

About this book . . .

Why should one read yet another book on the Cross of Christ? The author has already written books on the subject. What can he add to these? Perhaps this Cross and its companion Resurrection are a kind of obsession with him and he may have developed an imbalance in treating his subject.

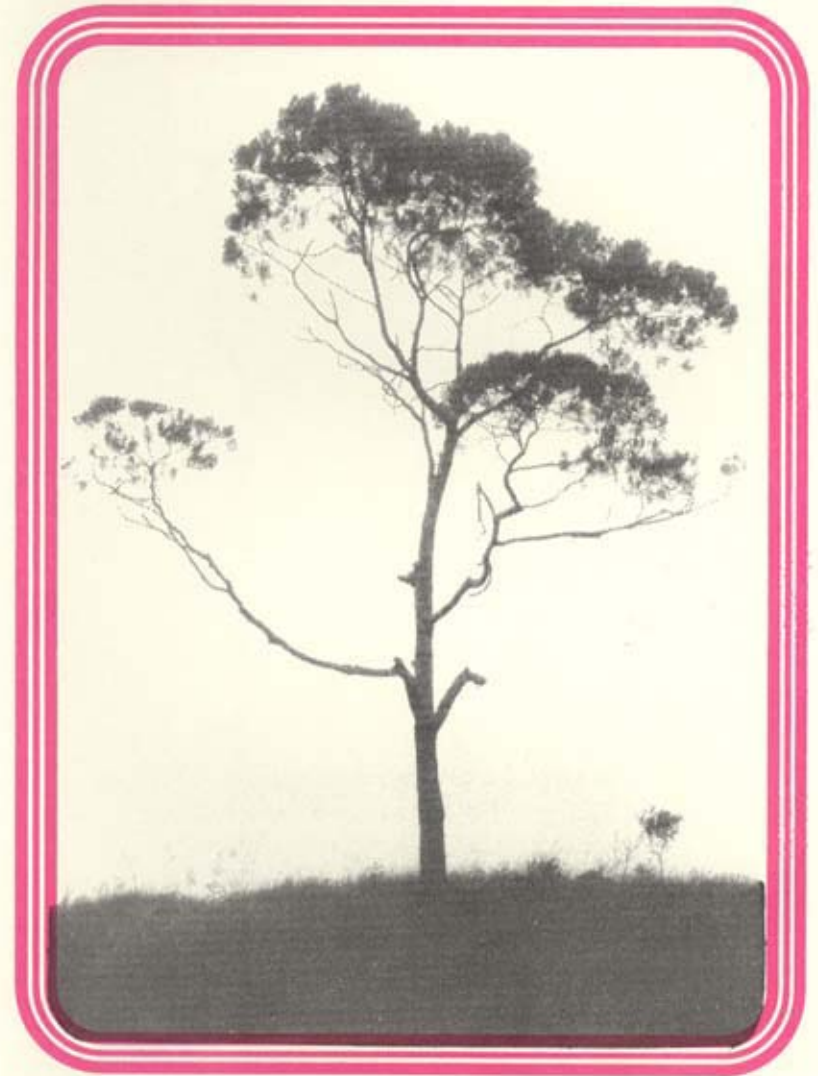
Perhaps, but a reading of this volume will convince many that the subject is not only thrilling, but it is also significant for every human being who will have lived in history. Not for nothing has a large volume of literature, art and music sprung from the inspiration of Christ's death, but all of it is as a thing apart when a person really goes to the Cross for himself or herself. The present volume may just be an aid to the contemplation we should all make of that event.

This time let the writer persuade you to take time off and spend it at the Cross. One may even feel lonely there, but one will not be alone. The central character may be Jesus of Nazareth, but others will also be there, some of them bitterly antagonistic, some friendly, some just bewildered. Join them and see how it goes with you.

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Come! Let Us Go to Calvary!



Geoffrey C. Bingham

Come!
Let Us Go to Calvary!

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Beyond the Cross
Christ the Conquering King
Christ's Cross over Man's Abyss
The Saving Work of Christ
The Word and the Words of the Cross

Geoffrey C. Bingham

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
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Foreword: A Book Is a Way

Some years ago I fulfilled a desire I had almost made a dream. It was to write a comprehensive book on the Cross, the death of Christ. It was published under the title, *Christ's Cross over Man's Abyss*. It was relief to write it, and there are reasons for believing it was a good venture. It goes on being reprinted and doing its own quiet work. It was suggested that the section on the sayings of Jesus when he was on the Cross be abstracted and be published under the title of *The Word and the Words of the Cross*. This booklet continues to sell in its thousands and to be used as a study book for groups who are attracted by its title and contents.

Some years later I realised how much of what goes for Christian teaching contains an evasion of the centrality of the Cross in its expression. This puzzled me until I realised that many have sought to enter the Kingdom by ways other than the only way, the Cross. Naturally they are sounding off what to them seems more important than the Cross and the Resurrection. Strangely enough they are sure they are preaching truth. I wrote another book *Beyond the Cross*. The title was given tongue-in-cheek: there is no ‘beyond the Cross’. I wanted to show that although the Cross is not a terminus, yet its effects are time-wide and universal.

Foreword

Coming to this present volume: I wanted to write as simple a book as was possible for me to compose. I wanted it to be personal, intimate, and of value to those who are puzzled about the death of Christ, and wonder at his resurrection. I did not want it to be heavily theological or lightly devotional. As the book developed itself, so to speak, it dawned on me that there has been no one in all history who was not at the Cross on the day he died. I know this sounds fantastic but I will not try to rationalise it in this Foreword.

If what I say is true, then we have a principle which is both anthropologically and theologically significant. That is, we have something that is present throughout the human race which continually confronts them, even though there may be no consciousness of it. It is part of their being human and it is a point in that humanity which can be touched, almost as though it were a resident nerve. Indeed, I would think that none would be conscious of that element until the story of the Cross were to be recounted to them. Of course there are myths of a cross in some cultures and religions, but I am not counting them in as particularly important.

The book is certainly not about this so-called universal element in the human race. It is about itself, the Cross. It does not mention theories theologians have developed, good as many of them are. It is simply saying, 'Come! Come to Calvary! Come and see what this Man did and what the human race did to him! Watch, listen, contemplate and work it through'. If this invitation has any appeal, then do read the book. Even if it has no appeal, yet please try to read the book. Not much time will be lost out of your life, and it may well be that the mystery of the Man's death may bring you the most profound understanding of yourself,

Foreword

the creation and others that you have yet experienced. It may also bring the most prized element of all—knowing God as He is!

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The Urgent Invitation

Come! Let us Go to Calvary!

The invitation here issued is to join the men and women who were present at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth in that day of his death. This may seem to be an odd request, but odd or not it is needed. We must somehow witness that event, even in hindsight. The whole world must come to see what happened. We are not speaking of some traditional pilgrimage or some cultural acknowledgment that the founder of Christianity deserves some contemplation regarding his death. There is much more to it than that. It has to do with the meaning, purpose and goal of that death, and as to whether it was a tragic mistake, a human error, or an event and an accomplishment which was, and is, indispensable for all human beings for all time—one way or another.

