

THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

The Cross Prefigured *The Word of the Cross*

The Exaltation of the Cross
September 14, 2020
Revision C

GOSPEL: John 19:6-35
EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

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The Search for the Cross by Helena

The Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Cross traces its roots to c. 326 AD when the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, journeyed to Jerusalem to look for the real cross. An old Jew named Judah told her that the Cross was buried under the Temple of Venus that Hadrian had built on Golgotha. Helena ordered that the Temple of Venus be torn down and the

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ground under it excavated. Having done that, they found three crosses. John Chrysostom stated¹ that they suspected which cross was the real one: first from its lying in the middle (John 19:18), and second from the title written by Pilate (John 19:19).

But they still needed to dispel all uncertainty as to which, if any, was the real one. At that moment a funeral procession was passing by. Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem suggested that they place the crosses one by one on the dead man. When they placed the first two on him, nothing happened. When they placed the third on him, he was restored to life. After that, they placed it on a sick woman and she recovered. Patriarch Macarius then raised up the cross for everyone to see and all the people sang, “Lord have mercy” with tears and joy. Empress Helena then had a silver casing made to contain the Cross.

In the early 7th Century, the Persians conquered Jerusalem and carried the Cross to Persia. Fourteen years later, the Greek Emperor Heraclius conquered Persia and brought the Cross back to Jerusalem and placed it in the Church of the Resurrection on Golgotha. September 14th, then, celebrates both the occasion of the finding of the Cross by Helena, and its return by Heraclius. The Eastern Church began celebrating the Exaltation of the Cross in the 4th Century. The Western Church eventually did so also after the 7th Century.

The Exaltation of the Cross is a feast day that is not celebrated much in the West today, however. Some Western Churches celebrate Holy Cross Sunday in mid September using the Gospel lesson for the Sunday before the Exaltation of the Cross and the Epistle for the feast day of the Exaltation. But this is not commonly done. Lutherans sometimes use the Epistle lesson for the Sunday after the Exaltation for Reformation Sunday in November. In both cases, the ideas are expressed that the Cross has become more than just a piece of wood that the Lord died on. However, the Word of the Cross is not emphasized in either case as it is in the Eastern Church. In the West, both Holy Cross Sunday and Reformation Sunday are one-day events. In the East, the celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross takes in two Sundays (before and after) with a major feast day in between. In addition to the above, taking up one’s cross is also the theme of the 3rd Sunday in Lent (The Adoration of the Cross) and All Saints Sunday (the 1st Sunday after Pentecost.)

¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXV, 1.

The Cross Prefigured

September 14, 2015

Old Testament Use of the Cross

The use of the Cross as a symbol or sign did not first appear in New Testament times. Other pagan cultures had used it before. For example, a cross-shaped emblem was used in Egypt, Nineveh and Phoenicia, among other countries. These crosses were shaped like the modern Greek Cross with equal length arms².

Shapes of Crosses

Other crosses used are the X-shaped St. Andrew Cross, so called because the Apostle Andrew was crucified on one of that shape. The St. Andrew Cross is very prominently displayed on the British flag today. Also used has been the Tee-shaped St. Anthony Cross, derived³ from the crutch or walking stick of Anthony the Great. During the Middle Ages in Europe the Celtic Cross, having a circle behind the crossbeam was used a lot, and carved in stone in many places. Most commonly used in the West is the Latin Cross, which is the style displayed on most Western Churches.

For executions in Roman times, a “Simple Cross” was sometimes used. This was a plain vertical stake where the victim’s hands were tied or nailed above his head⁴. The Greek word for cross, *stauros*, means “an upright stake” and does not imply a crossbeam. Thus a “cross” did not have to have a crossbeam, and referring to the Cross Jesus died on as “a tree” (1 Peter 2:24, Galatians 3:13) is perfectly consistent with the meaning of *stauros*.

Many comments have been made by the Church Fathers in comparing the “tree” that Christ died on with the “tree” that caused mankind to fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-16). By the “tree” in the Garden, Satan set a trap for Adam and caused him to fall. By the “tree” of the Cross, God also set a trap for Satan. If Satan had known what would result from this trap, he “would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

Traditional References to the Cross

According to tradition, there were times when Old Testament saints used the sign of the Cross without specifically calling it such. Some examples are:

Jacob Blesses Ephraim: Genesis 48:8-20

When Jacob was an old man living in Egypt, he blessed Joseph’s two children Manasseh and Ephraim. In doing so, he crossed his arms (in the shape of a cross) and blessed Ephraim, the younger, ahead of Manasseh (Genesis 48:14). Joseph was at first displeased with this since the elder child traditionally received the greater blessing. Jacob, however, said that he knew what he was doing and that his blessing was prophetic (Genesis 48:17-19).

² Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, pg. 227.

³ Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, January 17.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, pg. 227.

Moses vs. Amalek: Exodus 17:8-13

Shortly after leaving Egypt, the nation of Amalek came and fought against Israel. As Joshua led the army against Amalek, Moses stationed himself on the top of a hill with the staff of God in his hand. As Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; when he let his hands down, Amalek prevailed. Therefore Aaron and Hur (Miriam's husband) held up Moses' hands until sundown. According to tradition, they did so in the shape of an X-style cross, which would probably be the steadiest way to hold up someone's hands.

Justin Martyr wrote⁵ that Hur and Aaron supported Moses' arms in the shape of a Cross. It was the Cross and not Moses' prayers that prevailed against Amalek.

Trypho said, 'Prove to us whether He must be crucified and die so disgracefully and so dishonorably by the death cursed in the Law. We cannot bring ourselves even to think of this''.

"You know that what the prophets said and did they veiled by parables and types, so that it was not easy for all to understand since they concealed the truth by these means, that those who are eager to find out and learn it might do so with much labor. Listen, therefore, to what follows; for Moses first exhibited this seeming curse of Christ's by the signs which he made".

"When the people waged war with Amalek, and the son of Nun by name Jesus (Joshua), led the fight, Moses himself prayed to God, stretching out both hands. Hur with Aaron supported them during the whole day, so that they might not hang down when he got wearied. If he gave up any part of this sign, which was an imitation of the cross, the people were beaten, as is recorded in the writings of Moses. But if he remained in this form, Amalek was proportionally defeated, and he who prevailed did so by the cross. For it was not because Moses so prayed that the people were stronger, but because, while one who bore the name of Jesus (Joshua) was in the forefront of the battle, he himself made the sign of the cross".

The Blood on the Doorpost: Exodus 12:7, 22

Prior to the 10th Plague in Egypt, the Lord commanded Israel to slay the Pascal Lamb and to apply the Lamb's blood to the two door posts and the lintel with a bunch of hyssop. The lintel was that part of the doorframe above the doorposts that supported the bricks of the wall above the doorway. In order to apply the blood to these three places, one has to trace out the outline of a cross.

Joshua and the Long Day: Joshua 10:6-14

After conquering Ai (Joshua 10:1), a coalition of Canaanite kings marched against Gibeon, who had made peace with Israel. Joshua attacked these kings suddenly by marching all night and they fled before him. Since Joshua was outnumbered, he needed to complete this battle before nightfall to prevent the five kings from regrouping. The Lord helped Joshua by causing large hailstones to fall on the fleeing Canaanites. Joshua also spoke to the Lord and asked the sun to stand still. According to tradition, Joshua did this with upraised arms in the shape of a cross. "The sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not go down for about a whole day" (Joshua 10:13).

