

# The High Calling

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## The Crux of the Matter

By Stan Key

What is the greatest danger to the church today? In answering such a question, one thinks immediately of external threats such as militant Islam, gay activism, moral relativism, government interventionism, etc. The New Testament seems to indicate, however, that the greatest threats to the church arise from the *inside* rather than the outside; inner rot is more deadly than external pressure. The greatest danger to the church is for the gospel of Jesus to be diluted and polluted in such a way that it becomes a deadly poison for all who drink it. As one of my professors in seminary used to say, “A half-truth is more dangerous than a lie.”

This was the situation that Paul faced when he wrote the book of Galatians. Although government persecution, moral temptations, and the lure of other religions were all bringing external pressure, these were not the focus



of Paul’s concern. The gospel was being perverted—from the inside—in a way that threatened the very foundations of the church.

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is*

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## The Scar Issue

By Stephen Seamands



Professor of Christian doctrine at Asbury Theological Seminary, Seamands is an author and speaker on such issues as emotional healing and spiritual renewal. This article is an abridgement of Chapter 10, “Radiant Scars,” in his book, *Wounds that Heal: Bringing Our Hurts to the Cross* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003: 165–70). Used by permission.

The March 27, 2000, issue of *Newsweek* featured as its cover story an article titled, “Visions of Jesus: How Jews, Muslims and Buddhists View Him.” Though people practicing these religions do not consider Christ to be the unique Son of God, as Christians do, the article showed how greatly Jesus is revered and admired in all the world’s major religions.

Muslims, for example, recognize Jesus as a great prophet. They even believe he was born of a virgin and ascended into heaven. Jews have gained greater admiration for Jesus in recent centuries, viewing him as a reformer within Judaism who sought to liberalize his own religious tradition. Although they find his notion of a single god unnecessarily restrictive, Hindus also view Jesus as a virtuous man. Like Mahatma Gandhi, many

Hindus are drawn to Jesus because of his compassion for others and his commitment to nonviolence. Buddhists are quick to point out similarities between the stories of Jesus and Buddha. Many Buddhists regard Jesus, like Buddha, as a perfectly enlightened being who sought to help others find enlightenment.

Yet having clearly shown the universal appeal of Jesus by observing him in the mirrors of Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, the article reached an unexpected conclusion. Instead of suggesting that the universal admiration of Jesus may serve as a bridge in uniting Christianity with the other major world religions, it focused on the central element in the Christian view of Jesus that creates a stumbling block for them all: his violent death on the cross. As the article put it: “Clearly, the cross is what separates the Christ of Christianity from every other Jesus.”

Attributing crucial significance to Christ’s agonizing, shameful death is unique to Christianity. Unlike other world religions, which reject or downplay his death,

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# The Divine Dilemma

By Ken Gire



Ken Gire is the author of more than twenty books. In his book, *Windows of the Soul: Experiencing God in New Ways* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996: 123–28), Kire tells how seeing the movie “Camelot” as a young Christian in 1969 helped him for the first time to really understand the meaning of the cross.

Two of the greatest love stories ever told. The one, at Camelot; the other, at Calvary. Two of the noblest kings ever to live. The one, King Arthur; the other, King of the Jews. The one is adorned with a jeweled crown; the other, with a crown of thorns. The comparisons and contrasts between Camelot and Calvary are many, but one scene from Camelot illustrates a great theological dilemma that only the cross could resolve.

Prior to his appointment with destiny on the brow of that fateful hill, Jesus agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Lk. 22:42). Understand, on an emotional level, that this is the pleading of a son to his father. If your child came to you in such agony, wouldn’t you do everything within your power to grant the request? But this father, this time, didn’t respond as expected. And that’s the theological rub. He denied the request of his son, his only son, his beloved son. In Gethsemane, that son was asking: “Is there no other way?” The son is betrayed, arrested, deserted, denied, beaten, tried, mocked, and finally crucified. Tacitly, the father answers: “No, there is no other way.”

But why? Why was there no other way?

We find the answer to that question in a scene from Camelot, where the adulterous relationship between Queen Guenevere and Arthur’s most trusted knight, Sir Lancelot, has divided the Round Table. When the scheming Mordred catches them in a clandestine encounter, Lancelot escapes. Guenevere is not so fortunate. She faces a trial. The jury finds her guilty and sentences her to the flame.

As the day of execution nears, people come from miles around

with one question in their minds: Would the king let her die? Mordred gleefully captures the complexity of Arthur’s predicament:

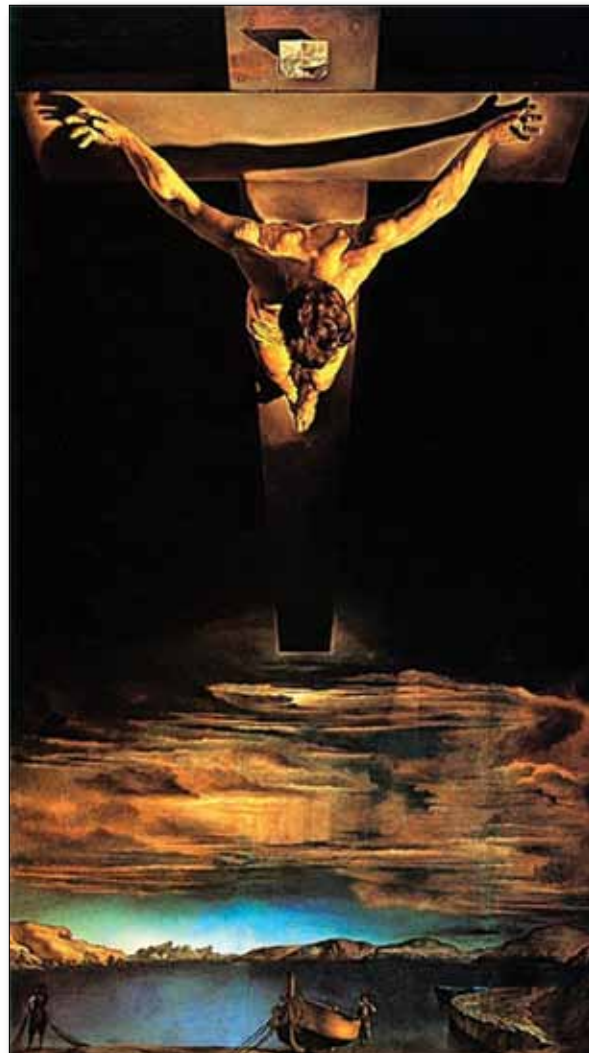
*Arthur! What a magnificent dilemma!  
Let her die, your life is over;  
Let her live, your life’s a fraud.  
Which will it be, Arthur?  
Do you kill the queen or kill the law?”*

The fact that Arthur was Guenevere’s husband, and, at the same time, her king, created the dilemma. If he carries out the sentence, he upholds the law and validates himself to be a just and impartial king. Yet, in doing so, he calls into question his love. His heart tells him to set her free. If he did, it would certainly remove any doubt of his love. But by bending justice and showing partiality, he would call into question his right to rule. Tragically but resolutely, Arthur decides: “Treason has been committed! The jury has ruled! Let justice be done!”

High from the castle window stands Arthur, as Guenevere enters the courtyard. She walks to her unlit stake, where the executioner stands with waiting torch. Arthur turns away, emotion brimming in his eyes. A herald mounts the tower where Arthur has withdrawn: “The queen is at the stake, Your Majesty. Shall I signal the torch?” Arthur is devastated. Again the herald calls, this time with greater urgency. But the king cannot answer. Arthur’s love for Guenevere spills from his broken heart: “I can’t! I can’t! I can’t let her die!”

Seeing Arthur crumble, Mordred relishes the moment: “Well, you’re human after all, aren’t you, Arthur? Human and helpless.” Tragically, Arthur realizes the truth of Mordred’s remark. Being only human, he is indeed helpless. But where this story ends, the greatest story ever told just begins.

Another Execution Scene. Another time. Another place. Another king. The setting: A world lies estranged from the God who loves it. Like Guenevere, an unfaithful humanity stands guilty and in bondage,



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*another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6–9 ESV)*

That’s strong language! Paul was not upset because the Galatians had abandoned the gospel. They hadn’t. They’d *distorted* it. The preachers in Galatia were still preaching Jesus, and the people on the pews were convinced they were following the gospel of Christ. But Paul realized that the truth had been so polluted that the faith they professed was a “different gospel,” which was really no gospel at all. Paul was upset, because those putting their trust in a perverted gospel were trusting in a lie. They were deceived, and their very salvation was in jeopardy. A polluted gospel simply has no power to save.

What were the marks of this distorted gospel that was being preached by the pastors and believed by the people? Though there was confusion in the church over issues such as faith and works, grace and law, and flesh and Spirit, these were not the root issues. The fundamental problem in Galatia was that the cross was no longer of central importance in defining both faith and practice. The cross was no longer the crux of the matter. Perhaps it was occasionally mentioned as a marginal element in the story of Jesus, but it was neither the defining ingredient of the gospel message nor the defining quality of the believers’ lives.

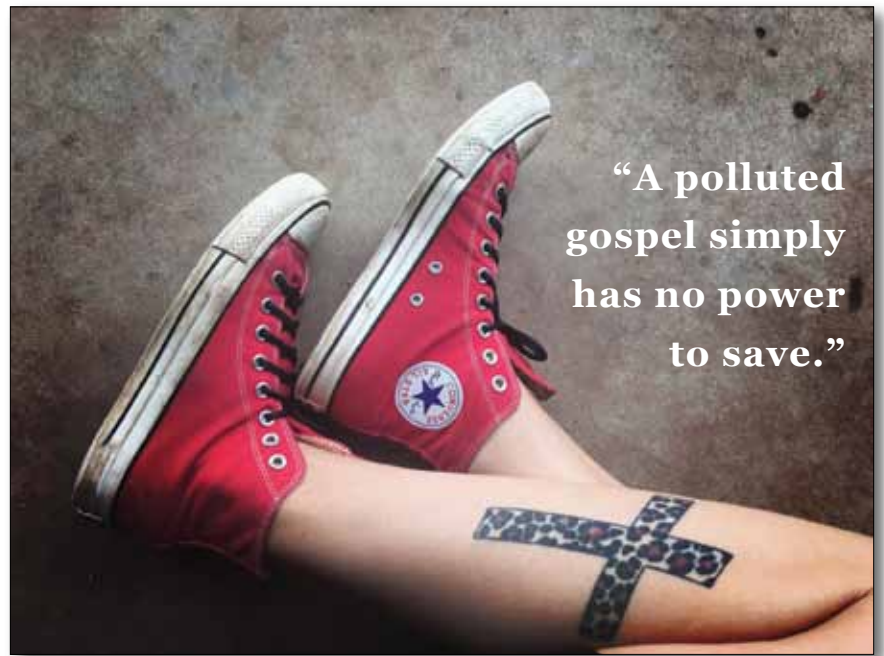
Paul wrote the book of Galatians to restore the cross to its place of central importance. In six short chapters, he highlighted four great truths about the cross of Jesus and why it is so fundamentally central to faith and practice.