The Invitation

This is a matter of urgency. You must come with me! If you ask me, 'Where?', I will say, 'You must come with

me to Calvary—Golgotha’s lonely hill where the Man of all men was killed by the hands of wicked people’. If you ask me, ‘Why are you so urgent about the matter?’, I will reply, ‘Because you cannot afford to spend one moment more on your own; one minute more in living your life outside a true view of this Calvary and its Cross. It is a matter of the greatest urgency for you’.

If you look at me in disbelief, and wonder whether or not I am a fanatic for pressing these claims, then I will tell you, ‘You are unaware of the great danger which confronts you. It has always confronted you, but more so now because I have warned you about the matter. Also you are missing what is most essential to your true humanity, that is, you are missing out on being fully human’.

I can understand your bewilderment, and even that you may be strongly repelled by my urging, but I cannot desist. I, another human being, fully understand the danger, and my approach is not overly dramatic, whatever it may seem to be. The occasion warrants all which may appear to be fanatical. I say, ‘Come! Come quickly with me to Calvary. It is a matter of life or death for you’.

If you then say to me, ‘Who am I, as a person, that you know me and urge me to this action, for I am but one amongst many?’, then I will say, ‘You are a human being who cannot generate life for yourself. In terms of your ultimate attainment, you cannot bring immortality to yourself. Everything human is limited in that respect. So, then, you are as any other human being, in need of immortality to assure you not only of the fact of life beyond death, but also, first, life here, and after that, life beyond death: indeed life over death’. That is why I address you, whether you think yourself to be a chance reader of what I write or a casual hearer of what I say. If immortality is of importance

to you, then hear the urgency in my voice and pay heed to me.

You may then reply, ‘Surely every human being is as every other in the matter of mortality or immortality! What picks me out as not being as others?’, and I will say, ‘Every human being is born mortal into this world. He—or she—will die. No one has ever produced the answer to this dilemma of the human race. The great religionists have not done so. Whether we admit it or not, the matter of our mortality troubles us deeply. Why, then, do we not resolve it, or why do we let the urgency to resolve it lapse? We must go to the only Person who ever offered immortality to the human race, and it is his own death which proves him to be immortal, and the work of that death which brings “life and immortality to light”’.

So I urge you gently, but strongly, come with me, then.

If my words have not assured you that the matter is immediately relevant to you, and if you are reluctant to respond to the pressure to come to Calvary, then let me say that what could be to you the Tree and key to life will one day become your tribunal. You will be judged—whether by God or in your own conscience—for having refused the gift of life you so need. What I say is not some utterance of an enthusiastic preacher who would pressure you into what he thinks is best for you. The truth is that the whole world has once gone to this Hill of Calvary, and there has been confronted with, and by, the Holy One of God, and has been taken into the action of his death. This is so, whether a person wish it to be so or not, and whether they be conscious of the fact, or not.

In another sense all history is moving towards this Cross. None can be neutral in this event. Those who are

repelled must go, and those who are attracted must join the rest. I tell you, as though you and I were at this present moment of history in that past moment of Christ's history, that none can turn his back and flee from the event. There may be repulsion or there may be fascination: there may even be bewilderment: but all must go towards that summit of history. Ultimately no human being can escape it. It was an event for all human beings and for all time.

The Goers and the Non-Goers

Who of us has actually gone to Calvary, to the Hill where Jesus was crucified? Many would say they had not been there, and that they had never desired to do so. In one sense they have been there, and in one sense they have not. As we shall see, the whole world was present at Calvary, representatively in the Man Christ Jesus, and in his sin-bearing for the whole race. The world was there, not knowing it would be crucified with him, for it thought it was crucifying him.

Perhaps the reason many will not go there is that they have been there, albeit unconsciously. Whether one could have gone to Calvary unconsciously is a moot question, but, on the practical level, not only those who were bodily present that day can be said to have been consciously present. For those of you, then, who were not there bodily, and for some reason or other would now care to contemplate Calvary, come with me, and we shall be renewed in the events of that first 'Good Friday', as the Church came to call it. What I can promise you is a good anamnesis or 'remembrance', for Jesus commanded his disciples to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to continually remember

the outpouring of his blood to some good purpose. Anamnesis was always intended to be dynamic. 'Remembrance' has been a long and powerful custom in the story of the Church.

Who, then, will join us in this cavalcade to Calvary?

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Introduction to the Events

We cannot abruptly come to that Good Friday and break into it without some background of the life and claims of the man murdered. We must know something of what was going on, both in the front of the scene and behind it. Crucifixions, so to speak, are not just snatched out of the air. Even that was not the case with two thieves who were crucified on the same day and in the same place. It must have all begun with his birth in the manger of a hostel stable. It must have developed as the baby grew into a man, and was attested, they say, by a voice from heaven declaring him to be His Son and, so, the Messiah of the Jewish people.

All of that is a grand and fascinating story on its own, but we hasten to the last week of his life lest we lose some along the way. Boredom might cheat some of the most transforming sight a human being can ever have, that of the crucifixion of one whose like had never been seen before, nor has been seen since. So we break into the story when Jesus was with three of his disciples on the Mount called Tabor. It is a good place to start, because he knew the immediate future related to the Cross.

Going to Jerusalem: 'Thy King Cometh!'

As a result of the Transfiguration, Jesus had set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He had spoken of this necessity, and the disciples had been troubled by his saying, and they feared to ask him the meaning even though Peter and James and John had heard Elijah and Moses discuss it with Jesus in the vision. As Jesus put it with sad irony, it was not possible that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem! They came to the Mount of Olives and, as he looked down over that City, so filled with history and so holy to the people of the covenant, he knew the events that lay ahead. He made provision to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, as recorded in Matthew 21:5, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass'.

He came as a king, but as the humble King. The people were almost delirious with joy, though some disliked it. They heard the adulation which sprang from prophetic fulfilment, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' In this there were echoes of the angels who had come to the shepherds at the time of Jesus' nativity. 'Teacher', said the Pharisees, 'rebuke your disciples'. He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent the very stones would cry out'.

The expectations concerning Jesus were enormous. He would overthrow the Roman powers and set up a glorious Davidic kingdom. Already he was purging the temple of its commercial, secular and political elements. At least his action was a prophetic statement of the demise of hypocritical worship. None of this was easy for him. He saw in Jerusalem what none other saw. When he finished

castigating the religious scribes and Pharisees, he burst into tears. Great racking sobs came from him as he cried:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matt. 23:37–39).

The chilling thing about this last statement is that they had already said this!

The Passion Week

We need not pause to cover the events of ministry in that Passion Week following Palm Sunday, except to speak of the night of the Last Supper and the betrayal by Judas of his Lord. History, devotion and investigative theology have not exhausted the wonder and the terror of that last night. In a meal which was held in private and which was either the Passover Supper or a Jewish one related to it, Jesus made it clear that his blood was going to be shed and his body given for the sins of the world. This would be the birth of the long-awaited New Covenant.

He took the occasion to teach deeply and clearly regarding the Cross which would soon scandalise them, and the Resurrection which would soon liberate them from shock. His following time in the Garden of Gethsemane was one of deep agony. He felt himself pressed down to death and prayed for death's cup—in this Gethsemane form—to pass from him. An angel came and strengthened him, for his agony was deep. He was now ready to drink the cup of the

Cross-death and face with equanimity the rabble that came to take him.