⁵ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 90.

Moses at the Red Sea: Exodus 14:21, 27

When Moses was leading Israel out of Egypt, they came to a dead end at the Red Sea. Trapped between the mountains, the Egyptian army and the Red Sea, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the sea parted (Exodus 14:21). After Israel had crossed, he stretched out his hand again and the sea closed on Pharaoh's army. According to tradition, Moses stretched out his hand horizontally to part the Red Sea, and did so vertically to close it. Thus, he traced out the cross in parting the sea.

Jonah in the Sea-Monster's Belly: Jonah 2

Jonah was called by the Lord to preach repentance to Nineveh in Mesopotamia, but he fled instead in the opposite direction. Calamity struck the ship he was on and all the sailors on board knew that the storm was on account of Jonah. At Jonah's request, they threw him overboard; Jonah was then swallowed whole by a great sea-monster and spent three days in the sea-monster's belly.

While in the sea-monster's belly, Jonah cried out to the Lord "from the depths of Sheol" (Jonah 2:2), "engulfed by the great deep with weeds wrapped around his head" (Jonah 2:5). His prayer came to the Lord and he vowed to sacrifice to the Lord and obey His voice (Jonah 2:9). According to tradition, Jonah prayed with his arms in the shape of a cross. After three days, the sea-monster vomited Jonah up onto dry land, and Jonah proceeded to go to Nineveh.

Parables of the Cross

Three readings from the Old Testament are used during Vespers preceding the Exaltation of the Cross. These are called prophecies or parables of the Cross:

The Waters of Mara Healed: Exodus 15:22-16:1

In this parable, Israel had just been freed from the threat of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. After great celebration and dancing they journeyed into the wilderness of Shur for three days (Exodus 15:1-22). Arriving at Marah [*Marah means bitterness*], they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter (Exodus 15:23). The people grumbled to Moses and Moses cried out to the Lord. The Lord showed Moses a tree; Moses threw it into the waters and the waters became sweet or drinkable (Exodus 15:24-25).

This Parable addresses how the tree (the Cross) can heal our bitterness. Many people think of the Christian life more in terms of how it will be when the Lord returns than how it is now. When the Lord returns there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain (Revelation 21:4). Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit will then be complete (Romans 14:17). In the meantime, we will have sorrow in this life, which can lead to bitterness. However, "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). When we feel that all the water we have to drink (spiritually) is bitter, if we remember the Cross in the sense of taking up our Cross, the tree of the Cross can make our water and our circumstances sweet also.

The Lord was merely testing Israel at Marah (Exodus 15:25). Following the healing of the waters, the Lord made a statute and a regulation with His people: "If you will give earnest heed

to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians. For I, the Lord, am your healer” (Exodus 15:26).

Similarly, the Lord tested Israel again and again after they left Marah. Shortly after leaving Marah, and just after leaving Elim, but before arriving at Mt. Sinai, the people grumbled again about inadequate food and longed to go back to Egypt where food was plentiful (Exodus 16:1-3). So the Lord rained down bread from heaven, which was called manna (Exodus 16:4), to test them again. Jesus made the analogy between manna and the Lord’s Supper: “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32-33). “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

The purpose of this testing by the Lord was to reveal what was in their hearts. Without this revelation, healing wasn’t possible. Later, Moses explained all this to the people: “He (the Lord) humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:2). The point of this testing was “to do good for you in the end” (Deuteronomy 8:16).

This also holds true for us⁶. The Lord tests us to strengthen our faith. His desire is that we wait on Him for our provisions and not grumble as Israel did when they were thirsty at Marah and hungry outside of Elim. He made analogies to birds and flowers regarding how simply He wanted us to live (Matthew 6:25-32, Luke 12:22-31). His answer was “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

The Lord’s Discipline: Proverbs 3:11-18

This Reading begins “My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof. For whom the Lord loves, He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12). We see this also in the relationship of God the Father to His Son: At Jesus’ baptism and at the Transfiguration the Father spoke from heaven saying, “This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, 17:5). But yet then He (the Father) laid on His Son the sins of all mankind at the Cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). Approaching the Cross, Jesus was in agony and sweat great drops of blood because of this; and that was even after being strengthened by an angel (Luke 22:43-44). Yet Jesus also approached the Cross as His glorification, knowing that His submitting to the Cross would accomplish a great deal (John 12:23-27).

The story of Job⁷ is another good example of this. Job was described as “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:1). The Lord taunted Satan about Job: “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). Yet the Lord allowed Satan to

⁶ This subject is covered more extensively on the Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross, and in the Gospel lesson for the Third Sunday after Pentecost.

⁷ For more details on Job, see the Study for Holy Week, where different aspects of the life of Job are covered on each day, Monday to Friday.

take away all his worldly goods and to kill his ten children. Job responded to this by saying, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:13-21). After this, Satan was allowed to inflict Job with very painful skin boils. It was so bad that Job’s wife suggested he just “curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). Job, himself, wished he had never been born (Job 3:1-11). As if this weren’t enough, Job’s friends then began talking to him about some “secret sin” that had brought on all this pain and misery (Job 4:7-21, 8:1-6, 11:1-20). These discussions with his friends comprise most of the content of the book of Job.

At the end of the book of Job, we find that Job had grown spiritually because of all the evil (the Cross) that he had to bear. And he was rewarded for that both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:1-17, James 5:11).

After addressing the Lord’s discipline, Solomon (in the reading for Vespers quoted above) switched to Wisdom without missing a beat: “How blessed is the man who finds Wisdom” (Proverbs 3:13). Thus the Lord’s discipline and the Lord’s wisdom are linked. He then went on to say that Wisdom “is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast” (Proverbs 3:18). Today’s Epistle lesson addresses this more directly: “For the Word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the Power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The Cross is Wisdom, as Paul said: “We speak the Wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.” This wisdom “none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

The Glory of the Lord in Zion by the Cross: Isaiah 60:11-16

This passage speaks mostly about the Kingdom of God restored in glory when the Lord returns. At this time, there will no longer be the sun for light by day or the moon by night, “but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory” (Isaiah 60:19). The same description was used by the Apostle John to describe the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23).

There seems to be a few references in this reading to events that already happened also. For example, the bringing in of gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:6) by those from Midian, Ephah and Sheba (descendants of Abraham by Keturah), are often linked to the Magi who visited Jesus as a young child (Matthew 2:1-2).

The dominant theme of this passage, however, is that the wealth of the nations will be brought to Zion (i.e. the New Jerusalem). There is a hint of judgment also: nations not serving the Lord will perish and those nations will be utterly ruined (Isaiah 60:11-12).