### **The cross is the only ground of our redemption.**

There is one—and only one—remedy for sin: the blood of the Lamb shed on Calvary. The solution can never be found in good works, passionate worship, liturgical rituals, social activism, or generous philanthropy. Paul began his letter by reminding the Galatians that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal 1:4). The cross was no accident. It was God’s plan from the beginning of time to save those who believe. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal 3:13). When the cross is not central, we have lost the remedy for sin.

### **The cross is the single theme of our preaching.**

Paul reminded the Galatians of the message he preached to them when they first experienced the good news of salvation: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified” (Gal 3:1). Apostolic preaching is always cruciform. Apparently, the false preachers in Galatia were preaching Jesus (his incarnation, his miracles, his kingdom, his return, etc.), but leaving out any emphasis on the cross. Such preaching may draw crowds and win converts. Because it avoids the most offensive element of the gospel, it enhances a preacher’s popularity (see Gal 1:10; 6:12). Rather than exhorting Christ’s followers to deny self and take up their cross, the preachers in Galatia were promoting a life-affirming message of health, wealth, and happiness. But such a “gospel” has no power to save from sin, and so Paul wrote his epistle to oppose the corruption that was in the church.



### **The cross is the sole means of our holiness.**

The cross is not only the sole remedy for sinful deeds but also the only solution for the sinful nature. When the cross is not central, holiness of heart and life becomes impossible. Authentic gospel preaching reminds us of not just one but *two* crosses that define the Christian life: the one on which Jesus died and another one on which self dies with him. Jesus spoke on numerous occasions of this second cross (see Luke 9:23–24; 14:27; etc.), and Paul made it clear in his preaching to the Galatians as well:

- “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)
- “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5:24)
- “[By the cross] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” (Gal 6:14)

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# Tortured by Love

By Peter Kreeft



Peter Kreeft is a professor of philosophy at Boston College and author of many books. A Catholic, he writes in the style of C. S. Lewis, addressing both the mind and the heart. The following article is taken from his book, *The God Who Loves You* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988: 212–14).

**T**he cross is the crux of everything. It reconciles heaven and earth, God and man. But it also divides mankind. For it is there at the cross that we see Love's enemies, Love's crucifiers, as well as Love's friends. At the cross we see the ultimate warfare. The cross is God's sword stuck into the earth held by the hilt from heaven.

It is also Satan's supreme attack and apparent triumph over the God who was foolish enough to step into his trap and into the terrible words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). How Satan must have loved those words! He had apparently succeeded. He had split the eternal Trinity, introduced death into the heart of life, demonstrated dramatically the folly of love, and even killed God! But this very event, the deicide, was also the supreme defeat of Satan, the salvation of God's people, and the triumph of Love. On the cross, life triumphed over death through the very event of the apparent triumph of death over life.

*Mors et vita duello, conflixere mirando*, "Death and life duel in wonderful conflict," the Catholic Church proclaims in her Easter Sunday Liturgy. Indeed, he came to bring a sword and also peace, but peace by means of a sword. Not a physical sword, of course. He soon stopped that confusion when he commanded General Peter to put up his sword and healed the only casualty of the shortest and most just war in history by restoring Malchus's ear (Jn 18:10–11; Lk 22:51). Christians have been making Peter's mistake ever since, trusting in Caesar and chariots

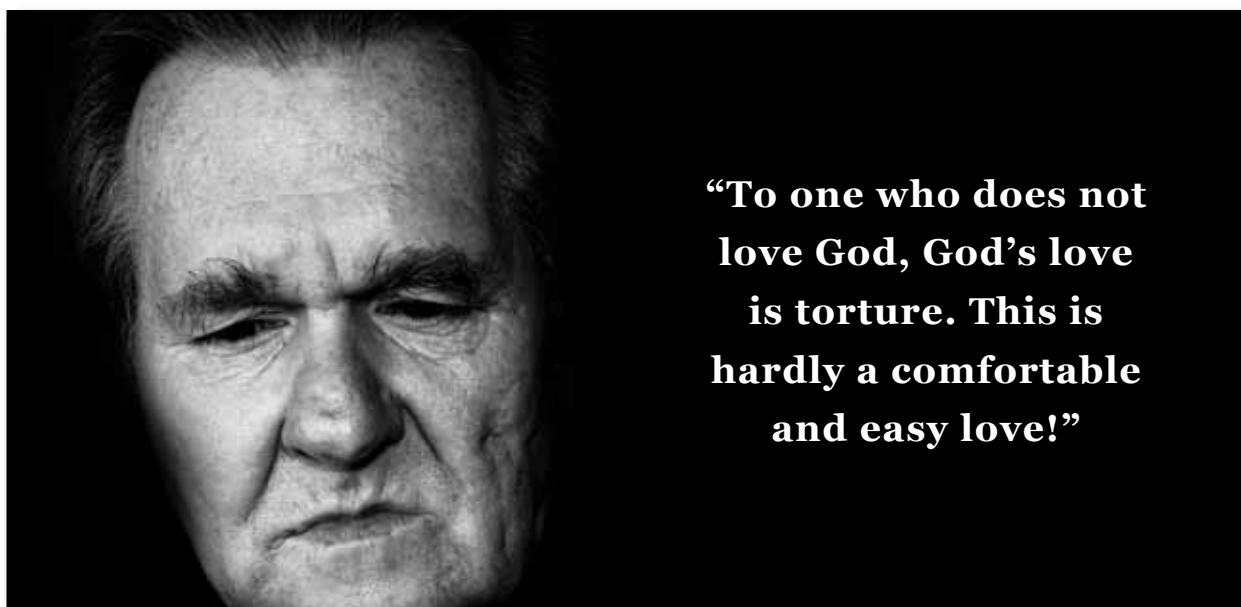
and horses and treaties and nukes and antinukes rather than in the love of God, the love on the cross. This love is infinitely more powerful than, and totally in control of, all the forces that crucify it, all the chariots and horsemen, even the horsemen of the apocalypse.