He said to his disciple, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?'

He said to Peter, who had cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, 'No more of this. Put up your sword', and he healed the severed ear.

To the soldiers of the temple, and the noisy rabble who came to jeer at his fall, he said, 'When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power [authority] of darkness'.

The disciples all forsook him and fled. Judas betrayed him, the disciples fled from him, Peter denied him repeatedly. The shape of the enmity was now taking place. The loyalty was left mainly to women who were helpless to stay the events. The road back to the temple would finish on Golgotha's hill, the place outside the wall of the holy city Jerusalem, where felons were terminated by violent death.

The Notorious and Nefarious Judgment

Reams have been written on the falsity of his judgment under the Jewish Council. History testifies that both accusation and sentence did not conform with true Jewish law, but then it was no time for legal niceties. If a man who could raise people from the dead were allowed to continue on his way, the Roman authorities would see the danger and decimate the nation of this pseudo-king. High Priest Caiaphas, unconsciously a prophet, said it was expedient for the people that one man die for the nation so that the whole nation perish not. Judgment must succeed if

the witness is concocted and false. The Nazarene obliges them by stating he is not only Son of God, but also Son of Man, the one of Daniel chapter 7, the one who comes in the clouds of heaven, who establishes the Kingdom of God.

The Judges: The Council, Pilate and Herod

We must take a moment to look at this person Pilate. He had his own problems, politically, especially one with Herod the King. All rulers designated by Rome lived uneasily in their delegated power. The Jewish leaders were past masters at political intrigue. Pilate was a fair man when it came to a judgment, but this messy Jewish affair was distasteful to him. A dream by his wife and a message for him warning of dire consequences made him look at the case more intently in that early morning.

On the profit side was a new friendship with Herod. Most of the rest was debit. His hand was forced to release Barabbas the bandit. The Man Jesus troubled him because of his demeanour and his quiet insistence that he was King of a Kingdom that transcended the sordid power which kingdoms of history had known. He had not come from humanity, although he was human. He had come 'from hence'. Dread grew in the Roman Governor. 'You are no friend of Caesar if you let this man go who claims to be a king!' On the horns of a dilemma he had made his decision. He publicly washed his hands of the whole affair, but was not justified thereby. History has judged every element of this man who appeared so strong, but who was innately weak, and so for the saving of himself. Later the Church returned to the matter of Pilate in round condemnation of him.

The die was now cast. The judgment was completed. Jesus was attested as an imposter, a blasphemer, a criminal in the eyes of leaders, and accepted as such by the Roman powers, whatever may have been their personal, private opinions.

The Beginning of the Going—I

The Gathering Audience

In history they were all going. For almost three years of his life of ministry to men and women, Jesus had indicated the coming reality of the death of the Cross. It is true that he spoke of this mainly to his intimate followers, but there were others, who would enthusiastically follow him, whom he warned must take up the way of the Cross if they were to be one with him. Doubtless they were puzzled because the language of crucifixion repelled all hearers, whether Jews or Romans or Greeks. Later Paul was to say that the way and word of the Cross was a scandal to the religious Jew and foolishness to the intellectual Greek.

So it was these things with his listeners. Their enthusiasm died away in the face of his discipleship demands: 'Take up your Cross daily and follow me', which really meant, 'If you would really follow me to the end of this road, then you will see it terminates in my Cross! It is to this Cross that you must be committed and with that you must be identified!' No wonder they dwindled away, embarrassed

and bewildered. Perhaps some of them were deeply disappointed and even sick at heart, their minds telling them he was speaking a mystery beyond their comprehension, but one which they should understand and then obey.

To his closest companions he said on three separate occasions, 'The Son of man must go to Jerusalem and be betrayed at the hands of wicked men, and be crucified and rise again the third day'. These intimates, also, did not hear him clearly. It was either that the saying was hidden under a veil, or it was that the fact presented was too appalling to contemplate, and they could not come at that! Certainly he spoke of it. It was always in his mind. Whether people liked it or not, they could not travel with him and fail to finish up at Calvary.

The Ones Going to the Cross: Jesus

Who, then, is going to this Cross? I will tell you. First there is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He has set his face steadfastly towards Jerusalem, and those who see this, whilst not understanding, dislike the fact. They would have him go to a throne and liberate them from the cursed Romans, or they would have him as a king who would multiply bread for them in time of need. They would have a strong leader, since for too long they had been without one. They would even have him stay—for centuries maybe—and minister to them in their human needs, especially their emotional, relational and material needs. He must avoid them; he must not swerve aside from the good things he had been doing, and move unwaveringly to the Hill far ahead.

We have had a glimpse of how others saw him, and their expectations of him, but who was this one who talked

of going to the Cross? For some he is the enigma of history. They write books about him, especially the one they call 'the historical Jesus'. They try to disentangle him from the myths, legends and accretions they say must have grown out of the early church, as his passionate, but probably disillusioned, followers sought to build a unique figure. Try as they may, these researchers cannot get to this 'historical Jesus'. They cannot even get to the mind of the writers of the four Gospels: they only think they can. Jesus evades their human thinking. All human beings have hidden agendas and some have not-so-hidden agendas. Whose interpretations can be trusted?

Jesus emerges as a definitive figure. God is his Father: he is the Father's Son, uniquely. He says all the Scriptures speak about him. He speaks about the Scriptures, quotes them concerning himself, claiming he lives in accordance with them, especially the prophets. He does nothing but what is predicted and accordingly predicts what he will do, such as going to the Cross, dying, rising again, ascending. He is Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, Suffering Servant. We can sift all of these titles out of his words—and more. What he does is possible only in a man under God's delegated authority. He speaks with authority. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount he is as the Lawgiver. This is the one the Jewish lawyers and judges judge!

He is ever the man going to Calvary. He was going to Calvary before time began. He arrives there in time, on time.

The Ones Going to the Cross: The Disciples

The disciples were going to Jerusalem and its Hill of Golgotha, but they scarcely knew why, nor did they have any taste for it. Like others, they wished he would work

out his Messianic powers for their benefit and the advancement of their nation. Even so, they went. They confessed that no one else had 'the words of life': the solution to the enigma of human mortality. So they went, and among them one who would betray him, another who would deny him, and all of them would flee from him in the hour of his greatest need. At the critical point none would be a friend or a neighbour to him.

How could they say they were his disciples? They did not become disciples of their own accord, not really; not deep down. He chose them, called them, taught them, prayed with them and for them. He cared for them. He loved them. At the last he called them 'my friends' and after his Resurrection he would call them 'my brethren'. He had them in mind as apostles—'sent ones'—and he gave them trial runs of the Kingdom ministry he had exercised. They knew, innately, that he was *the One*.

The question is whether they actually reached Calvary. John did, for he is mentioned. The others seemed hurt, bewildered, confused, afraid. Mark said, 'They all forsook him and fled'. Some people who were at the Cross were called 'his acquaintances', but were his disciples simply 'acquaintances'? They may have been there with friends and relatives of the other crucified men. If so, they stood 'afar off': perhaps for safety. John was near the Cross, with Mary. Later they would understand the Cross. For the present it seemed horrific, an abysmal failure of a promising mission.