Included in the wealth of the nations are three types of trees, which may be a figure for the Trinity. It might help to think of this wealth as “treasure in heaven.” These trees will “beautify the place of My sanctuary and make the place of My feet glorious” (Isaiah 60:13). While the passage states that “the glory of Lebanon will come to you”, notably absent are cedars of Lebanon. In Solomon’s Temple, cedar wood was used extensively for the roof, walls, etc. (1 Kings 6:9-20, 36). Cyprus was used for the floors and the doors to the nave (1 Kings 6:15, 34), where the floors and walls were overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6:30, 20-22). The doors to the inner sanctuary and the

doorposts for the entrance to the nave were olive wood (1 Kings 6:32-33). Yet the three trees mentioned are neither of these.

The three trees representing the wealth of the nations are also mentioned together as being among those that the Lord will cause to grow in the Arabah (Isaiah 41:19). The Arabah is the wilderness region between Israel and the Red Sea where Israel wandered for forty years. It is in this area that numerous monasteries⁸ thrived beginning in the 3rd-4th Century; and some still exist. Archaeologists have discovered over 60 such monasteries just in the Arabah of which a number are still active.

The three trees are (1) the *te'ashshuwr*, thought to be similar to a cedar since the word means straight and erect; (2) the *tidhar*, a hard wood tree, that derives from a word meaning lasting and may be a species of oak; (3) the *berowsh*, which was used for lances and may have been a kind of cypress. These trees are the likely types of trees that would be used as crosses to execute criminals. To be used for that purpose, the tree would have to be tall, straight and strong; but yet one would not want to use a tree like prime cedar and oak, since they are valuable for other purposes. Thus, the crosses used to execute Jesus and other Christians over the first three centuries were probably made from these three types of trees.

These three trees “beautify the place of My sanctuary” because the death and martyrdom of the saints is very precious to the Lord (Psalm 116:15). The monks living in the Arabah fit this description also since their goal has always been to die to themselves and take up their crosses in poverty and humility and prayer imitating the Apostle Paul (Mark 2:20, Luke 5:35, Acts 13:2-3, 14:23, Luke 14:26-28, 1 Corinthians 4:11, 2 Corinthians 11:27).

Making the sign of the Cross

Sometime during the first few centuries it became customary to trace out the outline of the cross on one's face and chest at various occasions. This has been linked with the Greatest Commandment on which hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40). Part of the Greatest Commandment was to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37), but its original statement was with all our heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). These were taken to be equivalent statements (Mark 12:33) and the words from Deuteronomy were part of a Creed⁹ used in the First Century Synagogue worship. Therefore, it became traditional to trace out the outline of the cross on one's head (mind), chest (heart) and shoulders (strength).

John Chrysostom wrote¹⁰ about the Sign of the Cross as a very useful weapon against the forces of evil.

“Let no man therefore be ashamed of the symbols of our salvation, and of the chief of all good things, whereby we live; but as a crown, so let us bear about the cross of Christ. By it all things are done, that are done among us. Whether one is newborn, nourished with that mystical food, ordained, or doing anything else, the cross is there; everywhere our symbol of victory is present. Therefore both on

⁸ Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 1995, pp. 28-37; July/August 1985 pp. 27-41.

⁹ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1994, pp. 245, 101-104.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LIV, 7.

house, and walls, and windows, and upon our forehead, and upon our mind, we inscribe it with much care.”

“This is the sign of our salvation, of our common freedom, and of the goodness of our Lord. ‘As a sheep was He led to the slaughter’ (Isaiah 53:7). When you sign yourself, think of the purpose of the cross, and quench anger, and all the other passions. When you fill your forehead with courage, make your soul free. And you know assuredly what the things that give freedom are. Paul leads us there, to the true freedom, reminding us of the cross and blood of our Lord. ‘For you are bought,’ says he, ‘with a price; do not become the slaves of men’ (1 Corinthians 7:22). Consider, says he, the price that has been paid for you, and you will be a slave to no man; by the ‘price’, he means the Cross.”

“Not merely by the fingers should one to engrave the Cross, but before this by the purpose of the heart with much faith. If in this way you have marked it on your face, none of the unclean spirits will be able to stand near you, seeing the blade whereby he received his wound, seeing the sword, which gave him his mortal stroke. For if we, on seeing the places where criminals are beheaded, shudder, think what the devil must endure, seeing the weapon, whereby Christ put an end to all his power, and cut off the head of the dragon.”

“Be not ashamed then of so great a blessing, lest Christ be ashamed of you, when He comes with His glory, and the sign appears before Him¹¹, shining beyond the sunbeam. For indeed the cross comes then, uttering a voice by its appearance, and pleading with the whole world for our Lord, and signifying that no part of His mission has failed”.

“This sign, both in the days of our forefathers and now, has opened doors that were shut up; this has quenched poisonous drugs; this has taken away the power of hemlock; this has healed bites of venomous beasts. For if it opened the gates of hell, and threw wide the archways of Heaven, and made a new entrance into Paradise, and cut away the nerves of the devil; what marvel, if it prevailed over poisonous drugs, and venomous beasts, and all other such things.”

“Therefore engrave this upon your mind, and embrace the salvation of our souls. For this cross saved and converted the world, drove away error, brought back truth, made earth Heaven, fashioned men into angels. Because of this, the devils are no longer terrible, but contemptible; neither is death, death, but a sleep. Because of this, all that wars against us is cast to the ground, and trodden under foot”.

Use of the Sign of the Cross for Healing

Chrysostom also wrote¹² of the use of the sign of the cross in the context of healing, depending entirely on the mercy of God and not on consultation with sorcerers. This he put in the context of the use of the tongue in describing what we believe:

“Nothing is holier than the tongue, when it gives thanks to God despite evil circumstances; truly in no respect does it fall short of that of martyrs; both are alike crowned. For over this one (the martyr) stands the executioner to force it to deny God by blasphemy; over the other the devil stands torturing it with executioner thoughts, darkening it with despondencies. If then one bears his grief, and gives

¹¹ Chrysostom interprets the “sign” of the Second Coming (Matthew 24:30) as being the Cross.

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, VIII.

thanks, he has gained a crown of martyrdom. For instance, is her little child sick, and does she give God thanks? This is a crown to her. What torture is so bad that despondency is not worse? Still it does not force her to vent forth a bitter word. The child dies: again she has given thanks. She has become the daughter of Abraham. For if she sacrificed, not with her own hand, yet was she pleased with the sacrifice, this is the same; she felt no indignation when the gift was taken away.”

“Again, is her child sick? She has made no amulets. It is counted to her as martyrdom, for she sacrificed her son in her resolve. For even though those amulets are worthless, and a mere cheat and mockery, still there are those who persuaded her that they are available. Yet she chose rather to see her child die, than to put up with idolatry. She then is a martyr, whether it is in her own case, or in her son’s that she has thus acted; if she had done otherwise, she is an idolatress. For it is evident that she would have done sacrifice, had it been allowed her to sacrifice. For these amulets, though they who make money by them are forever rationalizing about them, saying, ‘We call upon God, and do nothing extraordinary’; the thing is idolatry. Are you one of the faithful? Sign the Cross; say, ‘This I have for my only weapon; this for my remedy; and other I know none’. Tell me, if a physician should come, and, neglecting the remedies belonging to his art, should use incantation, should we call that man a physician? By no means! For we see not the medicines of the healing art! So neither, in this case, do we see those of Christianity”.

