; Ps 143:2). It is only "God who justifies" (Rom 8:33), and He does so not because of good works done by penitent sinners, but because of His grace.

The Ground of Our Justification

The *ground* or the righteous basis of our justification is expressed by the phrase *justified by his blood*: "Since we have been *justified by his blood*, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him" (Rom 5:9; emphasis supplied). Justification is not an arbitrary act of God declaring bad people good, or saying that they are not sinners after all. Rather, as John Stott aptly observes, "God is pronouncing them

legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself has borne the penalty of their law-breaking.”

The basis of justification is not our obedience, but Christ’s, for “through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life . . . By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:18-19; KJV). Through Christ’s obedience, believers are “justified freely by His grace” (Rom 3:24; KJV).

The Means of Our Justification

The *means* of our justification is indicated by Paul’s favorite expression *justified by faith*. “We maintain that a man is *justified by faith* apart from observing the law” (Rom 3:28; emphasis supplied; cf. Rom 5:1; Gal 2:9). Paul speaks of faith as the sole means of justification because, as mentioned in the previous verse, he wants to exclude human boasting. “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith” (Rom 3:27).

Paul’s statement on justification by faith has been the object of endless controversies between Catholic and Protestant theologians since the sixteenth-century Reformation. What is at stake is the definition of the nature of faith and of the dynamics of the process of justification. Before discussing how Catholic and Protestant theologians have defined their positions, let us mention the *effects* of justification.

The Effects of Our Justification

The *effects* of our justification are described as a restored relationship with Christ. This is suggested by Paul’s expressions that we are *justified in Christ* (Gal 2:16-17; Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:21). “We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ. . . . But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!” (Rom 2:16-17; emphasis supplied).

Being justified in Christ points to a personal relationship with the Savior that believers can enjoy now. This fact shows that justification is not purely an external judicial declaration of acquittal, but an internal union with Christ that brings assurance of the believer’s acceptance. No

matter how sinful one's past life may have been, God pardons all our sins and we are no longer under the condemnation of the law. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

The realization that our Savior's sacrifice forgives our sinful past brings healing to our body and mind. It enables us to forget the dark chapters of our past life, because His forgiving grace has taken care of them (Phil 3:13-14). It motivates us to "walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4).

The reassuring message of justification by faith appears to be a simple and clear biblical teaching, yet it has been intensely debated since the Reformation. It is a teaching that has deeply divided the Catholic from Protestant churches. The limited nature of this study allows for only a summary statement of the respective Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification by faith.

The distinction between the Catholic and Protestant views of justification by faith revolves around four major questions, aptly summarized by Avery Dulles: "1) Is justification the action of God alone, or do we who receive it cooperate by our response to God's offer of grace? 2) Does God, when He justifies us, simply impute to us the merits of Christ, or does He transform us and make us intrinsically righteous? 3) Do we receive justification by faith alone, or only by a faith enlivened by love and fruitful in good works? 4) Is the reward of heavenly life a free gift of God to believers, or do they merit it by their faithfulness and good works?"

The Reformers' Understanding of Justification by Faith

The sixteenth-century Reformers were convinced of the central importance of justification by faith. Martin Luther called it "the principal article of all Christian doctrine, which maketh true Christians indeed." Luther developed his answer to the above questions on the basis of his study of Paul and of his personal monastic experience. As an Augustinian monk, he sought in vain to find reassurance of salvation by submitting himself to a rigorous regiment of fasting and prayer. But in spite of his rigorous spiritual exercises, he still felt as a condemned sinner in God's sight.

Luther's quest for a gracious God, not a stern judge, led him to discover in Paul's writings that justification is by faith, without the works of the law. To ensure that his German people would understand the exclusive role of faith, Luther added the word "alone" to Romans 3:28: "We hold that a man is justified by faith alone, apart from works of the law." This interpretation made him feel like a newly born person entering Paradise. Out of pastoral concern for the conscience of terrified people buying indulgences to avoid the temporal punishment of their sins, Luther developed the slogan "By grace alone, by faith alone."