The love of God is so far from being an easy, secure, comfortable, and sleepy love that both the undying ecstasy of heaven and the undying torments of hell are made of it. The very same fire that never goes out—by which the saints are blessed and blissed, the fire of God's love—is the fire by which the damned are tortured, for they are its enemies and haters. For no one is this a *comfortable* love.

Lady Julian of Norwich, a remarkable medieval prioress, asked God to show her some of his mysteries, which he did. One of the things he showed her was his wrath. This had been a mystery to her because she knew, both from her faith in Scripture and from her own experience of God touching her soul, that God was pure love. And yet Scripture speaks of the wrath of God, so it must be real. What could it be? She asked God, and instead of explaining it to her, he showed it to her. And she said it was real indeed, but not where she had thought it was supposed to be. It was not in God himself. She said of the "showing" simply this: "I saw no wrath but on man's part."

The love of God is no projection of anything in us, but the wrath of God is. The wrath of God is real, all right. In fact, it is the very nature of God, the God who is love, but whose love is also absolute truth and justice and righteousness. The wrath of God is the love of God as experienced by someone who does not love him, does not love truth and justice and righteousness, does not want truth to be truth—someone who will not repent and agree with God, someone who will not admit and stand in the light

of God's truth but insists on creating his own truth and his own justice and his own righteousness. To such a one who loves his own darkness rather than God's light, that light is torture. Light (truth) and love are one. Therefore, to one who does not love God, God's love is torture. This is hardly a comfortable and easy love! ✠



**"To one who does not love God, God's love is torture. This is hardly a comfortable and easy love!"**

# So Send I You

By *Lesslie Newbigin* (1909–1987)



Lesslie Newbigin was a British missionary and missiologist. Serving many years in India, he wrote several books on a wide range of theological topics, especially focusing on missions and culture. The following article is taken from *Mission in Christ's Way*, Chapter 3, "Participating in the Passion: Witnessing to the Resurrection" (New York: Friendship Press, 1987: 22–31).

**J**ohn's account of the missionary commission is found in John 20:19–23. The disciples are frightened, and they have reason to be. They are doing what the church has so often done, withdrawing from the world and seeking protection for itself. Then the risen Christ comes in their midst.

*Jesus came and stood among them and said to them: "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit..." (Jn 20:19–23)*

And that is the launching of the church. The church's being is in that sending. We have to remind ourselves again of the significance of the little word "as." It is the manner in which the Father sent the Son that determines the manner in which the church is sent by Jesus. Its mission is governed by the manner of his. And lest the full meaning of that word "as" should be missed, he shows them his hands and his side. It was the scars of the passion in his risen body that assured the frightened disciples that it was really Jesus who stood among them. It will be those same scars in the corporate life of the church that will authenticate it as indeed the body of Christ, the bearer of his mission, the presence of the kingdom. It will not be enough for the church to place a cross on the top of its buildings or in the center of its altars or on the robes of its clergy. The marks of the cross will have to be recognizable also in the lives of its members if the church is to be the authentic presence of the kingdom.

I find it remarkable that this aspect of the biblical teaching has been so much neglected in the missiology of the past two hundred years, and that missions have

been seen—by contrast—in triumphalistic terms. It is remarkable that the consistent teaching of St Paul about the nature of the apostolate has played so little part in missionary thinking. When his claim to be an authentic apostle of Jesus was questioned, as it was especially in the congregation at Corinth, Paul's reply was always, in one way or another, to affirm that he has taken his share in the sufferings of Christ. Both of the Corinthian letters are full of this (e.g., I Cor 4:8–13; II Cor 4–5, 12:1–10), and there are many other places where this theme is repeated (e.g., Gal 6:14–17; Eph 3:13; Col 1:26). In particular, the fourth chapter of the second Corinthian letter, which is almost a classic definition of mission, has been (as far as I know) almost completely ignored in missiological writing. The whole chapter is concerned to define what it means to be an authentic messenger of Christ, but listen especially to these central verses:

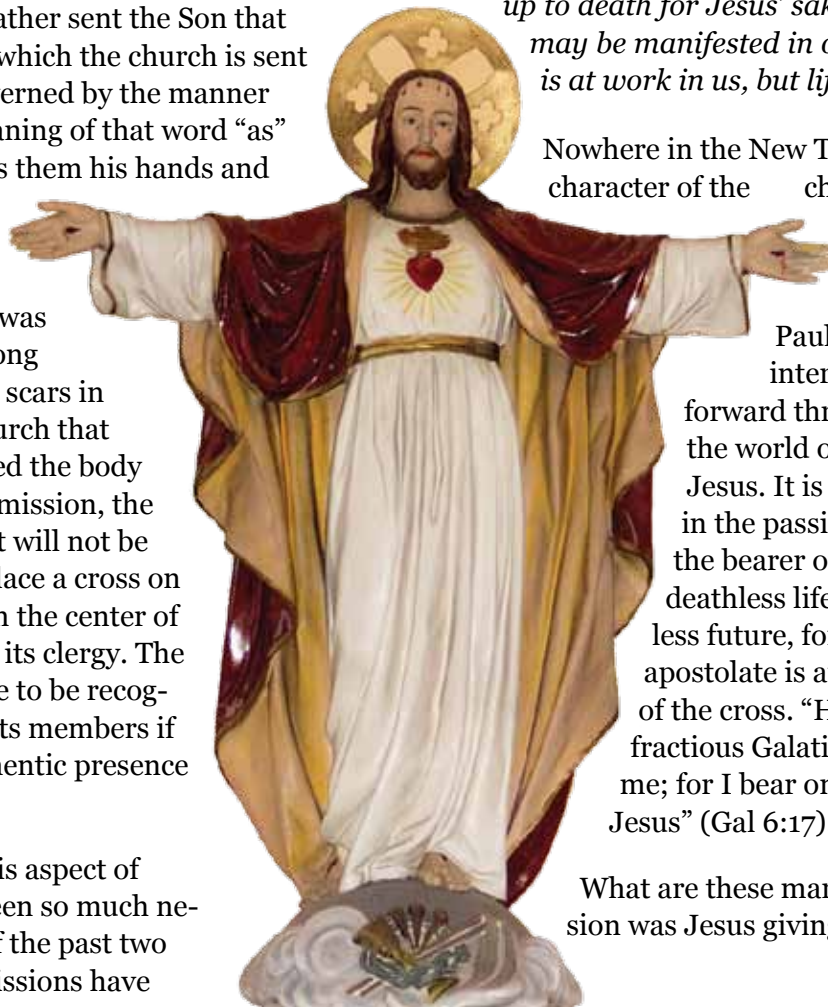
*We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (II Cor 4:7–12)*

Nowhere in the New Testament is the essential character of the church's mission set out

more clearly. It ought to be seen as the classic definition of mission.

Paul's apostolate, as he here interprets it, is the carrying forward through the ongoing life of the world of the vicarious passion of Jesus. It is as he actually participates in the passion of Jesus, that he can be the bearer of the risen life of Jesus, that deathless life that opens out into a limitless future, for the sake of others. His apostolate is authenticated by the marks of the cross. "Henceforth," he writes to the fractious Galatians, "let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17).

What are these marks? What model of mission was Jesus giving to his apostles when



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## Whodunit?

By John R. W. Stott (1921–2011)



An Anglican cleric who was a respected leader of the worldwide Evangelical movement, Stott was one of the principal authors of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement of the chapter, “Why Did Christ Die,” from his book *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 1986: 51–65).

**W**hy did Christ die? Who was responsible for his death?

Those immediately responsible for the death of Jesus were of course the Roman soldiers who carried out the sentence. When they arrived at “the place called Golgotha,” Jesus was offered some wine mixed with myrrh, which was a merciful gesture intended to dull the worst pain. But, although according to Matthew he tasted it, he refused to drink it. Next, all four Evangelists write simply, “and they crucified him.” That is, the soldiers carried out their gruesome task. They were just obeying orders. It was their job. And all the while, Luke tells us, Jesus kept praying out loud, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

Although the Gospel writers seem to be implying that no particular blame is attached to the Roman soldiers for crucifying Jesus, the case is quite different with the Roman procurator who ordered the crucifixion. Pilate was culpable. In fact, his guilt is written into our Christian creed, which declares that Jesus was “crucified under Pontius Pilate.”

Pilate was convinced of Jesus’ innocence. During the trial, he tried several ingenious attempts to avoid having to come down clearly on one side or the other. He was “wanting to release Jesus” (Lk 23:20), but he was also “wanting to satisfy the crowd” (Mk 15:15). The crowd won. Why? Because they said to him, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar” (Jn 19:12). The choice was between honor and ambition, between principle and expediency.

Although we cannot exonerate Pilate, we can certainly acknowledge that he was on the horns of a difficult dilemma and that it was the Jewish leaders who impaled

him there. For it was they who committed Jesus to him for trial, who accused him of subversive claims and teaching, and who stirred up the crowd to demand his crucifixion. Therefore, as Jesus himself said to Pilate, “the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin” (Jn 19:11). Perhaps, since he used the singular, he was referring to the high priest Caiaphas, but the whole Sanhedrin was implicated. Indeed, so were the people, as Peter boldly said to them soon after Pentecost: “Men of Israel... you handed him [Jesus] over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life” (Acts 3:12–15).

What was the fundamental reason for the priests’ hostility to Jesus? Was it that they were concerned for political stability, doctrinal truth, and moral purity? Pilate did not think so. He was not taken in by their rationalizations, especially their pretense of loyalty to the emperor. In Matthew’s words, “he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him” (Mt 27:18).

Having seen how Jesus was handed over by the priests to Pilate, and by Pilate to the soldiers, we now have to consider how he was handed over to the priests by Judas in the first place. This “handing over” is specifically termed a “betrayal” and Judas is “he who betrayed him.” He must be held responsible for what he did, having no doubt plotted it for some time previously. The fact that his betrayal was foretold in the Scriptures does not mean that he was not a free agent, any more than the Old Testament predictions of the death of Jesus mean that he did not die voluntarily.