The Sign of the Cross at the Second Coming

Cyprian of Carthage wrote¹³ of the righteous being “signed” with the sign of the Cross prior to the Second Coming:

“But the Day of Judgment is still future which the Holy Scripture warns about, saying, ‘Howl, for the Day of the Lord is at hand, and destruction from God shall come. The day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and anger, to lay the earth desolate, and to destroy the sinners out of it’ (Isaiah 13:6-9). And again: ‘Behold the day of the Lord comes, burning as an oven; and all the aliens and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord’ (Malachi 4:1). The Lord prophesies that the aliens shall be burned up and consumed; that is, aliens from the divine race, and the profane, those who are not spiritually new born, nor made children of God. For those only can escape who have been new born and signed with the sign of Christ; God says this in another place. When He sends forth His angels to the destruction of the world and the death of the human race, He threatens more terribly in the last time, saying, ‘Go and smite, and let not your eye spare. Have no pity upon old or young. But touch not any man upon whom is written the mark’ (Ezekiel 9:5). Moreover, what this mark is, and in what part of the body it is placed, God sets forth in another place, saying, ‘Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst’ (Ezekiel 9:4). And that the sign pertains to the passion and blood of Christ, and that whoever is found in this sign is kept safe and unharmed, is also proved by God’s testimony, saying, ‘And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses in which you shall be; and I will see the blood, and will protect you, and the plague shall not be

¹³ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, V, 22.

upon you when I smite the land of Egypt' (Exodus 12:13). What previously proceeded by a figure in the slain lamb is fulfilled in Christ, the truth that followed afterwards. As, then, when Egypt was smitten, the Jewish people could not escape except by the blood and the sign of the lamb; so also, when the world shall begin to be desolated and smitten (Ezekiel 9:4, Revelation 7:3, 9:4), whoever is found in the blood and the sign of Christ alone shall escape”.

Cyprian continued¹⁴, “In the Apocalypse: ‘And I saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty and four thousand; and they had His Name and the Name of His Father written on their foreheads’ (Revelation 14:1). Also in the same place (Revelation 22:13, 14): ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have power over the tree of life’”.

Gospel: John 19:6-35

The Gospel lesson is John’s account of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion¹⁵. John was present for at least part of Jesus’ trial before the high priest, since the high priest knew him (John 18:15). He was also present at the crucifixion where Jesus committed the care of His mother to John (John 19:26-27). Yet he did not seem to be afraid of being recognized, as was Peter (John 18:17-18, 25-27).

The Love of God and the Cross

One thing that stands out very emphatically in the Gospel account is the absence of justice on the part of the civil and religious authorities. If anyone was ever innocent, it was Christ; He had not only committed no crime (John 19:4, Luke 23:14-15), but also had committed no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22). Yet the religious authorities arranged false witnesses against Him (Matthew 26:59-60) and beat Him and spit on Him (Matthew 26:67). The civil authorities mocked Him with a scarlet robe, a crown of thorns, a reed for a scepter and spit on Him (vv.2-3, Matthew 27:28-31). Pontius Pilate even had Jesus scourged, bloodying His back, even though Pilate’s wife had warned him from a vision to have nothing to do with Jesus (Matthew 27:19). Yet Pilate refused to stand up for justice even though he found no fault in Jesus (John 19:4) and then delivered Jesus to the mob (John 19:16).

In spite of this injustice, Jesus willingly went to His Cross, knowing that this would happen (Luke 9:22, 18:31-33). He did this because He loved us (Romans 5:8), and this type of love is the greatest kind (John 15:13).

John Chrysostom commented¹⁶ that we should imitate the Master and the Apostles, who tried to save those who crucified Christ. In this regard, faith alone will not save us; we need to exhibit our faith with deeds.

“But let us not merely read of these things, but bear them in mind: the crown of thorns, the robe, the reed, the blows, the smiting on the cheek, the spitting, the irony. These things, if continually meditated on, are sufficient to take down all

¹⁴ Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, XII, ii, 22.

¹⁵ For a more detailed study of these events, see the Study for Good Friday of Holy Week.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXIV, 3.

anger. And if we are mocked, if we suffer injustice, let us still say, ‘the servant is not greater than his Lord’ (John 13:16). For on this account He bore all these things in order that we might walk in His footsteps, and endure this mocking which disturbs more than any other kind of reproach. Yet nevertheless, He not only bore these things, but also used every means to deliver from the appointed punishment those who did them. For He sent the Apostles for their salvation, and you hear them saying, ‘We know that you did it in ignorance’ (Acts 3:17, see also 3:25-26); and by these means drawing them to repentance. This let us also imitate.”

“All these things, therefore, let us practice in our actions; for if we do not act rightly in these, we have come to no purpose and in vain into the world. Or rather we have come to our harm, for faith is not sufficient to bring men into the Kingdom. It even has power in this way most to condemn those who exhibit a sick life. For ‘that servant who knew His Master’s Will and did not prepare himself or do according to His Will, shall be beaten with many stripes’ (Luke 12:47). And again, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin’ (John 15:22). What excuse then shall we have, who have been set within the palace and deemed worthy to enter into the sanctuary, and have been made partakers of the mysteries?”

Propitiation for our Sins

Propitiation is the term describing what the Old Testament animal sacrifices were all about. The life of the animal was in the blood, and it was the blood that made an atonement or propitiation for the soul (Leviticus 17:11). This was also true in the days of Noah when God told man to begin eating meat, but not blood. He also specified the death penalty for anyone shedding another’s blood (Genesis 9:3-6). Blood for a sacrifice was performed as early as Abel’s offering (Genesis 4:4), and probably also prior to Abel’s birth where the Lord used the skins of the sacrificed animals to make clothing for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21).

This propitiation is graphically illustrated by the Passover in Egypt. When the Lord saw the blood of the Lamb on the doors of the Israelites, He passed over their houses (Exodus 12:13, 23, 29). The Egyptians, who did not have the blood of the lamb for propitiation, died themselves.

In the New Testament, Hebrews states that Christ was “made like His brethren to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17). That is, He “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). In His humanity, He was fully human; thus He was able to make propitiation as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19). This propitiation illustrates the love of God for man (1 John 4:10).

The Effect of the Blood of Christ

The Covenant relationship between God and His people in the Old Testament has been called “a covenant of blood” (Hebrews 9:20). When the Tabernacle was built and consecrated, both the tabernacle, the vessels inside, the book of the Law and the people were sprinkled with blood (Hebrews 9:19-21). “And according to the Law, almost all things are purified with blood; and without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

Yet the Tabernacle made by Moses was just a copy of the one in heaven. Christ purified the Heavenly Tabernacle with His own blood (Hebrews 9:23), which was a better sacrifice than that of the animals offered continually. “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many”; and “once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:28, 26). The blood of Christ, then:

- Purchased the Church (Acts 20:28)
- Redeemed us (Ephesians 1:7, Revelation 1:5)
- Brought us near to God (Ephesians 2:13)
- Made peace and reconciled us to God (Colossians 1:20)
- Justified us (Romans 5:9)

There are three that bear witness to this in heaven: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There are also three that bear witness on earth: The Spirit, the water and the blood (1 John 5:7-8). The Spirit bears witness that we are children of God and that we are not under bondage (Romans 8:14-17). Christ came by water and blood, (1 John 5:6) and the water that witnesses to this is living water (John 4:14, 7:38) and is also called the water of Life (Revelation 22:17). The blood also speaks and bears witness. If the blood of Abel could speak from the ground (Genesis 4:10, Hebrews 11:4), the blood of Christ can speak much better and more effectively (Hebrews 12:24) as a witness to these things.