Luther concluded that justification is a divine act, by which God imputes Christ's righteousness to a believer, regardless of that person's cooperation. God declares a person to be forgiven of all sins, thus pronouncing that person righteous in His sight (Acts 13:38-39; Rom 4:5, 24). According to Luther, we are justified by God's grace that freely imputes to us the merits of Christ apart from our inner renewal. We receive justification by *faith alone*, that is, by a passive faith that accepts God's provision of salvation, not by an active faith manifested in obedience to God's commandments. The problem with Luther's interpretation, as we shall see shortly, is that *faith is never alone*—it is never passive, because it involves the mind and the will.

In summation, Luther understood justification by faith as a declarative and judicial act of God based on Christ's righteousness. It changes the legal standing of a believer from condemnation to justification (acquittal), but is not dependent upon a change in the person's behavior. This means that a person can be simultaneously saint and sinner—*simul justus et peccatoris*. The problems with the Lutheran (Protestant) understanding of justification by faith will be discussed after the Catholic understanding of justification by faith is described.

The Catholic Understanding of Justification by Faith

The Catholic view of justification by faith was formulated by the Council of Trent in 1546 A.D., largely as a response to the teachings of Luther and Calvin. Since Trent, the official Catholic views have not substantially changed. The recent study (1986 to 1993) on *Church and Justification* produced by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Commission, as well as the joint Catholic-Lutheran declaration, shows that fundamental differences still do exist.

Simply stated, for the Roman Catholic church, justification by grace is not a declarative judicial act of God that imputes Christ's righteousness to the believer, but an infusion of grace that enables believers to produce good works. The latter is a process that begins at baptism and continues through the whole life as believers partake of the sacraments and produce good works.

Avery Dulles succinctly summarizes the teachings of Trent, saying: "The Council taught that although justification is an unmerited gift, it needs to be freely accepted, so that human cooperation is involved. Secondly, it taught that justification consists in an inner renewal brought about by divine grace; thirdly, that justification does not take place by faith without hope, charity, and good works; and finally, that the justified, by performing good works, merit the reward of eternal life."

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reiterates the teachings of the Council of Trent by affirming that justification is an infusion of grace bestowed at baptism that enables believers to conform to God's righteousness. "Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy."

By linking justification to a person's moral condition, the Catholic church teaches that the righteousness received in justification can be increased or decreased. If lost, justification can be recovered by good works such as a Penance. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly states that those who "since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace . . . to them the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification." Such a view goes against the popular Protestant belief of once saved, always saved. Once believers are imputed with Christ's righteousness and are declared righteous, allegedly they cannot lose the legal standing as forgiven children of God. Unfortunately, both positions misinterpret the biblical view of justification.

Evaluation of the Protestant and Catholic Understandings of Justification by Faith

A comparison between the Catholic and Protestant formulations of the doctrine of justification by faith reveals the extreme definitions

formulated in the crossfire of controversy by the respective churches. Protestants tend to reduce God's justification to an external *legal declaration* of acquittal which is not conditioned by interior renewal. By contrast, Catholics make justification by faith a process of *moral transformation* that continues throughout one's life, and also in Purgatory if necessary.

For Protestants, Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to believers, while for Catholics it is *infused* by means of baptism and the other sacraments. For Protestants, justification is received by *faith alone*, while for Catholics it is achieved by *faith together with works* of obedience. For Protestants, believers put on *righteousness like a cloak*, leaving their character and conduct unchanged, while for Catholics, believers are *infused with righteousness* which enables them to become righteous by means of sacraments and good works.

These extreme contrasts between the Protestant and Catholic positions serve to highlight how both positions misrepresent the biblical truth expressed through the word picture of justification by faith. For example, the Reformers' teaching that every justified Christian is *simul justus et peccator*, that is, a saint and a sinner at the same time, makes justification a phoney external transaction which leaves people internally unchanged. Such an understanding of "justification by faith alone" can become a thinly disguised license to go on sinning.