The Ones Going to the Cross: The Women

There were women going with him. These had been attracted one by one. Mary his mother had ever believed in

him and had lived with an angelic prophecy concerning him. He was surely her son, but, more than that, she knew him to be the Son of God, even if she did not fully understand the meaning of that designation. The great joy she knew at bearing the prophetically promised Messiah needed to be weighted against the sword which was soon to pierce her own soul, a sword of immense and deep pain. Of all, she was the supreme volunteer, so to speak, but other women were with her, women of great depth. One was the mother of two of the disciples. Another was a woman out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils. What relief, then, Mary of Magdala had come to know at the command for the demons to be gone! Other women, some of them noble, and some of simple birth, had ministered to Jesus and his disciples, and they had not been afraid to be women in his presence and the presence of the men. There was no gender consciousness, as we find it in such different ways today.

How close these women, who were intimate with Jesus, were to Cross we do not know. For the most part they, with 'the acquaintances', stood a great distance from the Cross. No sooner was the death completed than they hurried forward as he was taken down from it. Standing 'a great distance' from the Cross may have been because the sight from close by was too dreadful and painful to witness.

The Ones Going to the Cross: The Crowd

There had been others hurrying along with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Some of them may have been dawdling with a strange reluctance to see the end, yet unable to resist it. Most were Galileans, people of rough speech and strong ideas; many of them rebels, looking for

the overthrow of an alien tyrant-nation. Many were simply going to the great Feast of the Passover. Feasts of this kind are in every culture and are irresistible, so established they are, so ingrained in the mores, so much times of festivity and national pride. Many families gather their members, gird up their loins and make the journey to the capital with its centuries-old traditions, associations and memories. Many, if not all, were disinterested in a Cross. They scarcely suspected the Man to be moving towards that kind of a termination of life!

Crowds, they say, are fickle. This was a fickle crowd. It changed its nature from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. There were those 'for' and those 'against'. Part of the crowd was the rabble which came from the temple to Gethsemane, some employed as soldiers, others who always sense a mob situation and lust for the flow of adrenalin. Stunned by Jesus' calm reception of them in the Garden, they fell back—a rare happening with rabble. The innate bloodlust of fallen human beings grew with the rumours concerning the judgment. They chanted as the religious leaders incited them. They asked for Barabbas instead of Jesus. That was the measure of them—wanting a criminal as against choosing the Son of God! At the Cross, they were little less than demonic. We will see more of them at that Cross.

Others had also been on the road for some time, although almost unwittingly. They were the confessed and avowed enemies of Jesus. Some among them did not yet know they were that—enemies—but they were, and not indifferently. Many of them were scribes, lawyers, priests, Pharisees and Sadducees. Their professions were linked with religion, and no doubt some of them were reasonably good men, whilst others were in it for the money and the

fame. Jesus had often sorted them out. His final words to them were in the last week, and his sayings strongly denounced the hypocrisy and the insincerity of this group, whilst warning the people against them.

Unseen, but not unfelt, were all the powers of darkness. They could not leave this Son of Man well alone. Afraid of him, they must yet destroy him, though just how they could do this they could not, as yet, know.

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The Beginning of the Going—II

More of Those Gathering

Jerusalem was ablaze with the news. Friends and foes were—so to speak—emerging from the woodwork, flowing towards the Council of the Jews, towards Pilate's praetorium, and perhaps Herod's palace. Then, when the judgment was made, the screaming crowd at Pilate's hall became the ever-enlarging mob that made its way towards Golgotha's Hill 'outside a city wall'. Some went to wail, some to be still in horrified silence, but others to indulge in their blood sport. For them there was nothing to equal a riot or a mob-mind having its senseless fill.

Going towards the Cross: The Conscripts

'They seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus'. Mark says he was 'a passer-by'. Was he not going to the Cross? Apparently not. Whilst we are told he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, that adds

nothing to our knowledge. What does interest us is that Jesus was unable to carry his cross unaided to Calvary. John tells us that he started off carrying it, but, evidently weakened by his being scourged, he was to need the aid of the conscript. We can only speculate what it would have meant to have a forced or conscripted view of the event. It must have been wholly humiliating.

In another sense the soldiers were part of the conscription: they had to be there, but then that has always been the lot of mercenaries.

Going towards the Cross: The Thieves

These two thieves are significant participators. It seems they had to carry their crosses without help. Perhaps they were tough criminal material: they are also called 'robbers'. Jesus was crucified between the two of them. They both reviled him, and sarcastically suggested that, being the Son of God, he could get them out of their predicament.

An intriguing question is whether there was another bandit-terrorist present named Barabbas, the one who was freed from prison in the place of Jesus. There is no evidence either way. It would seem he would want to see the one through whom he was freed, but we can reach no conclusion: the mind of a political terrorist and bandit can play us tricks. In another sense he was present, in that Jesus was his true substitute.

Going towards the Cross: Pilate and His Soldiers

There seems no likelihood that Pilate was personally, bodily present at the Cross. Certainly his mind must have been occupied with the awful event. He was represented in

his soldiers, and later the Church remembered this and stated it objectively (Acts 4:27–28). They also included Herod as being present and active against Jesus in the whole event. As for the soldiers, these were about their business as servants of the Roman powers. They appear to have acted like all mercenaries. Prior to going to the crucifixion, their first act was one of mockery when the whole battalion was called to ridicule Jesus. Ridiculing him as a Pretender-King of the Jews, they then led him out to the crucifixion. The potion they offered him was a stupefying drug, proffered not so much out of pity as to make the act of crucifixion easier for them. It is only as the crucifixion proceeds that their view of Jesus changes.

Going towards the Cross: The Religious Leaders

They were present, without doubt, for they mocked him cruelly at the time of crucifixion. Perhaps they were more uppermost in Jesus' mind than others who did not mock. The four Gospels tell of the gradual build-up of their venom and hatred throughout Jesus' ministry. His unmasking of them gave them bitter reasons for revenge. They dreaded every element of him.

Going towards the Cross: The Unseen Ones

Satan and His Powers

Jesus had said, 'This is your hour and the power of darkness', and, though addressed to the rabble and the temple soldiers, it went far beyond that. Jesus had said in the upper room, 'the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me'. He also saw the hour of the Cross as

the time when Satan and the world would be defeated and cast out. All evil was converging upon the Cross to destroy him, as we shall fully see. Jesus had told the Jewish leaders on one occasion, 'You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires'. It is difficult for us to realise the number, let alone the nature, of these hellish visitants and gloating antagonists.

The Father and the Holy Spirit

In his high-priestly prayer of John chapter 17, Jesus had asked the Father to glorify him in the hour of the Cross. His desire was to reveal God's Fatherhood through his suffering. Of course the Father was the Initiator of this act of reconciliation. That He was there at the Cross goes without saying. Jesus, as we know, twice addressed the Father as being present. Paul later tells us, 'God was [present] in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself'.