In this regard, the Lord had said that unless one eats His flesh and drinks His blood, one has no life in him. Doing so brings eternal life and resurrection at the last day (John 6:53-54). The Lord’s Supper, then, is a sharing or communion in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16).

The Glory of the Cross

There was a glory in the Cross for Christ, and another glory in the Cross for us. Hilary of Poitiers summarized¹⁷ how the Father glorified His Son at the Crucifixion, using the sun, the stars and the earth. This was foolishness to the world’s philosophers. Because of this, we, as Christians, understand things that are incomprehensible to the wise in this world.

“Christ said, ‘Father the hour is come; glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You’ (John 17:1). He said this to strengthen His disciples, at the time of His passion. He prayed to be glorified by the Father, that He Himself may glorify the Father. But what does He mean? Does One who is about to give glory look to receive it? Does Christ, who is about to confer honor, make request for Himself? Is He lacking the very thing, which He is about to repay? Let the world’s philosophers, the wise men of Greece, harass us and spread their syllogistic nets to entangle the truth. Let them ask how, when and why? When they can find no answer, let us tell them that it is because God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). That is the reason why we, in our foolishness, understand things incomprehensible to the world’s philosophers”.

“How was the Son to be glorified? He had been born of a virgin; from cradle and childhood He had grown to man’s estate; through sleep, hunger, thirst, weariness and tears, He had lived man’s life. Now He was about to be spit on, scourged and crucified. These things were ordained for our assurance that in Christ

¹⁷ Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity, III, 10-11.

is pure man. But the shame of the cross is not ours; we are not sentenced to the scourge, nor defiled by spitting. The Father glorified the Son by what followed. The sun, instead of setting, fled; it did not retire behind a cloud, but abandoned its appointed orbit. All the elements of the world felt that same shock of the death of Christ. The stars in their courses, to avoid complicity in the crime, escaped by self-extinction from beholding the scene. The earth quivered beneath the burden of the Lord hanging on the tree, protesting that it was powerless to confine Him who was dying. Yet surely rock and stone will not refuse Him a resting-place. They are torn and cut apart, and their strength fails. They must confess that the rock-hewn sepulcher cannot imprison the Body which awaits its burial”.

“The centurion of the cohort, the guardian of the cross, cries out, ‘Truly this was the Son of God’ (Matthew 27:54). Creation is set free by the mediation of this Sin-offering; the rocks lose their solidity and strength. They who had nailed Him to the cross confess that truly this is the Son of God. The outcome justifies the assertion. The Lord had said, ‘Glorify Your Son’. He had asserted, by that word ‘Your, that He was God’s Son not in name only, but in nature. Multitudes of us are sons of God; He is Son in another sense. For He is God’s true and own Son, by origin and not by adoption, not by name only but in truth, born and not created. After He was glorified, that confession touched the truth; the centurion confessed Him the true Son of God, that no believer might doubt a fact which even the servant of His persecutors could not deny”.

How there is glory in the Cross for us was illustrated by John Chrysostom, when he spoke¹⁸ of the glory of the Cross among the Apostles right after Pentecost. Because everyone had humbled themselves and donated everything he possessed to the common cause, there was great power and grace in their midst.

“Observe, even the Apostles, after the prayer at Pentecost, are ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:4). ‘And the multitudes of them that believed’ (Acts 4:32). Great, you perceive, is the virtue of this thing, seeing there was need of this grace even in that Company! This is the foundation of all that is good, this of which he now for the second time makes mention, exhorting all men to the contempt of riches. ‘Neither said any of them that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things common’ (Acts 4:32). For that this was in consequence not merely of the miraculous signs, but of their own purpose, is manifest by the case of Sapphira and Ananias. ‘And with great power gave the Apostles witness’ (Acts 4:33). Not in word, but with power the Apostles exhibited their testimony of the Resurrection, just as Paul said, ‘And my preaching was not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but with manifestation of the Spirit and of power’. And it is not merely, with power, but ‘with great power’ (1 Corinthians 2:4). ‘And great grace was upon them all; for neither was there any among them that lacked (Acts 4:34). This is why the grace was upon them all, for ‘there was none that lacked; that is, from the exceeding ardor of the givers, none was in want. They did not give in part, and in part reserve; nor yet in giving all, did they give it as their own. And they lived moreover in great abundance; they removed all inequality from among them, and made a goodly order. And with great respect they did this; for they did not

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XI.

presume to give into their hands, nor did they ostentatiously present it, but brought to the Apostles' feet. To them they left it to be the dispensers, made them the owners, that thenceforth all should be defrayed as from common, not from private, property. This was also helpful to them against vainglory”.

The Word of the Cross

Revision C

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

What is the Word of the Cross?

The “Word of the Cross” is a literal translation of 1 Corinthians 1:18, which is often mistranslated “the message of the Cross.” In Greek, the word *logos* is used, just as in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” Other Greek words existed that mean message, such as *rhema*: a message or matter, and *kerugma*: a message or proclamation. For example, while Peter was speaking to Cornelius, the text reads, “While Peter was still speaking this message (*rhema*), the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the Word (*logos*).” One can listen to a message (*rhema*) of this life (Acts 5:20) and not hear the Word, depending on the condition of one’s heart.

Thus, the Word of the Cross is not just a message; it is part of the fabric of Christianity. If one misses the Word, one misses God. If one misses the Word of the Cross, one misses God’s ways.

Foolishness and Weakness

The word translated “foolishness” (Greek *moria* which comes from *moraino* meaning foolish or moronic) could also be translated “moronic behavior” and is the root of the English word “moronic.” To many people who see only the world’s viewpoint, it may seem moronic that we put all our hope for life and being in the teachings of a crucified Jew!

The Chief Priests, Scribes and elders mocked Jesus on the Cross saying, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’ “ (Matthew 27:42-43). How can it be reasonable that this crucified Jew is the answer to all the world’s problems?

John Chrysostom compared¹⁹ Christ on the Cross, with the Three Children in the fire (Daniel 3:16-25) and with Jonah in the belly of the sea monster (Jonah 2).

“If the Three Children did not enter the fire, it would not have been so astonishing as their having entered and trampled on the fire. For Jonah, it was a greater thing by far, after the sea monster swallowed him, to suffer no harm, than if he had not been swallowed at all. For Christ, His remaining alive would not have been so inconceivable as that having died, He should loose the bonds of death. He did not come down from the Cross for He was hastening on to close conflict with death himself. He descended not from the Cross, not because He could not, but because He would not”.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 3.

Those who are perishing do not understand this. As Chrysostom stated²⁰, those who are sick often cannot handle normal food and friends.