In their zeal to emphasize the free gift of salvation in opposition to the Catholic emphasis on good works, Protestants have often given the impression that obedience to God's law is not important, because after all justification is a judicial declaration of acquittal, not a moral transformation. Actually, the separation between these divine saving activities can occur only in the minds of speculative theologians, not in the practical experience of believers. Believers who are justified are also sanctified at the same time. Note how Paul lumps together regeneration, sanctification, and justification: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11).

The fact that Paul mentions the cleansing, the sanctification, and the justification as saving activities simultaneously experienced by be-

lievers indicates that believers are sanctified at the moment of justification. The reason why “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1) is not merely because penitent sinners have been declared “not guilty” before God’s court, but because “God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin . . . in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

Both the *legal declaration of justification* and the *moral transformation of sanctification* are gifts of divine grace received at the same time. “The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.” The imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ are both offered at the same time to those who accept God’s provision of salvation.

Catholics are right in affirming that justification by faith is not merely a legal declaration but also a moral transformation. But they are wrong in claiming that such a transformation is triggered by an infusion of grace that begins at baptism and continues through life by means of the sacraments and good works. To Catholics, justification is ultimately not a divine gift of grace, but a human accomplishment by believers who join their works with faith. This understanding of salvation is reflected in Passion Plays like Gibson’s movie. We have seen in chapters 1 and 2 how the Passion Plays have inspired Christians to imitate Christ’s suffering as a way to earn their own salvation. Salvation is thought to be achieved through penitential suffering, rather than being received as a divine gift of grace.

Luther’s Understanding of Faith

“Faith” lies at the heart of Paul’s doctrine of salvation, being often presented as an indispensable requirement for salvation. The definition of “faith” lies also at the root of the difference between Catholic and Protestant understandings of salvation. Trying to capture the exact Catholic and Protestant understandings of faith is a most difficult task, because their respective literature hardly offers clear, unambiguous definitions of faith.

Justification by *faith alone* was Martin Luther's great spiritual and theological breakthrough. To find peace with God, he tried everything from sleeping on hard floors, confessions, prayers, and fasting to climbing the "Holy Staircase" in Rome while kneeling in prayer. All these good works proved fruitless. Finally, Luther found peace when he discovered in the study of Paul's writings that justification is by *faith*, not by the works of penance he had been performing. The phrase "justification by *faith alone*" became for Luther the key to unlock the Bible.

What was Luther's understanding of the justifying faith? The answer seems to be complete trust in Christ's forgiving grace. He wrote: "Justifying faith is a sure trust, by which one believes that his sins are remitted for Christ's sake; and they that are justified are to believe certainly that their sins are remitted."³⁵ He further explains: "No previous disposition is necessary to justification; neither does faith justify because it disposes us, but because it is a means or instrument by which the promise and grace of God are laid hold on and received."

In his "Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther wrote: "Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures."

Faith and Works

These statements suggest that for Luther "faith" was absolute trust in Christ's forgiving grace. It involves the mind rather than the will, that is, mental acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice rather than willingness to obey God's commandments. He reached this conclusion because all his works of penance never gave him the assurance of salvation. What Luther failed to realize is that the doctrine of justification by faith does not mean that we are saved by faith without works, but that we are saved by God's grace without human merits.

"Works" for Paul are the works of the law—acts of obedience motivated by the desire to gain righteousness. Such works obviously negate faith, that is, the acceptance of salvation as a divine gift of grace. For James, however, "works" are not a means of salvation, but an out-

ward manifestation of genuine faith. A professing faith is a practicing faith (James 2:14-26). With these connotations, the terms “faith” and “works” are fully compatible.