Jesus was said to have 'offered himself through the eternal spirit', and the original Greek manuscripts in capitals (uncials: upper case) make it difficult to know whether 'spirit' should be in upper or lower case. The argument seems to lean more towards the Holy Spirit than Jesus' own spirit, although the two must have been vitally connected. On any score, the work of the Cross must be understood as Trinitarian. Certainly the Holy Spirit was present, and Jesus called no more on the Father and the Spirit than any believing person would be entitled to do.

Going towards the Cross: The Nations of the World

In Acts 4:24–28 the early Church prayed in terms of Psalm 2:

Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit,

'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples imagine vain things?

The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.

Without doubt the early Church saw all the nations of the earth as going to Calvary, though not altogether in a geographical, spatial way. Herod and Pilate represented them. None of it was an accident of circumstance. 'To do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place' is a pretty powerful statement. It talks about Divine Sovereignty at its highest plane. It also sends shivers down my mental spine.

Most of all, it makes the point we are now at in our account of the Cross happening. It tells us the event of the Cross was universal; that is, both space-wise and time-wise. Everyone was there at the Cross from Adam to the close of human history. This thought is strong stuff: some would say 'unimaginable'. No philosopher would ever dream that up, and no theologian would be strong enough to think it up himself. And it is not as though we have yet said everything, even on this marvellous score.

The Sum of it All

The whole human caravan, the persons and the people, the tribes and the nations, were all there assembled (i) 'to do

whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place', and (ii) to deal with the spirit of every human creature ever born. If this were not the case, then we can cease our inquiry into the meaning of Calvary, and we should keep clear away from it all.

Few, if any, in history have been able to do that. It may not be too much to claim that in the depths of every human being there is some knowledge of that Cross, whether it be what we call 'unconscious' or 'conscious'. Paul said, 'We are convinced that if one died for all, then did all die'. All were there. The thought, baffling as it is, has to be explored. None of us can keep away from Calvary.

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The Three Tenses of the Cross

Tenses and the Intention

Peter the Apostle had a good thing fixed clearly in his mind. He said:

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.

By this Peter wants us to understand that before time God had planned the event of the Cross; that is, of the shedding of Christ's precious blood. In this he was one with John the Seer who wrote, 'every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain'. This has been translated in many ways, but the sense of it is that the book of life is the book of life of the Lamb. One gets life from the Lamb. John either refers to names being written before the

foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb, or to the Lamb being slain before the foundation of the world. It works out very much like the Peter passage; namely, that before the foundation of the world, the Cross was in the mind of God, planned to take place in time. The Cross was not something God thought up during the process of history as a remedy for the evil of Man. We conclude the Cross was always 'on the list'.

Secondly, the Cross actually happened in history. No one debates this. It is an historical fact. Interpretations of the event may be many, but there is one fact, one happening. The Cross can therefore be present to human sense, especially where its happening is proclaimed. It is a fact to be reckoned with. It may be scorned, ignored, interpreted as a scandal or foolishness, and rejected as a worthless event, but it is with us in books, in liturgies, in poetry, prose and other forms of art. It is with us in devotion, theology and perpetual confrontation. It is an event to be remembered in the anamnesis, that is, in the remembrance of the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, Eucharist and Mass; the names we use are many and indicate some aspect of the event. Jesus said, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. Remembering places it in the historic.

Thirdly, John the Seer tells us in apocalyptic—revealing—language that there is present in heaven 'a Lamb as though it had been slain'. The Wounded One is not held by mortality, but, as the New Man, is alive forever, and so 'his wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified' tell us of a resurrected and glorified being. Maybe we do not need to be too literal here, as the language is apocalyptic, but the principle of the once-slain Lamb is actual. The wonder of it all is that he has the plan of history in his hand in the form of the seven-sealed book, and, as he undoes the seals,

so he causes the motion of history to flow in remarkable and effective ways. In that sense there will always be the Cross, always be the Crucified One.

The Cross of the Three Tenses

I am speaking from, and in, our time sequence. More astute minds than mine speak of 'realised eschatology' and the non-time reality of events which happen in our history, but that should not deter us from taking a commonsense view of time. There is surely a work of God which happens above the plane of our time. I dimly grasp what is meant by such a statement, but when I come to Calvary with all the hosts of men and of angels, I know the effects of this event stretch back over time, remain dynamic in the present of time, and will forever prove effective in the future of the time I know as the time of the future. I spell it out carefully so as not to confuse myself in what I know as 'reality'. I respect the time and space dimensions. Most of us—rightly or wrongly—think in such terms because we live in these space-time dimensions.

The person we know as Christ has always been present in time, though not in the office of Messiah which only came to him in his being born as a man and baptised, at which time God affirmed him as His Son and so as His appointed Messiah. The New Testament writers speak of this one as being existent prior to creation, working at creation, working in the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with Moses. The spirit of prophecy was ever 'the testimony of Jesus'. Of course this is a mystery but not a fantasy. Somehow sacrifices offered in faith were valid and effective only in the light of his one, 'perfect, and

sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction', offered 'once for all', which was to happen, and then did happen, on the Cross.

The power of the Cross did not end in its historical happening, but, in one sense, at that point of time *began* to affect, and also effect, the whole course of history. This it continues to do. The future is in its hands, and in ways of which we may not even be able to dream. Paul concluded that not only was the event of the Cross powerful, but also that Christ crucified was, and is, the whole of the power of God and the wisdom of God. Admittedly we have to open up that claim and set forth its reality, but for going to Calvary these three tenses must be reasonably grasped and understood. We go to Calvary, so to speak, in the light of its effects on the past, its power for the present and its fruits for the future.

Going to the Cross Unblinkered

It is doubtful that any one other than Jesus went to the Cross with the knowledge of its happening—the meaning, intention and significance of it. Within the depths of the suffering that came to him, he had also had a great confusion, a great bewilderment and a great alienation from the sense of the Presence of God—but we cannot grasp that. What we are saying is that his eyes were open, whereas ours could not have been at that time. Whilst in this book and its simple thesis we are *as* those going to the Cross, yet only some of us can really be that way. I could not write concerning the Cross had I not been there and had I not been crucified with him. Some readers may not be *as* I am; that is, be in the state in which I am, but I beg them to

come to Calvary—whatever! If I claim to be unblinkered, it is because the responsibility has been placed upon believing men and women to tell others of 'Christ and him crucified'. There are so many pitfalls for the blinkered. I suggest, although it may sound to be foolishness, that the powers of darkness now dread that Cross and would hope to 'blind the eyes of them that believe not', lest the glory of it all should break through into the human spirit and liberate it.

Going to the Cross with open eyes means that every element of that happening can become intelligible and remarkable, of point and significance, and shed light on the future. That is the thing to keep in mind. God always intended it to go in effect beyond its present happening. As the theologians would say, 'The Cross is *eschatological*'.

With all this in mind, let us now come into the action of the Crucifixion.

The Happening of the Cross—I

Introduction: The Action of the Cross, the Mystery of God

A biblical mystery is generally truth which we need to know but cannot understand without the aid of the Word and the Spirit. The Cross is certainly the primary mystery of God so far as sinful Man is concerned. Theologians have worked hard to develop theories of the work of the Cross, and perhaps many of them have been useful, but they do not convey to us a revelation of the mystery of God.