The motive of Judas’s crime has long occupied the curiosity and ingenuity of students. Some have been convinced that he was a Jewish zealot, had joined Jesus and his followers in the belief that theirs was a national liberation movement, and finally betrayed him either out of political disillusion or as a ploy to force Jesus’ hand and compel him to fight. Other commentators attribute the defection of Judas to a moral fault rather than a



**“Why did Christ die? Who wo**

political motivation, namely the greed that the fourth Evangelist mentions. He tells us that Judas was the treasurer of the apostolic band and “as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (Jn 12:6).

We have looked at the three individuals—Pilate, Caiaphas, and Judas—on whom the Evangelists fasten the major blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, and at those associated with them, whether priests or people or soldiers. Of each person or group the same verb is used, *paradidomi*, to “hand over” or “betray.” Jesus had predicted that he would be “betrayed into the hands of men” or “handed over to be crucified” (Mt 17:22; 26:2). And the Evangelists tell their story in such a way as to show how his prediction came true. First, Judas “handed him over” to the priests (out of greed). Next, the priests “handed him over” to Pilate (out of envy). Then Pilate “handed him over” to the soldiers (out of cowardice), and they crucified him.

It is natural to make excuses for them, for we see ourselves in them, and we would like to be able to excuse ourselves. Indeed, there were some mitigating circumstances. As Jesus himself said in praying for the forgiveness of the soldiers who were crucifying him, “they do not know what they are doing.” Similarly, Peter said to a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, “I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.” Paul added that if “the rulers of this age” had understood, “they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (Lk 23:34; Acts 3:17; I Cor 2:8). Yet they knew enough to be culpable, to accept the fact of their guilt, and to be condemned for their actions. Were they not claiming full responsibility when they cried out, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!”

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Day of Pentecost: “Let all  
Israel be assured of this: God  
has made this Jesus, whom  
both Lord and  
over, far from  
his verdict, his  
“cut to the heart”

and asked what they should do to make amends (Acts 2:36–37).

Blaming the Jewish people for the crucifixion of Jesus is extremely unfashionable today. Indeed, if it is used as a justification for slandering and persecuting the Jews (as it has been in the past), or for anti-Semitism, it is absolutely indefensible. The way to avoid anti-Semitic prejudice, however, is not to pretend that the Jews were innocent, but, having admitted their guilt, to add that others shared in it. This was how the apostles saw it. Herod and Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, they said, had together “conspired” against Jesus (Acts 4:27). More important still, we ourselves are also guilty. If we were in their place, we would have done what they did. Indeed, we have done it. For whenever we turn away from Christ, we “are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Heb 6:6). We, too, sacrifice Jesus to our greed like Judas, to our envy like the priests, to our ambition like Pilate. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” the old negro spiritual asks. And we must answer, “Yes, we were there.” Not as spectators only, but as participants, guilty participants, plotting, scheming, betraying, bargaining, and handing him over to be crucified. We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate. But our attempt will be as futile as his. For there is blood on our hands. Before we can begin to see the cross as something done *for* us (leading us to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done *by* us (leading us to repentance). Indeed, “only the man who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross,” wrote Canon Peter Green, “may claim his share in its grace.”

The answer that we have so far given to the question “Why did Christ die?” has sought to reflect the way in which the Gospel writers tell their story. They point to the chain of responsibility (from Judas to the priests, from the priests to Pilate, from Pilate to the soldiers), and they at least hint that the greed, envy, and fear that prompted their behavior also prompt ours. Yet this is not the complete account that the Evangelists give. I have omitted one further and vital piece

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**Who is responsible for his death?”**

# Rolled Away, Rolled Away, Rolled Away

By John Bunyan (1628–1688)



In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan describes the journey of a pilgrim named Christian as he travels toward the Celestial City. The following excerpt is taken from a modern English version of this classic of Christian devotion (Alachus, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1998: 47–48).

**N**ow I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called salvation. Therefore, Christian ran up that way, but not without great difficulty because of the load on his back. So he ran till he came to a place somewhat elevated. Upon that place stood a cross, and below at the bottom there was a tomb. I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden came loose from his shoulders and fell off his back. It began to tumble and continued to do so until it came to the mouth of the tomb. It then fell into the tomb, and I saw it no more.

Then Christian was glad and relieved, and he said with a joyful heart, “He has given me rest from my sorrow and life through his death.” Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder, for he was very surprised that the sight of the cross should ease him of his burden in such a way.

The Crux of the Matter *continued from page 3*

Being a Christian is more than getting our sins forgiven so that we can go to heaven when we die. Following Christ means walking as he walked and imitating his character. Such a life can be realized only when the old nature is crucified—put to death. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die... In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die...” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, 89–90).

It is noteworthy that Paul concluded his letter to Galatians by reminding them that he bore in his body “the marks of Jesus” (Gal 6:17). In all probability these “marks” (Greek, *stigmata*) referred to the wounds he had received as a follower of Christ: beatings, stonings, whippings, etc. For Paul, these wounds certified his apostleship; they were the tangible proof that he was indeed a follower of the Crucified One. Thomas had stated that unless he saw the nail prints in Jesus’ hands, he would not believe (Jn 20:25). In a

He looked, therefore, and looked again, even until the springs in his head sent their waters flowing down his cheeks.