The two apostles address two different concerns. Paul addresses the question of the basis of salvation: Is it a human achievement or a divine gift? James discusses the effect of salvation: Is it a profession or a practice? Both apostles are concerned about the misuse of the law. Paul addresses the problem of legalism, using the law as a means of salvation — while James discusses the problem of antinomianism—disregarding the law as irrelevant to salvation. Understood in their proper contexts, there is no conflict between Paul and James on the question of faith and works.

For Paul, faith is not purely an intellectual acceptance of the provision of salvation, but a complete commitment to God manifested through obedience. Three times Paul states: “neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision”; each time he concludes this statement with a different phrase: “but keeping the commandments of God . . . but faith working through love . . . but a new creation” (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15). The parallelism suggests that a believer who has been saved by faith is not released from the observance of God’s commandments, but is empowered to observe them.

The Catholic View of “Faith”

The Catholic understanding of saving “faith” differs substantially from the Protestant one. In Catholic thought, faith occupies a subordinate place. The Council of Trent admits that faith does play a role during the life process of justification, but final justification only occurs when a person receives the infused grace through water baptism. While in Protestant teachings faith is the instrumental cause of justification is faith, in Catholic teachings baptism operates as the instrument of justification.

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that “*faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him.*” Since baptism is viewed by the Catholic church as a sacrament administered by the church, it is through the church that the believer receives the faith. As stated in the new Catechism, “It is through the Church that we receive

faith and new life in Christ by Baptism.” This means that, for the Catholic church, faith is a *dispensation of the church* rather than a *disposition of the believer*.

The fact that baptism is administered at birth, when a newborn baby is unable to mentally accept Christ’s forgiving grace, shows that for Catholics the saving faith is an external infusion of grace rather than an internal, intelligent decision. The initial infusion of grace at baptism is instantaneous, but from that point on grace is a lifelong process that works with the believer to earn salvation.

Faith as Infusion of Grace

The Roman Catholic church sees grace everywhere. For example, believers by God’s grace must suffer to pay the penalty of their sins throughout the present life, and if necessary in Purgatory. The sufferings of Christ portrayed in Passion Plays like Gibson’s movie serve as a model for believers to imitate Christ’s sufferings to atone for their sins.

The Council of Trent is most explicit on this matter: “If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.”

God’s grace can shorten the stay in Purgatory! God’s grace can generate more grace through the eating of Christ’s actual body and drinking of His actual blood at the Catholic Eucharist! God’s grace enables believers to secure more grace through indulgences or by paying for perpetual Masses on behalf of departed relatives and by praying directly to Mary to ask special favors of the Son!

It is evident that, for the Roman Catholic Church, salvation or eternal life can be attained through a combination of grace, faith, and good works. It is a works-oriented method of salvation that challenges believers throughout their lives to do “good works” and to receive the sanctifying grace of the Sacraments in order to reach the level of righteousness needed for entry into heaven.

The Catholic combination of grace and good works as the method of salvation negates the biblical teaching that salvation is entirely the free gift of God. By grace God makes available to us through Christ His provision for our salvation, which we accept by faith, that is, by trusting in Him, not through our own good works. To use Paul's words, "For by grace you have been saved through faith: and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8; cf. Rom 5:1).

CHRIST'S DEATH AS RECONCILIATION

The fourth word picture of salvation that illustrates the achievements of the Cross is "reconciliation." This is probably the most popular word picture, because it portrays the restoration of relationships with family members and friends. Through the previous word pictures we made our way through the Temple court to understand *propitiation*, the slave market to clarify the origin of *redemption*, and to the law court to grasp the meaning of *justification*. Now we are going home to renew our relationship with family and friends.

Reconciliation expresses that the ultimate purpose of the Cross is to reconcile us to God and fellow beings. The verb *katallasso* ("to reconcile") occurs six times in the New Testament (Rom 5:10; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20), and the noun *katallage* ("reconciliation") appears four times (Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18f). The central idea in all these occurrences is the termination of the estrangement between God and human beings by the death of Christ: "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom 5:10).