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“To the sick and gasping, even wholesome meats are unpleasant, friends and relatives are burdensome, and sometimes not even recognized, but accounted intruders. Much like this often is the case of those who are perishing in their souls. For the things, which tend to salvation they don’t know; and those about them, who care for them, they consider to be troublesome. Now this ensues not from the nature of the thing, but from their disease. And just what the insane do, hating those who take care of them, and besides reviling them; the same is the case with unbelievers also. Don’t be troubled, therefore, for it is not a strange event, that things truly great are mocked by those who are beside themselves”.

But the wisdom of the world was unwilling to discover God. Therefore God “employed what seemed to be foolishness, i.e. the Gospel, to persuade men; not by reasoning but by faith. For to believe on Him that was crucified and buried, and to be fully persuaded that this Person Himself both rose again and sat down on high; this needed not wisdom, nor reasoning²¹, but faith. For the Apostles themselves came in not by wisdom, but by faith, and surpassed the heathen wise men in wisdom and loftiness. This transcends all human understanding (since they were uneducated fishermen)”.

This is what Paul meant by “destroying the wisdom of the wise” (v.19, Isaiah 29:14). Chrysostom stated²²,

“The wise are not profited at all by wisdom, nor the unlearned injured at all by ignorance. For the shepherd and the rustic will more quickly receive this, once for all both repressing all doubting thoughts and delivering himself to the Lord. In this way then, He destroyed wisdom”.

Similarly He “made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 1:20). Chrysostom stated²³

“He has shown the wisdom of the world foolish in regards to receiving the faith. Since they prided themselves on wisdom, He lost no time in exposing it. What sort of wisdom is it, when it cannot discover the chief things that are good?”

Paul spoke a lot about foolishness and weakness, contrasting the world with the things of God. Paul stated, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). This way of doing things was exactly opposite to that of some of the 1st Century heretics, like Simon Magus, who had an exalted ego.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 1.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 2.

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 4.

John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that Christ's power was not affected by His taking on human weakness. In Paul's statements on weakness and foolishness, he expresses how unbelievers see things, and shows how it is an illusion.

“Though He chose to endure something, which seems to carry a notion of weakness, still this in no way breaks in upon His Power. His power still remains invincible, and what He endured has not harmed it, but shows His Power most of all, in that He endured such a thing, and yet His Power was not mutilated. Let not the expression ‘weakness’ disturb you; for elsewhere he says, ‘The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’ (1 Corinthians 1:25). Although in God is nothing either foolish or weak, but Paul called the Cross so, as setting forth how the unbelieving regard it. Hear him interpreting himself. ‘For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:18). And again, ‘But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24). And again, ‘But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him’ (1 Corinthians 2:14). Observe, how in every place he expresses the conception of the unbelieving, who look upon the Cross as foolishness and weakness. Here he does not mean real ‘weakness’, but what was suspected to be such with the unbelieving. He does not say that because He was weak He was crucified. He had it in His power not to have been crucified, and He showed this throughout. For example, when He cast men down prostrate (John 18:6), turned back the beams of the sun (Mark 15:33), withered a fig tree (Matthew 21:18-21), blinded their eyes that came against Him (John 18:4-8), etc. Although He was crucified after enduring peril and treachery, yet still He was not harmed thereby”.

Jerome compared²⁵ the wisdom of his day with the wisdom of God, and showed that the wisdom of the world comes in a distant second. With the wisdom of God, the untrained fishermen became more eloquent than the philosophers of their day. This wisdom of God was also available to the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs.

“Peter and John were not ignorant; they could say of themselves, ‘I am unlearned in speech, yet not in knowledge’ (Acts 4:13). Was John a mere fisherman, and untaught? If so, where did he get the words, ‘In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God’ (John 1:1). *Logos* in Greek has many meanings. It signifies word, reason, reckoning and the cause of individual things, by which everything that exists subsists. All of these things we rightly predicate of Christ. This truth Plato with all his learning did not know; of this Demosthenes²⁶ with all his eloquence was ignorant. ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent’ (1 Corinthians 1:19). The true wisdom must displace the false, and the foolishness of preaching is inseparable from the Cross. Paul speaks ‘wisdom among them that are perfect (Colossians 1:28), yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XXIX, 3.

²⁵ Jerome, Letter to Paulinus, LIII, 4.

²⁶ Demosthenes was an Athenian orator and statesman of the 4th Century BC, contemporary with Plato.

this world that come to nothing'. He speaks 'the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world' (1 Corinthians 2:7). God's wisdom is Christ, for Christ, we are told, is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24). He is the wisdom which is hidden in a mystery, of which also we read in the heading of the 9th Psalm 'for the hidden things of the son'. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He who was hidden in a mystery is the same that was foreordained before the world. Now it was in the Law and in the Prophets that he was foreordained and prefigured. For this reason the prophets were called seers, because they saw Him whom others did not see. Abraham saw His day and was glad (John 8:56). The heavens, which were sealed to a rebellious people, were opened to Ezekiel. 'Open my eyes', said David, 'that I may behold wonderful things out of your Law' (Psalm 119:18). For 'the Law is spiritual' and we need a revelation to enable us to comprehend it, just as when God uncovers His face, we need a revelation to behold His glory".

Tertullian, in refuting the heretic Marcion's concept of God, pointed out²⁷ that God has intentionally chosen the foolish and weak things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. Marcion's god did not do this.

The 'stumbling block' which he declares Christ to be 'to the Jews' (1 Corinthians 1:23), points unmistakably to the Creator's prophecy respecting Him, when by Isaiah He says, 'Behold I lay in Zion stone of stumbling and a rock of offense' (Isaiah 8:14-15). This stone or rock is Christ. This stumbling stone Marcion still retains. Now, what is that 'foolishness of God which is wiser than men' (1 Corinthians 1:25), but the cross and death of Christ? What is that 'weakness of God which is stronger than men', but the nativity and incarnation of God? If, however, Christ was not born of the Virgin, was not constituted of human flesh, and thereby really suffered neither death nor the cross there was nothing in Him either of foolishness or weakness; nor is it any longer true, that 'God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'. For nothing in the dispensation of God is found to be ignoble and contemptible. Such only occurs in man's arrangement. The Old Testament itself can be charged with foolishness, weakness, dishonor and contempt. What is more foolish and weaker than God's requirement of bloody sacrifices? What is weaker than the cleansing of vessels and of beds? What more dishonorable than the discoloration of the reddening skin? (Leviticus 13:2-6) The whole of the Old Testament, the heretic (i.e. Marcion), holds in derision. For God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound its wisdom. Marcion's god has no such discipline, because he does not take after the Creator in the process of confusing opposites by their opposites, so that 'no flesh shall glory; but, as it is written, He that glories, let him glory in the Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Tertullian also stated²⁸ that such basic Christian teachings as the creation of the world out of nothing, the resurrection of the dead and the virgin birth are foolishness to the worldly

²⁷ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, V, 5.

²⁸ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 5, 19.

philosophies. The philosophers, the heretics and the heathen stand together against the Church on these matters.