Now, as Christian stood looking and weeping, three Shining Ones came to him and greeted him with, “Peace be to you!” The first said to him, “Your sins are forgiven.” The second one stripped him of the rags he was wearing and clothed him with rich garments. The third set a mark on his forehead and gave him a document with a seal on it. He instructed Christian to look at the document as he continued on his way and to deliver it at the Celestial Gate. This done, the three went on their way. Christian gave three leaps for joy and continued on his way singing:

*Thus far did I come laden with my sin;  
Nor could ought ease the grief that I was in,  
Till I came hither: What a place is this!  
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?  
Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?  
Blessed cross! Blessed tomb! Blessed rather be  
The Man that there was put to shame for me. ✠*

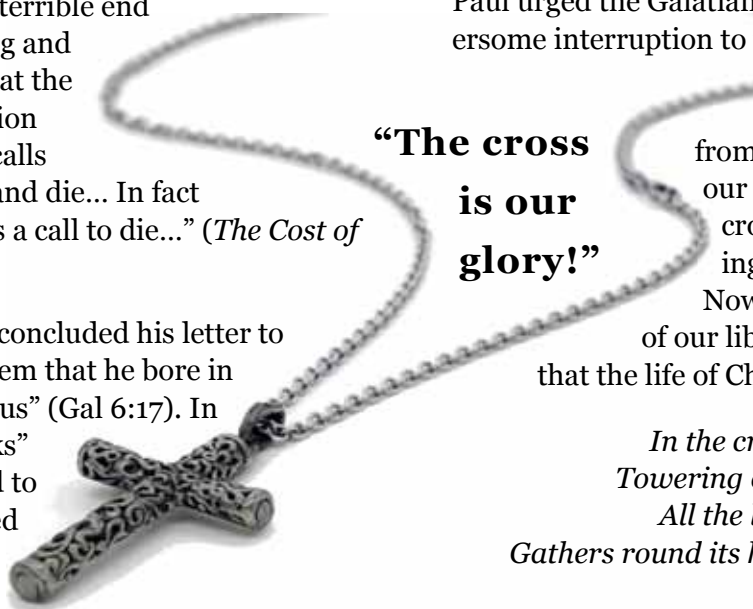
similar way, the world today may be saying to the church, “Unless we see the evidence of your self-denial, we will not believe.”

## The cross is the only object of our boasting.

Paul urged the Galatians not to view the cross as a bothersome interruption to their plans. It is not something to be dutifully tolerated. Rather, the cross is our glory! “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14). The cross is no longer a symbol of suffering, shame, weakness, and defeat. Now, the cross is the glorious means of our liberation! It is as death works in us that the life of Christ can flow out freely to others.

*In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime. (John Browning)*

This issue of *The High Calling* is devoted to the cross. For Christians, it is indeed the crux of the matter. We send this edition to you with the prayer that it will remind the body of Christ of what is truly central to our faith and to our practice. Amen. ✠



**“The cross is our glory!”**



Christians do the opposite. In our theology, worship, preaching, art, hymnody, and architecture, we celebrate, lift high, even glory in the cross. What the irreligious and those of other religions find contradictory, bewildering, and offensive, Christians, in stark contrast, consider essential, indispensable, and precious.

In the Christian scheme of things, even after Christ was raised from the dead and given a glorious new resurrection body, the scars in his hands and feet and side—emblems of his gruesome death—remain. God’s power overcame all other evidence of violence done to him. Suffering and death were left behind; he was alive as never before. Yet these marks of humiliation were not erased. In fact, his scars became his identifying marks. On that first Easter, when his disciples were hiding behind closed doors, he appeared among them and “showed them his hands and his side.” Then they absolutely knew it was Jesus and “rejoiced when they saw the Lord” (Jn 20:20).

Why is it that Christians glory in the cross? While every other religion is repulsed by Christ’s suffering and death, why do Christians rejoice over them? Because we believe the cross is God’s supreme instrument in redeeming fallen creation.

We believe God’s solution to the problem of suffering and evil is not to eliminate it, nor to be insulated from it, but to participate in it and then, having participated in it, to transform it into his instrument for redeeming the world. This is what Simone Weil meant when she said, “The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering but a supernatural use for it.” Rather than hindering God’s work, suffering and evil actually weave into God’s redemptive plan and pattern for the salvation of the world. God takes terrible tragedy and turns it into triumph; the grotesque becomes glorious, evil is transmuted into good. Emil Brunner is right: “If there ever were an event in which evil, innocent suffering, malice and human pain reaches its climax, it is in the cross of Christ.” Yet God took the awfulness of that event—the diabolical evil, the flagrant injustice, the excruciating pain—mixed them together and, through a marvelous

divine alchemy, transformed them into medicine for the healing of the nations.

The cross demonstrates that even when things seem to have gone tragically wrong, God can still use anguish creatively to bring out of it blessings that could not have been realized any other way. In fact, this is God’s method of redemption: this is how God, in the face of evil, works to accomplish his will and purpose for the world.

How does God overcome that which opposes his will? How does God demonstrate divine sovereignty and power in the face of evil? The cross tells us: God accomplishes it through a power that absorbs opposition to his will through innocent suffering and then, having absorbed the opposition, neutralizes it by forgiving love. Finally, having neutralized evil, God uses it to accomplish the very purpose it was originally designed to thwart.