The message of reconciliation is most relevant today when many people feel alienated and estranged from their homes, churches, workplaces, and society. To them, the message of reconciliation is Good News. To appreciate the full import of this divine act of reconciliation, it is important to consider both the divine and human dimensions of this reconciliation.

Divine Dimension

The act of reconciliation is in the first place a divine and not a human initiative. It is accomplished by God through Jesus Christ's atoning

death which removes divine judgment against the sinner: “All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ . . . God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor 5:18-19). In Colossians, Paul reminds the believers that it pleased the Father “through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things . . . making peace by the blood of His cross. And you . . . He has reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Col 1:19-22). Note that *reconciliation is the work of God*, initiated by Him and accomplished through the Cross.

Reconciliation is accomplished not by a change in human attitude toward God but by the objective historical reality of Christ’s death. *Christ is the agent of reconciliation*. This is crystal clear in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, where Paul says: “God . . . through Christ reconciled us to himself . . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.” Both statements tell us that God took the initiative to reconcile and He accomplished it through Christ. The beneficiaries of reconciliation are both “us” and “the world,” which suggests the universal scope of reconciliation.

The *cosmic* scope of reconciliation is expressed more fully in Colossians 1:19-20, where the supremacy of Christ is linked to His work of reconciliation: “For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.” The ultimate reconciliation will take place at the end when all the natural order will be liberated “from its bondage to decay” (Rom 8:21).

God reconciled us to Himself by the death of His Son “while we were enemies” (Rom 5:10). Thus believers *do not initiate* but *accept* the reconciliation already effected on the Cross. Through the Cross, God reconciled the world unto Himself by “not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19), because He has dealt with them in Jesus Christ. Reconciliation is then a work outside us, initiated by God who through Christ removes the barrier of sin that separates us from Him.

Human Dimension

Our response to God’s initiative involves first of all the acceptance of the reconciliation provided by God: “We rejoice in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now *received* our reconciliation” (Rom 5:11). The acceptance of God’s act of reconciliation brings joy (“we rejoice”), assuring believers that they have been restored to the Father’s house. We experience “peace,” Paul says, because we “are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:12-19).

Accepting God’s provision for our reconciliation means also accepting the mandate to become the *ambassadors of the reconciliation*. Paul explains that not only has God in Christ reconciled us to Himself, but He has also “entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:19-20).

God finished the work of reconciliation at the Cross, yet it is still necessary to appeal to people to be reconciled to God. It is significant to note that God has entrusted to us a message and a mission. The message is the Good News that God in Christ has reconciled the world to Himself. The mission is to appeal to people to come to Christ. John Stott perceptively points out that “it is not enough to expand a thorough orthodox doctrine of reconciliation, if we never beg people to come to Christ. Nor is it right for a sermon to consist of an interminable appeal, which has not been preceded by an exposition of the gospel. The rule should be ‘no appeal without a proclamation, and no proclamation without appeal.’”

It is a remarkable truth that the same God who achieved the reconciliation through Christ now is working through us to announce the message of reconciliation to others. By sharing the good news of reconciliation, we experience its blessings and express our gratitude to God for His gracious provision.

CHRIST’S DEATH AS INTERCESSION

The fifth word picture of salvation that illustrates the achievements of the Cross is “intercession.” This word picture describes Christ’s heavenly ministry at the right hand of God to make available to us the benefits of His redemptive mission. In the previous four word pictures, we have examined the achievements of the Cross through Christ’s sacrificial death on earth. Now our eyes are directed heavenward to catch

a glimpse of the benefits of the Cross extended to us on earth through Christ's heavenly ministry.