“Paul warns them to ‘beware of subtle words and philosophy’ (Colossians 2:8), as being ‘a vain deceit’, such as is ‘after the basic principles of the world²⁹’. It would be tedious to show how in this sentence all heresies are condemned, on the ground of their consisting of the resources of subtle speech and the rules of philosophy. But let Marcion know that the principle term of his creed comes from the school of Epicurus³⁰, implying that the Lord is stupid and indifferent; wherefore he refuses to say that He is an object to be feared. Moreover, from the porch of the Stoics³¹ he brings out *matter*, and places it on a par with the Divine Creator. He also denies the resurrection of the flesh, — a truth which none of the schools of philosophy hold. But how remote is our (Catholic) truth from the artifices of this heretic. We firmly believe that (1) He produced all things out of nothing, (2) He promised to us a restoration from the grave of the same flesh that died, and (3) Christ was born of the virgin’s womb! At this, philosophers, heretics, and the heathen, laugh and jeer. ‘God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise!’ Thanks to this simplicity of truth, so opposed to the subtlety and vain deceit of philosophy, we cannot possibly have any relish for their perverse opinions”.

The Deity of Christ

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians has been a key factor in addressing some of the major heresies in the Church that have to do with the Deity of Christ. This began in the 1st Century, where a major influence in the Church was the teachings of Simon Magus and his followers – which included four of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20), who apostatized³². Simon was so celebrated and influential in his heresy that Emperor Claudius erected a statue of Simon along the Tiber River in Rome with the inscription, “To Simon, the Holy God”. One aspect of Simon’s heresy was that there was no bodily resurrection, and this teaching had gotten to Corinth. Paul stated to the Corinthians, “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Corinthians 15:12) Paul had just been in Corinth three years earlier performing incredible miracles and teaching about the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). Peter and Apollos had been there in the interim preaching the same thing! How was it that some of the Corinthians quit believing in the Resurrection? The answer is that Simon Magus was an extremely influential person, and he supported his teachings with his knowledge of the black arts, making it seem that he was performing incredible miracles just like the Apostles. Paul’s answer to the heresy in Corinth is important in that the same words

²⁹ By “the world”, Tertullian understands thereby worldly learning, and “the tradition of men”, subtle in their speech and their philosophy.

³⁰ Epicurius was a Greek philosopher of the 4th to 3rd Century BC who subscribed to a hedonistic ethic that considered an imperturbable emotional calm to be the highest good. He held that intellectual pleasures are superior to all others and renounced momentary pleasures in favor of more permanent pleasures.

³¹ The Stoics were founded by Zeno of Citium about 300 BC. They taught that the wise man should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submissive to natural law. Like others of the Greek philosophers, they also taught that matter was eternal, thus putting matter on a par with Christ.

³² For further study on the life and teachings of Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2003.

that Paul used to address these heresies were used again and again to address the heresies in later centuries, and especially during the Arian controversy of the 4th Century.

A common denominator both for Simon's heresies and those of Arius was the Deity of Christ. If one doesn't have this right, a whole flock of foul spirits congregates around whatever takes its place. In order to understand better what Paul was saying to Corinth, it is useful to look at how later writers used Paul's words to address the heresies of their day.

Gregory of Nyssa, speaking³³ against the heretic Eunomius³⁴ in the 4th Century, stated that for Eunomius to say that Christ was a created being implied that the Father also was a created being. Since Christ is the wisdom and power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), the Father would have had no wisdom or power prior to His creation of Christ. This kind of thinking degenerates into either atheism or a created god.

"Eunomius' stated, concerning Christ, 'He was not, before His own generation'. Let him declare the Divine Names by which He Who, 'once was not', is called. He will say, 'light', 'blessedness', 'life', 'incorruptibility', 'righteousness', 'sanctification', 'no power', 'truth', and the like. Eunomius proclaims that when He 'was not', there was no truth, no life, no light, no power, no incorruptibility, no other of those pre-eminent qualities which are conceived of Him. What is still more marvelous and still more difficult for impiety to face, there was no 'brightness' and no 'express image'. In saying that there was no brightness, there is surely also the non-existence of the radiating power, as one may see in the illustration of the lamp. For he who speaks of the ray of the lamp indicates also that the lamp shines, and he who says that the ray 'is not', signifies also the extinction of that which gives light. So that when the Son is said 'not to be', a necessary consequence is the non-existence of the Father. For if the one is related to the other by way of conjunction, according to the Apostolic testimony — the 'brightness' to the 'glory', the 'express image' to the 'Person', the 'Wisdom' to God — he who says that one of the things so conjoined 'is not', surely by his abolition of the one abolishes also that which remains. So that if the 'brightness was not', it is acknowledged that neither did the illuminating nature exist; and if the 'express image' (Hebrews 1:3) had no existence, neither did the Person imaged exist. If the wisdom and power of God 'was not', He also was not, Who cannot be conceived without wisdom and power".

"If, then, the Only-begotten God, as Eunomius says, 'was not before His generation', and Christ is 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24), and the 'express image' and the 'brightness', neither did the Father exist, Whose power and wisdom and express image and brightness the Son is. It is not possible to conceive by reason either a Person without express image, glory without radiance, God without wisdom, a Maker without hands, a Beginning without the Word, or a Father without a Son. All such things, alike by those who confess and by those who deny, are clearly declared to be in mutual union, and by the abolition of one the other also disappears with it. Let these men who are overly wise consider that they are supporters of the Epicurean doctrines, preaching atheism under the

³³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VIII, 5.

³⁴ Eunomius was an Arian Bishop of Cyzicus in the 4th Century.

guise of Christianity. Now since the logical consequence is shown to be one of two absurdities, either (1) that we should say that God does not exist at all, or (2) that we should say that His being was created, let them choose which they like of the two courses before them. Either they can be called atheist, or they can say that the essence of the Father is created. They would avoid, I suppose, being reckoned atheists. It remains, therefore, that they maintain that God is not eternal”.

Ambrose of Milan stated³⁵ that the Father is seen in the Son, and that this is how Christ showed the Father to the Apostle Philip. This “image of God” is not composed of body color or modeled in wax, but is drawn from the fountainhead of the Father.

“The prophets say, ‘In Your light we shall see light’ (Psalm 36:9); and again, ‘Wisdom is the brightness of everlasting light, and the spotless mirror of God’s majesty, the image of His goodness’ (Hebrews 1:3). ‘Brightness’, because in the Son the Father’s glory shines clearly; ‘spotless mirror’, because the Father is seen in the Son; ‘image of goodness’, because it is not one body seen reflected in another, but the whole power of the Godhead in the Son. The word ‘image’ teaches us that there is no difference; ‘expression’, that He is the counterpart of the Father’s form; and ‘brightness’ declares His eternity. The ‘image’ is not that of a bodily countenance, not one made up of colors, nor modeled in wax, but simply derived from God, coming out from the Father, drawn from the fountainhead”.

“By means of this image, the Lord showed Philip the Father, saying, ‘Philip, he that sees Me, sees the Father also. How then do you say, “Show us the Father?” Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?’” He who looks upon the Son sees, in portrait, the Father. Note what manner of portrait is spoken of! It is Truth, Righteousness, the Power of God. It is not dumb, for it is the Word; not insensible, for it is Wisdom; not vain and foolish, for it is Power; not soulless, for it is the Life; not dead, for it is the Resurrection. You see, then, that while an image is spoken of, the meaning is that it is the Father, Whose image the Son is, seeing that no one can be his own image”.