The actual means by which we can come to understand the Cross when the Spirit is pleased to reveal it to us, are the various members who participated as actors and spectators at the event, the actions which happened, and the words which were spoken, especially the seven words of Jesus. Linked with all of this are the *reasons* why certain of the audience were present, and their consequent actions which happened during the hours of crucifixion.

The utterances Jesus made as he hung aloft reveal to some extent what was going on in dreadful experience. Because there was such interchange and interaction with creatures both human and celestial, and because these were to some degree linked with the utterances of Jesus, we are not going to be able to narrate all things in pure chronological order, or capture the mystery of that great enmity evil presented, and Christ's great suffering, in a simple form. Perforce we must go backwards and forwards, up and down, in and out, and though it may seem to be a confusing disorder, yet it will eventually climax in its own utter beauty and triumph.

The Purpose of God in the Crucifixion

A Word to Readers Who Find Difficulty in Understanding Biblical Teaching

Any reader who is not versed in the Scriptures will find the new paragraphs somewhat bewildering. Today many—if not most—are biblically illiterate, and theologically impoverished. So I suggest you read this book, and even if you cannot understand it, that you temporarily set it aside but keep it in mind so that you can come back later and try to grasp its meaning. It is not that all of it has not been said and written before—indeed time and again—but it is not palatable to those of us who developed tastes for other things. We have lost the language in which the Bible has stated its truth, the Truth. We have influences about us which suggest that truth should be so simple that reading it should be as easy as falling off a log. I simply ask you to try to

understand what is written, and then if it does not appeal to you, you are free to reject it, but you will know what you are rejecting, and what would seem to be the consequences of that act.

The Work and Works of the Cross

Simply put, the aim of the work of the Cross was—and is—redemption. Redemption is buying persons out of prison, out of debt and out of slavery. Thus the goal and purpose of the Cross was the salvation of human beings. It was the work intended to liberate men and women from the bondage of their guilt, and from the outcome of guilt which is everlasting destruction. In this purpose was contained the vindication of the holy law of God by its—the law's—judgments being poured out on the human race, in Christ, thus 'establishing the law' as God's true way for human living. It was the work by which the holiness of God was both revealed and vindicated. It was the place where defeat and destruction was spelt out to Satan and the whole system he had built up—that system which is called 'the world system' or 'the present evil age'. It was to defeat death in the very death which Christ died, and it was to be the basis for the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and in him all who would otherwise die and perish. 'Die and perish' does not mean moulder away, dissolve, disappear and eventually be nothing, but rather means to suffer in everlasting punishment such as has been prepared for the devil and his angels: in other words, hell. Whilst the word 'hell' is repugnant to modern ears, it is one of those things we should not dismiss: more meaning may reside in it than we even dream.

The purpose of the Cross was to provide the way of reconciling Man to God by God's provision of the atoning sacrifice that took away the guilt of sins, and allowed Man to stand before God, thus being reconciled to Him. So the Cross was intended to be the revelation of God's love to Man, and His mercy upon Man in forgiving his sins, justifying him from the deserved condemnation—judgment—of the law of God, and so giving him a good and clean conscience by which he could live without the incessant nagging of guilt.

The purpose of the Cross was further to 'gather into one the children of God scattered abroad'; that is, to bring men and women to God as Father through the suffering and sacrifice of the Cross. This being so, it was to be the basis for the bringing of the Community of Christ into being as the Family of God, when the Spirit would be sent at Pentecost. On the widest possible score, the Crucifixion was with a view to the nations, that through his Lordship over life and death, obtained by the work of the Cross, Christ should win the nations to the obedience of faith, and so defeat human division—both personal, corporate and national—and bring peace to Mankind in the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God.

These few paragraphs do not contain all the purposes of the Cross, most of which are included within the ones already mentioned. The Cross can then be summed up as a battle: a battle *against* those evil forces which would destroy the human race; and a battle *for* sinful men and women that they might be reconciled to God, and to one another. This being understood by us, if only in part, helps us to go to Calvary and to stay there through the long hours of suffering and so come to some comprehension of what was happening.

No One Understood What Was Happening at the Cross

Jesus had taught much of the meaning and purpose of the Cross, but, without the outpouring of the Spirit, Jesus' followers were still unable to comprehend. It may well be that through the understanding which has come to us through the gift of the Spirit and the teaching of enlightened apostles, our vigil—we may call it that—at the Cross as we recall it and seek to enter into it, may be more intelligible. Even so, the mystery of Divine love is not seen by human sight: only by faith, faith that is informed by the Word and the Spirit.

So, then, whether we have some understanding or not, let us come to Calvary and gaze upon the action and allow God to inform us in our depths and imprint indelibly what Paul called 'the word of the Cross', and other apostles called 'the gospel'.

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The Happening of the Cross—II

The Events and the Meaning We can Obtain

The Beginning

The first action was the Crucifixion. The three men were nailed to the wooden crosses. Opinions differ as to size and shape, but these do not concern us. The crosses would be laid upon the ground, and the sharp nails driven in hands or wrists, and ankles or feet. We need not dwell on the excruciating pain. The thieves would have been filled with anger, bitterness and resentment. They began to vilify Christ from the beginning. For his part Christ did not drink the stupefying drug offered him. His first words were: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'. He did this in the face of the careless soldiers who were casting dice for his robe, and the screaming, blood-lusting horde of religious leaders and other anger-maddened mobsters.

His words are powerful because he did not seek for justice nor resent having come under injustice. 'Being

reviled he reviled not again.’ Forgiveness is one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, gift that God gives to fallen human beings. We need no sermons on it. We only need to know there is no forgiveness apart from the Cross. He also understood that they did not really know what they were doing, although it was evident that they knew what their actions were. Sin’s innate deceit is that it is not sinful. Jesus understood this strange thing in humans.

The Title

Pilate had a title written over the Cross: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’. The fact that it was written in three languages is important. There were, so to speak, three language audiences—Hebrew, Latin and Greek. It was not a minor thing, domestically Jewish, but an announcement to a wider audience in universal languages of the day intended, in that sense, for a universal audience. The notice was anathema to the Jews. He was being acclaimed, no matter how ironically, for what he had claimed to be—‘the King of the Jews’! Not only had irony triumphed, but justice also.

The Family at the Cross

His next words were to his mother Mary: ‘Woman, behold your son!’ He might have called her ‘Mother’, but he was seeking to break that old bond with its many associations, and mercifully bring her into a new relationship with himself, and with John his disciple. Harsh as his word ‘woman’ sounds, it was said for a kindly purpose. She had once sung, ‘My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour’, and here he was as her Saviour. She had no claims on him through her motherhood which would exempt her from the need of salvation.

Likewise John was given a relationship with Mary which would tide them over the present event until understanding came. ‘Behold, your mother.’ From ‘that hour’ John took her to his home. Almost certainly it was after the termination of the crucifixion. Long before, Jesus had said that those who did the will of his Father were his mother, and brothers and sisters. We need not elaborate on these things.