The Inauguration of Christ's Heavenly Ministry

Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary began at the time of His ascension to heaven and exaltation to the right hand of God. Jesus had prophesied at His trial that "from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). Peter at Pentecost announced the fulfillment of the exaltation of Jesus: "This Jesus God raised up . . . being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

It is noteworthy that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—the most significant event of the Apostolic Church—is connected with the exaltation of Christ and His installation at the right hand of God. The installation of Christ to His heavenly ministry is reflected in those passages which speak of Christ "sitting" at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13). The sitting signifies not a position of repose, but the official enthronement to His intercessory ministry. This is indicated by the fact that Stephen saw "the heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56; emphasis supplied).

The "standing" position points to Christ's role as our heavenly advocate and intercessor before the Father. The meaning of "sitting" is further clarified in Hebrews 8:1-2 where Christ is presented as the "high priest . . . seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tent." These word pictures of Christ standing or sitting at God's right hand signify Christ's official enthronement in His heavenly intercessory ministry. The nature of Christ's ministry is described in prophetic, kingly, and priestly terms. For the purpose of our study, we will focus only on the priestly ministry of Christ.

Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross did not terminate His priestly ministry, because "he holds his priesthood permanently" (Heb 7:23). Just like in the Old Testament sacrificial system, the priests not only offered sacrifices for the people, but also interceded for them, likewise,

Christ continues His ministry of intercession after having offered Himself for our sins. "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

Christ's heavenly priestly intercession is based on His sacrifice on the Cross. This connection is brought out in 1 John 2:1-2, for example: "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for the whole world." Christ's death accomplished our salvation and His heavenly intercessory ministry applies the benefits of the Cross to our lives today.

New Dimension of Christ's Ministry

When Christ ascended into heaven, He entered the heavenly sanctuary to present His completed sacrifice to His Father. Louis Berkhof writes: "Just as the high priest on the great Day of Atonement entered the Holy of Holies with the completed sacrifice, to present it to God, so Christ entered the heavenly Holy Place with His completed, perfect, and all sufficient sacrifice and offered it to the Father." "Now Christ appears 'in the presence of God for us' (Heb 9:24), and thus continually embodies before God the sacrifice He made for our sins . . . the perpetual presence of the completed sacrifice of Christ before God contains in itself an element of intercession as a constant reminder of the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ."

The heavenly intercessory ministry of Christ at the right hand of God points to the new dimension of Jesus' Lordship. Wayne Grudem comments that "After his resurrection, Jesus was given by God the Father far greater authority over the church and over the universe. God raised him up and 'made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church' (Eph. 1:20-22; cf. Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25).

That authority over the church and over the universe will be more fully recognized by people when Jesus returns to earth in power and

great glory to reign (Matt 26:64; 2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 19:11-16). On that day he will be acknowledged as ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (Rev 19:16) and every knee shall bow to him (Phil 2:10).”

Earthly Sufferings and Heavenly Intercession

The sufferings that Christ experienced during His life and sacrificial death qualified Him for His sacerdotal heavenly ministry. The Cross must be seen as the culmination of Christ’s life of suffering. There is a tendency to focus on the suffering of the last week of Christ’s life, or even the last twelve hours, like in the case of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. Such a tendency ignores that Christ suffered pain, fatigue, hunger, and thirst throughout His life (Matt 4:2). He suffered temptation at the hands of Satan (Heb 4:15). He suffered rejection from His people (Matt 11:20-24). He suffered denial (Luke 22:60) and betrayal (Matt 26:47-56) from His friends.

What was the purpose and value of the sufferings Christ experienced in His life and death? While the sufferings of Christ’s death represent, as noted earlier, the satisfaction of divine justice, His life of suffering has a broader purpose, which includes two significant aspects.

Suffering to Become a Perfect Sacrifice for Sin

Twice in Hebrews the sufferings of Christ are mentioned as a means of perfecting Him. Hebrews 2:10 says that the Author of our salvation was made “perfect through suffering” (emphasis supplied). Later we read that Christ “learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:8-9; emphasis supplied).