Gregory of Nyssa stated³⁶ that the Father, without the Son has neither existence nor Name. Anyone who imagines such either sees nothing or sees evil.

“Inasmuch as the Lord, Who is the Truth, is God, and is in the Father and is one with the Father, there is no room in the true doctrine for distinctions of phrases. For he, who truly believes in the One, sees in the One Him, Who is completely united with Him in truth, deity, essence, life, wisdom, and in all attributes whatsoever. If he does not see in the One, Him Who is all these, it is in nothing that he believes. For without the Son the Father has neither existence nor Name, any more than the Powerful without Power, or the Wise without Wisdom. For Christ is ‘the Power of God and the Wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24). He who imagines he sees the One God apart from power, truth, wisdom, life, or the true light, either sees nothing at all or else sees that which is evil. For the withdrawal of the good attributes becomes the origin of evil”.

³⁵ Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, I, vii, 49-50.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II, 4.

Gregory of Nyssa also stated³⁷ that God created all things without the benefit of any pre-existing matter or instruments. The power and wisdom of God has no need of external assistance.

“We know that the Word is the Creator of matter, producing with the matter the qualities of matter. For Him, the impulse of His almighty will was everything and produced matter, instrument, place, time, essence, quality, everything that is conceived in creation. For at one and the same time did He will that everything should be, and His power that produced all things that are, kept pace with His will, turning His will into act. Thus Moses instructs us about the Divine power, ascribing the production of each of the objects of the creation to the words that created them. For ‘God said, Let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1:3); and so about the rest, without any mention either of matter or of any instrumental agency. Accordingly the language of Eunomius on this point is not to be rejected. For God, when creating all things that have their origin by creation, did not need any matter on which to operate, nor any instruments to aid Him in His construction; for the power and wisdom of God has no need of any external assistance. But Christ is ‘the Power of God and the Wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24), by Whom all things were made and without Whom is no existent thing (Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:11). If, then, he made all things both visible and invisible, and if His will alone suffices to create all existing things (for His will is power), Eunomius utters our doctrine though with a loose mode of expression. For what instrument and what matter could He, Who upholds all things by the word of His power, need in upholding the constitution of existing things by His almighty word? But if Eunomius maintains that what we have believed to be true of the Only-begotten in the case of the creation, is true also in the sense that the Father created Him in like manner as the creation was made by the Son, then we retract our former statement, because such a supposition is a denial of the Godhead of the Only-begotten”.

John Chrysostom pointed out³⁸ that while Christ is called “the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), yet not always where “the power” and “the wisdom of God” are mentioned is Christ meant. Such statements could also refer to the Holy Spirit.

Basil referred³⁹ to the heretics of his day, who claimed that the references to Christ sitting at the Right Hand of the Father imply a lesser position or an inferior being. Basil stated that this is not the case, but represents the use of dignified language to indicate the seat of honor.

“The expression ‘right hand’ does not, as they contend, indicate the lower place, but equality of relation. It is not understood physically, but Scripture puts before us the magnificence of the dignity of the Son by the use of dignified language indicating the seat of honor. It is left then for our opponents to allege that this expression signifies inferiority of rank. Let them learn that ‘Christ is the power of God and wisdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 1:24), and that ‘He is the image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15) and ‘the brightness of his glory’ (Hebrews 1:3), and that ‘Him has God the Father sealed’ (John 6:27), by engraving Himself on Him. Are we to call these passages, and others like them, throughout the whole of

³⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, Against Eunomius, II, 7.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, V, 1.

³⁹ Basil, On the Spirit, VI, 15.

Holy Scripture, proofs of humiliation, or rather public proclamations of the majesty of the Only Begotten, and of the equality of His glory with the Father? We ask them to listen to the Lord Himself, distinctly setting forth the equal dignity of His glory with the Father, in His words:

1. 'He that has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9);
2. 'When the Son cometh in the glory of his Father' (Mark 8:38);
3. That they 'should honor the Son even as they honor the Father' (John 5:23);
4. 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father' (John 1:14);
5. 'The Only Begotten God which is in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18).

Of all these passages they take no account, and then assign to the Son the place set apart for His foes. A father's bosom is a fit and becoming seat for a son, but the place of the footstool is for them that have to be forced to submit".

John of Damascus pointed out⁴⁰ that if there was a time when the Father existed without the Son, there was a time when He was not the Father.

"When we say He was before all the ages we show that His birth is without time or beginning; for the Son of God was not brought into being out of nothing. He is the effulgence of the glory, the impress of the Father's subsistence, the living wisdom and power, the Word possessing interior subsistence, the essential and perfect and living image of the unseen God. But always He was with the Father and in Him, everlastingly and without beginning begotten of Him. For there never was a time when the Father was and the Son was not, but always the Father and always the Son, Who was begotten of Him, existed together. He could not have received the name Father apart from the Son. If He were without the Son, He could not be the Father; and if He thereafter had the Son, thereafter He became the Father, not having been the Father prior to this, and He was changed from that which was not the Father to become the Father".

Athanasius of Alexandria stated⁴¹ that it is important to know that Christ became man, rather than coming to take up temporary residence in man like He did in Old Testament times.

"From the Gospels one will perceive that the Lord became man; for 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). He became man, and did not come into man. This it is necessary to know, lest irreligious men fall into this notion, and beguile others into thinking, that, as in Old Testament times, when the Word used to come into each of the saints, so now He took up temporary residence in a man, hallowed him, and thus showed Himself. For if this were so, and He only appeared in a man, it was not unusual; and those who saw Him would not have been startled, saying, 'Where is He from?' (John 9:29-34) and 'Why do You, being a man, make Yourself God?' (John 10:33) They were familiar with the idea, from the words, 'And the Word of the Lord came' to this or that of the Prophets. But now, the Word of God, by whom all things came to be, endured to become also Son of man, and humbled Himself, taking a servant's form (Philippians 2:7). Therefore

⁴⁰ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I, 8.

⁴¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, III, xxvi, 30.

to the Jews the Cross of Christ is a scandal, but to us Christ is ‘God’s power’ and ‘God’s wisdom’ (1 Corinthians 1:24) for ‘the Word became flesh’”.

Ambrose of Milan stated⁴² that the act of becoming does not imply an act of creation as applied to Christ. Christ “became” our refuge and our salvation, even though He existed from eternity with the Father.

“Becoming does not always imply creation; for we read, Lord, You have become our refuge’ (Psalm 90:1 LXX), and ‘You have become my salvation’ (Psalm 118:14). Plainly, here is no statement of the fact of a creation, but God is said to have become my ‘refuge’ and have turned to my ‘salvation’, even as the Apostle has said, ‘Who became for us Wisdom from God, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption’ (1 Corinthians 1:30). That is, Christ was ‘made’ for us, of the Father, not created. Again, the writer has explained in the sequel in what sense he says that Christ was made Wisdom for us. ‘But we preach the Wisdom of God in doctrine of mystery, which Wisdom is hidden, foreordained by God before the existence of the world (1 Peter 1:20, Ephesians 1:4, Colossians 1:26-27) for our glory, and which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known they would never have crucified the Lord of glory’” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

⁴² Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith*, III, v, 35-36.