It may seem fanciful to say all families were present to this saying of Jesus. It was a domestic saying, a family concern. In his hour of suffering the families of the ages were in his mind. That it is not fanciful is shown by what will become a recurrent theme in our contemplation of the Cross; namely, that every person was intimately present to Christ and in Christ as he is to each of us. When we speak of the anguish of children and the anguish of families which have neglect and pain and division, then we should see that what Jesus said to Mary and John springs out of his concern for parents, children and families; that it is not mere empathy, but in the Cross he is doing something which will release all from grief and sorrow, and heal them. We do not know *how* this happens, but we do know it is part of the work *for* it to happen. In this sense, then, all the families of the world are present, no matter what their tragic experiences of life may have been or yet will be within their family, or what may have happened or yet will happen to them from outside the family.

The Continuing Violence

The heart of violence is hatred of God. Long ago God had told Noah that striking another is striking the image of God. To strike God’s image is to strike God. The soldiers were the agents of the violent religious leaders. We are

tempted to say that the quality and measure of violence that day was pathological, but that is to give it a psychological term when it needs a down-to-earth, honest, theological term. What they cried, in their maddened desire to see pain and ignominy inflicted, was murderous lust. They were all as sons of Cain:

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, "I am the Son of God."' And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

It was impossible that, prophetically, the hatred of this day and the sufferings of the Victim should never have had voice. This mental and physical brutality is in the old writings:

But I am a worm, and no man;
scorned by men, and despised by the people.
All who see me mock at me,
they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;
'He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'

Thou knowest my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to thee.
Insults have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.

They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

The savagery of them is likened to the rush of roaring bulls, and the cruel encircling of a pack of dogs:

Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
thou dost lay me in the dust of death.
Yea, dogs are round about me;
a company of evildoers encircle me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—
I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
they divide my garments among them,
and for my raiment they cast lots.

No human being on this earth is free from such violence of mind and spirit. By the Fall, and by sin and guilt, all are enemies of the Most High. Hatred in the heart writes graffiti on the walls of heaven, as gossip and bitterness etches itself with the acids of violence on the portals of the hated. At this Cross there is no catharsis of the ancient enmity, but only its explosive expression.

A Reviler Retracts

'And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.' Where one would have

expected some fellowship in pain and ignominy it did not happen. Both thieves shrieked their imprecations. That is, until Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'. It was then one of the malefactors ceased his blasphemy and changed his mind. He told his companion to cease also. He said that Jesus had done no wrong. He said that they had both done wrong and deserved their death. He had suddenly seen this Man to be God's Lord.

'Jesus', he said, 'remember me when you come into your Kingdom'.

Lord! Kingdom! What was he saying and thinking? He was believing what the leading religionists and theologians had never begun to perceive.

'This day', said Jesus, 'you will be with me in the Garden'.

The Garden, of course, was Paradise, the Paradise from which Man had been evicted. The first of this violent mob is to enter its gentle place and be home with God.

The Happening of the Cross—III

The Dereliction

To this point we have said little of the powers of darkness. The ruler of the evil world was there with all his principalities, powers and demonic forces. They were out to destroy this vexatious Prince of Peace with his holy law and his holy love. No man must ever be as this man and not be destroyed. It was '[their] hour, and the power of darkness'. They were the bulls of Bashan, the roaring lions, the encircling curs, and the priests and the people their running dogs. 'Satan has nothing *in* me', Jesus had said, in effect. Now Satan had all things *on* him for 'the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all'. 'God made him to be sin.' He was bearing the sins of all mankind, and the accusation and guilt of that sin must spread over him as hot lava, or as terrifying darkness. The snarling creatures must visit him with the shame and pain of all evil. He must escape nothing.

They watch to see whether he has the resources to bear this titanic burden. There is anxiety in them lest his utter

purity and his holy love defeat their devices of bitter calumny of God and created Man.

God, with them, must stand against the Victim. His holy law has been transgressed, the law which is the very transcript of His Holy Self. True justice must be done for the execrable violation. The law is deep in its condemnation. The delight of evil creatures, both human and celestial, is that they have a handle on God.

All things cry, 'Out into the darkness with him! Down into the abyss with him!' The Son of Man is lifted up as a serpent. He is hurried out into the doom of all evil. Even these cries of the evil ones cease and he is alone, suspended in the unspeakable limbo of the lost. The agony which began to come upon him in the Garden is now upon him in its fullness; the totality of guilt and sin brings him to the point of utter dereliction. None will ever understand those three hours of darkness from noon to mid-afternoon.

Yet all were there: all creatures. He was bearing the guilt. He was destroying the evil. In the hot crucible of the Cross he was purifying his creation. He was doing it *alone*.

We might never have known of that dread terror and the awfulness of it had he not cried out:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

They say—some of them—of this fearful cry, 'Oh, only the quoting of an old Psalm'. They say, 'Not really forsaken: only the impression of it'. They say, 'He simply wanted to indicate much suffering is needed for sin'. The fact is that he did not lie: *he was forsaken*. This is the death of sin and the hell of it. The forsaking of this Man by holy love must take place for the redemption of evil Man and the defeat of all members of the Satanic kingdom. 'He tasted

death for every man' contains more in it than all the minds of men and angels together can ever begin to comprehend. 'He poured out his soul to death', the prophet said of him, and the Victim cried, 'You have laid me in the dust of death!'

Henceforth there is only defeat for Satan and his hosts. Henceforth there is mercy for every soul which will take it. Henceforth there can be the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, and nothing can stay the accomplished victory of God.

The Crisis Has Passed

From nine until noon he had borne silently with the mob, his vilifiers, his judges and his executioners. Something was happening within him. He was drawing all mankind into himself. Person after person, and all persons together, were being crucified with him. Rebellious human flesh was being crucified. The dreadful system of evil was being defeated as the guilt of humanity was being borne to its irreversible extinction. His holiness was exhausting all evil. The pure but ruthless demands of the law were being met in the suffering of holy love and the violation of the Holy One—the Eternal God—in a satisfaction that will forever be beyond theological comprehension.

The cry that came was from the Man for all mankind. It was True Man becoming Derelict Man for the derelict humanity. His cry was 'My God, my God', and not 'My Father, my Father'. There was no division of the Triune Community. Nor did God cease to be in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, but the imposed dereliction was His way of being in Christ in the dark hours. Against him, He was yet for him. Love closed over the sorrow, and the snarling and raging evil was silenced effectively for ever.

The Resources Expended

'I thirst.'

That cry we understand if only, comparatively speaking, to a minimal degree. We have all thirsted. Our pools and fountains are so small; our inner resources so tiny. We scarcely make it to the end of any day without their being exhausted. In the face of that massed and inexorable opposition what could he have done?

It is what he did which matters. We might call the oceans of his holy love the nature of his deity, but he did not work in that deity. Long ago he had come as Man for all mankind. He lived always by the aid of the Father and the Spirit, but no more than it was the province of any human being who willed to be obedient. He prayed at the last that the Father would enable him with His glory. He offered himself through the Eternal Spirit. We scarcely know what we are meaning when we quote these great words, but we know we are saying something of true worth.

We do not need to wax poetical. He was as dehydrated. He was as breathless of life. Doubtless his body thirsted, but that was but a parable of the state of his spirit. It was not that the Father would not now sustain him to the close end, but that the world should know the redemption that he wrought cost all that he was, and that he had been drained of all that he possessed. So vast a suffering it was for so terrible an evil.