Sufferings perfected Christ by enabling Him not to overcome moral imperfection but to become a perfect Savior for sin. In what sense? Through the pain and stress of temptation and suffering Christ “learned obedience.” He learned what it means to obey as a human being under the stress and strain of human limitations and temptations. His perfect life of obedience, in spite of sufferings, qualified Christ to be a perfect Savior for sin and an understanding intercessor.

The sufferings that Christ experienced throughout His life, climaxing at the Cross, enabled Him to offer up Himself as the blameless Lamb who takes away our sins through His once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 9:28; 10:12). Christ's obedience, manifested in His willingness to suffer even unto death rather than disobey, qualified Him to expiate our sins through the sacrifice of His life. As sin and death came into the world through the disobedience of one man, so, Paul explains, "by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). It is Christ's obedience, even unto death, that gives atoning value to His death.

Suffering to Become a Perfect High Priest

The suffering that Christ experienced in His life and death qualified Him for His role as Mediator and High Priest. The priests functioned as mediators between sinners and God by providing the means of reconciliation through sacrifices (Heb 8:3; 10:11). The Book of Hebrews explains that Christ can rightfully function as our heavenly High Priest for two reasons. First, because He was fully man (Heb 2:14,17), who "in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb 4:15). The experience of suffering and of being tempted enabled Christ to be a sympathetic High Priest: "We have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with us, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15). The human suffering undeniably gave Christ an experiential understanding of human woes and temptations.

A second reason why Christ can rightfully function as our High Priest is because He secured our "eternal redemption" through His suffering and sacrifice (Heb 9:12). Christ has no need "to suffer repeatedly" (Heb 9:26), because His onetime sacrifice qualifies Him "to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24). There is an unmistakable connection between the atoning function of Jesus' suffering and death and His right to function as our heavenly High Priest. Having suffered to atone for our sins, Christ "is able for all time to save those who draw to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

What is the nature of Christ's intercessory work in the heavenly sanctuary? Obviously, it is not intended to induce God to love us since the Father shared in the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:19). Its

function is to represent us before God's throne in order to make available to us the gracious provisions of divine redemption. To appreciate the scope of Christ's intercessory work, we shall briefly consider some of its benefits.

Extension of Human Probation

Christ's intercession extends to the whole human family by offering physical life and temporal benefits to all. As Paul explained on Mars Hill, "He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25). It is by virtue of Christ's atoning work that the punishment for human disobedience has been stayed. Ellen White comments: "Whether men receive or reject Him, He works earnestly for them. He grants them life and light, striving by His Spirit to win them from Satan's service."

Sustenance of the Church

Christ's intercession sustains the church in her mission to illuminate the world with the good news of salvation. John the Revelator saw "in the midst of the lampstand one like a Son of Man" (Rev 1:13). Since the "seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Rev 1:20), which symbolically represent the church at large, the standing of Christ in the midst of His church points to His sustenance of those who have accepted Him and who keep their light shining before the world.

As the earthly priests daily trimmed and filled the lamps to keep them burning, so Christ in the heavenly counterpart of the holy place symbolically ministers daily at the candelabra by sustaining and strengthening the church. This ministry is accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit who is also identified in Revelation 4:5 with the seven lamps: "Before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God." It is noteworthy that these "seven spirits" are explicitly identified with the "seven eyes" of the Lamb-Priest: "I saw a lamb standing . . . with seven eyes, which are the seven spirit of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). Through the Holy Spirit, Christ fully sees ("seven eyes") and supplies the needs of His people.

Mediation of Believers' Forgiveness

Christ's intercession mediates repentance and forgiveness of sin to penitent believers. Peter proclaimed before the council: "God exalted Him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Similarly, John explains: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

Forgiveness involves not merely the cancellation of punishment, but also the cleansing of believers (1 John 1:9) and their restoration to full fellowship with God. All of these are provided through Christ's continuous ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Mediation of Believers' Prayers

Christ's intercessory ministry makes it possible for our prayers to ascend to the Father. In our human sinfulness, we cannot approach our holy God in prayer without claiming the merits of Christ. Looking forward to His heavenly ministry, Jesus promised: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name" (John 16:23-24).