**“His scars are now instruments of healing.”**



<http://anglicanorthodoxchurch.blogspot.com/2015/04/first-thursday-of-eastertide-9-april.html>

God overcomes evil not through passive resignation or brute strength, not through coercion or a dazzling display of force, but through the power of suffering love. God uses suffering redemptively to accomplish his will and purpose in the world. That’s why Christ’s scars are still there even when he returns with a glorified body after his triumphant resurrection. And they will always be there, but with one crucial difference: now they are radiant scars. A verse in the hymn “Crown Him with Many Crowns” conveys this so beautifully: “Crown him the Lord of love; behold his hands and side, those wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.” The scars are now bearers of divine glory, radiating the light of God’s presence, which transforms everything it encounters. His scars are now instruments of healing. As the Scripture says, “By his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5). ✠

of evidence that they supply. It is this: that although Jesus was brought to his death by human sins, he did not die as a martyr. On the contrary, he went to the cross voluntarily, even deliberately. From the beginning of his public ministry, he consecrated himself to this destiny.

He repeatedly predicted his sufferings and death and steadfastly set himself to go to Jerusalem to die there. His constant use of the word “must” in relation to his death expressed not some external compulsion, but his own internal resolve to fulfill what had been written of him. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep,” he said. Then, dropping the metaphor, “I lay down my life... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn 10:11, 17–18).

Moreover, when the apostles took up in their letters the voluntary nature of the dying of Jesus, they several times used the very verb (*paradidomi*) that the Evangelists used of his being “handed over” to death by others. Thus Paul could write “the Son of God... loved me and gave [*paradontos*] himself for me” (Gal 2:20). He used the same verb when he looked behind the voluntary self-surrender of the Son to the Father’s surrender of him. For example, “he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up [*paredoken*] for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). Octavius Winslow summed it up in a neat statement: “Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy—but the Father, for love!”

As we face the cross, then we can say to ourselves both, “I did it, my sins sent him there,” and “He did it, his love took him there.” The cross that is an exposure of human evil is, at the same time, a revelation of the divine purpose to overcome the human evil thus exposed. ✱

*Upon that cross of Jesus  
Mine eye at times can see,  
The very dying form of One  
Who suffered there for me.  
And from my stricken heart with tears  
Two wonders I confess:  
The wonders of redeeming love  
And my unworthiness.  
—Elizabeth C. Clephane*

he showed them his hands and his side? Here we must beware of a misunderstanding of the passion that has (it seems to me) been widely created in Christian minds by the mediaeval crucifix, which shows Jesus as a drooping, defeated, pain-drenched figure—a symbol of abject submission and defeat. This picture of the cross as the defeat of goodness by the powers of evil has been enormously influential in Spanish Christianity and is part of the background of Latin American liberation theology.

But the earliest representations of the crucifixion do not portray it like this. They depict Christ with head erect, the warrior beating down the powers of death and hell, the victorious challenger of all the powers of evil. This is the true understanding of the cross as the New Testament teaches us. The cross is not abject submission to the power of evil; it is the price paid for a victorious challenge to the powers of evil. In what seems like defeat, the victory of God is actually won. ✱

*The Divine Dilemma continued from page 2*

awaiting judgment’s torch. Could God turn his head from the righteous demands of the law and simply excuse the world’s sin? If not, then could he turn his head from the world he loved? Would the king burn Guenevere? Like the wicked Mordred, Satan must have looked on in delight:

*God! What a magnificent dilemma!*

*Let them die, your life is over;*

*Let them live, your life’s a fraud.*

*Which will it be, God?*

*Do You kill Your world or do You kill the law?”*

Without even waiting for his Guenevere to look up in repentance, the King stepped down from his throne, took off his crown, laid aside his royal robes, and descended his castle’s polished steps into humanity’s pockmarked streets. Paul’s words in Philippians are thought by some scholars to be the lyrics of an ancient hymn, singing about the King of kings.

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6–8)*

God became a man so that Jesus, unlike Arthur, would be neither simply human nor helpless. He stepped down from his throne, giving up the luxury of the castle to live on earth. We were his Guenevere. He was both our king and the lover of our soul. And he gave up his Camelot for our cross. When he did, God satisfied both his love for us and the righteous demands of his law. ✱

# The Old Cross / The New Cross

By A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)



A. W. Tozer was an American pastor, preacher, author, and spiritual mentor. His published works are still read today by those hungry for a deeper experience with Christ. The following article is a slightly edited abridgement taken from the book, *The Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 2002: 86–88).

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis is not as before.

The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a high plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, “Come and assert yourself for Christ.” To the egotist it says, “Come and do your boasting in the Lord.” To the thrill-seeker it says, “Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship.” The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

*Continued on page 12*

# The Loss of the Cross

By Stan Key

*On a hill far away  
Near a major highway  
Stands a church all aglow with success.  
And the thing I like most  
(You must pardon my boast),  
I can go with no sins to confess!*

*So I'll cherish this gospel of wealth,  
How it pampers me, makes me feel good.  
And promises blessings and health,  
Without needing a Man nailed to wood.*

*And on top of this church  
Like a crow on its perch,  
Shines the symbol of what's preached inside.  
Though the form is a cross  
The message is lost  
All covered with greed and with pride.*

*This new gospel I hold  
Offering silver and gold,  
Has a wondrous attraction for me.  
For now my new creed  
Fully sanctifies greed  
And blesses my prosperity.*

*When I go to the mall  
My god is on call  
To grant me my every request.  
For the reason I pray  
Is to get my own way,  
And decide for myself what is best.*

*For those who would weep  
For the sins of the sheep  
And grieve for a world lost in sin;  
They will notice the loss  
Of the old rugged cross,  
And pray, “Lord, revive us again!”*

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life God offers is life out of death. How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this, let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Savior, and from him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ. ✠



*If you will not savor the cross, you cannot savor the things of God.*  
*It is impossible to love God without loving the cross.*  
—Madame Guyon

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