This dimension of the heavenly ministry of Christ is portrayed in Revelation 8 by the incense from the golden altar given to an angel, presumably by the Lamb: "Another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne" (Rev 8:3).

It is noteworthy that the "prayers of the saints" ascend to the throne of God "with" the smoke of the incense" (Rev 8:4). It is Christ's merits and intercession, represented by the incense, that make our worship and prayers acceptable to God. Ellen White perceptively explains the unique intercessory role of Christ represented by the incense: "The religious services, the prayers, the praise, the penitent confession of sin ascend from true believers as incense to the heavenly sanctuary; but passing through

the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value before God. They ascend not in spotless purity, and unless the Intercessor who is at God's right hand presents and purifies all by His righteousness, it is not acceptable to God. All incense from earthly tabernacles must be moist with the cleansing drops of the blood of Christ. He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ's propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned."

Ministration of Angels to Human Beings

The intercessory work of Christ makes possible the ministry of angels to human beings. The veil and the curtain covering the tabernacle were inwrought with cherubims (Ex 26:31), representing the angels surrounding the throne of God (Dan 7:10; Rev 5:11) and the ministry angels render to God's people. Hebrews concludes the first chapter, not only asserting the superiority of Christ over the angels, but also asking the question: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

In Revelation 5:6, Christ is represented as a "Lamb standing . . . with seven eyes, which are the *seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*" Similarly, in Revelation 1:16, 20, Christ is represented as holding "seven stars" which are interpreted as typifying "the angels of the seven churches." This imagery effectively illustrates the close connection between Christ and the angels who serve as His messengers to human beings. "Through Christ," Ellen White writes, "communication is opened between God and man. Angels may pass from heaven to earth with messages of love to fallen man, and to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation. It is through Christ alone that the heavenly messengers minister to men."

This brief survey of Christ's intercessory ministry in heaven has shown its vital importance for our present life and eternal salvation. As our heavenly High Priest, Christ sustains us, offering us repentance, forgiveness, and cleansing. He makes our prayers acceptable to God, and

provides us with the invisible, yet real, assistance of His angels. Such a knowledge of Christ's heavenly ministry can make the difference between living without assurance of divine assistance in this present life, and consequently without hope for the future, and living with the assurance of divine help and grace for our daily life and with hope for a glorious future.

CONCLUSION

Our study of the Cross of Christ has highlighted the richness of meaning and function of Christ's sacrificial death. The various word pictures employed to explain the significance and value of Christ's death represent partial attempts to capture its many dimensions. The total scope of meaning of Christ's death cannot be reduced to few conceptual statements, but will always remain "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19). The contemplation of this mystery will engage our minds through countless ages, constantly heightening our appreciation for the love of God.

We have found that the Cross has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Subjectively, through the Cross God revealed 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, assuming its penalty, and thus satisfying divine justice.

We have found that the substitutionary significance of Christ's death is central to the New Testament understanding of the Cross. Christ is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world by expiating through His substitutionary sacrifice our grievous disobedience. Thus, at the Cross, divine love was manifested not by the relaxation of justice, but by the satisfaction of its demands through the voluntary substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, who paid the price of human disobedience.

Five major word pictures are used to explain how God deals with the objective reality of sin—propitiation, redemption, justification, reconciliation, and intercession. These word pictures help us appreciate what God did for us and is doing in us.

Christ died to redeem us not only from the penalty of sin (Gal 3:13) but also from the power of sin (Titus 2:14). Redemption is not only

a rescue but also a cure—not only a liberation but also a transformation. It is important to maintain both of these dimensions of the Cross in their proper balance. The Cross is not merely an important doctrine but the very essence of the Gospel. Paul, recognizing the fundamental value of the Cross, explained: “I have decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:12).

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