They brought the vinegar to him, and his humanity may well have received it with relief. We do not know. We do not despise this gesture. No man was his master at that moment. In their helplessness and bewilderment they could but proffer what they knew not.

The Triumph is Complete

He had 'appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin'. The marvel is that it can be put away. It was put away. In those hours, especially the dark hours that terrified the captive audience, there had been silence. Did they hear the dropping gout of blood on Golgotha's hard rocks—the blood of thieves and their Saviour mingled? What they thought does not much matter. Those thoughts have been repeated millions of times throughout the millenniums. It was the cry which wrote '*finis*' to the deceit of evil and the pain of sinners who would henceforth repent and believe.

He cried, '*Tetelestai!*' 'It is finished!'

The work of redemption was finished. His defeat of evil was definitive: 'When he had overcome the sharpness of death he opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers'. The thief was to be in Paradise that very day. Nothing was left for Man to do to be liberated from his sin and inducted into new life. Nothing Satan and his forces would do could ever reverse the completed work of the Cross. He had:

... plunged in his imperial strength
To depths of darkness down.
He brought his trophy up at length,
The foiled usurper's crown.

The Conclusion to the Cross

Through death he has defeated death and broken the excruciating guilt-grip of accusing evil. This is the finished work, and the law can but applaud, for its own holy being has been established by this justifying righteousness of God.

No more work for Christ? No: no more such redemptive work, but from now on there would be the outworking of what he had worked to its successful conclusion.

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The Committal: Going Home to the Father

The work has been done. The sounds of the battlefield are stilled. The Great Warrior has defeated the enemy. The cries of the bloodlusty have long ago been stilled. Doubtless many have crept away in terror or bewilderment. In his lifetime they said of him, 'No man ever spoke like this man!' Because of the manner of his death they must say this with a new emphasis.

He has authority to lay down his life, and this he has done. He also has authority to take it again, and this he will now do. The words of the Psalmist are in his mind and doubtless the whole context of the words. He says, not in exhaustion, not in resignation and not in turbulence, but in gladness, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!'

For the second time the word 'Father' is on his lips. Now it is not 'My God, my God', but 'Father!' He is going back to the bosom from which he came, a bosom which in one sense he had never left. He is at peace, and he is in joy, and the witness of that tells us of the triumph of the Cross.

Delivered and Raised

In Romans 4:25, Paul sums up the event of the Cross, its leading to the Resurrection, and the connection of the two. We need to understand this before we proceed to the post-death happenings. What we have seen in the previous chapter was his suffering on account of the guilt of Man before the holy law of God, and so before the Holy One Himself. Romans 4:25 says that he was 'handed over to death' or 'delivered to death' or 'given up to death' 'for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. Whilst the Greek does not say 'to death', the previous verse implies it.

Death, which is described by Paul as 'the last enemy', is the one whose engendered fear keeps men and women all their lifetime in Satan's bondage. It meant that Jesus had to destroy this death by fighting it on the Cross, before men and women could lose their mortal fear. This he did by taking their sins and their guilt and bearing them out to exhaustion and extinction: thus he defeated death. He killed death before he died, and so death had no 'sting' to it, no guilt, no impending judgment. He 'tasted death for every man'; he 'poured out his soul unto death', and God, for Man's sake, 'laid him in the dust of death'. This liberation

for Man from death, and thus from its bedevilling fear, was the triumph which allowed him to give up his spirit to the Father. He had killed death so that death could not kill him. Nor could it kill 'the children whom God had given him'. He was serene in the knowledge that God would 'not suffer his holy one to see corruption'.

This, too, was the attestation of his being 'the resurrection and the life'. Henceforth no believer would ever die, though watchers of the believer going through to the fullness of eternal life might misread the outward event, mistaking it for what humans call 'death'.

'The Shouting and the Tumult Dies'

The Lords, Captains, Kings, People and All Sinners Depart

The Loyal Son and His Loyal Ones

The Man is dead. He has gone down to the grave. All this without fear. Later he will talk to the disciples out of the Scriptures and, without doubt, following his revelation of these prophecies, will quote what they could not tire of quoting:

I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also dwells secure.
For thou dost not give me up to Sheol,
or let thy godly one see the Pit.
Thou dost show me the path of life;
in thy presence there is fullness of joy,
in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore,

because that was his confidence in entrusting himself into the Father's hands.

In this world they are taking him down from the Cross, and the women are gathering around. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, is perhaps unconsciously fulfilling the Scripture of Isaiah 53:9:

And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

The women watch as Joseph wraps the body in a linen shroud. Nicodemus, another disciple, comes bringing 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight'. So, 'they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews'. Was this not enough that they should still purpose to return home and prepare 'spices and ointments' to come again on the morning of the third day, the Sabbath being ended? The women were bereft of their living Lord, their beloved Master, but they were not bereft of the womanly gifts of love, and their insistence on giving reverence to the human remains of the one who had brought them through many fine experiences to the day of his death. It has been said that Mary of Bethany anointed him beforehand for the day of his burial, and that she did so because she was having a pre-death celebration. She had sat and listened and in understanding knew, perhaps more than anyone, what that death was for: what it was all about.

Mary Magdalene had come with her love to honour the dead body. Her weeping eyes could not see the risen Man as other than the gardener. Her soul was 'surprised by joy', but the old relationship was finished. The new

revelation was of one about to ascend to his Father and their Father; his God and their God.

The Captains and the Kings

Later Paul spoke of ‘the rulers of this world’. He may have meant primarily, Pilate, Herod, the chief priests and the like, but he may have meant the principalities and powers who were the leaders in Satan’s world-system. Paul said that ‘had the rulers of this age understood this . . . they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’. It is a powerful and beautiful statement. It does not, however, speak of repentance but of remorse. The rulers—Pilate, Herod, the chief priests and the Council—had made a dreadful mistake, and one which they could never recall. They needed the grace of repentance, and this had been available to them through the very act they had precipitated. The evil rulers had long ago placed themselves beyond repentance. God has given that prerogative of repentance and redemption to Man and not the fallen celestial creatures.

As for Pilate and all he represented on that day—Herod and all he stood for, the chief priests and their followers, and the others who were haughty—they received their death knell. Their judgment had been completed on the Cross. He was the Judge and they had become the accused. Also a time was coming when they would stand before him at the Great Assize and nothing of their perfidy would be concealed. Jesus had defeated him ‘who has the power of death, that is, the devil’. He had ‘overcome the sharpness of death’, taking its sting of sin, and its power of law-guilt. In this way he had made ‘an open show’ of the principalities and powers, leading them as manacled and defeated prisoners in his triumph march to the Holy City.

The captains, the kings, the lords were all departing. The scenario they had planned was finished, but was no comfort to them, and certainly no victory. The conquest of the unreviling Victim was the offering of himself as an oblation for the sins of the world. The triumph of the Slain Lamb would be forever and it would decide every moment of history in the cavalcade of creation. Rightly understood, it had been doing this down through history.

The Maddened Mob: The Cruel Heart

The violent mob had been stilled: the blood lust had spilled over and had flowed over Calvary to their eternal shame. They could not recall the great mistake, the wrong choice and the horrific display of their hatred. The venom of Man against God had so displayed itself and had viciously betrayed the spirit that was in Man. That spirit was shown to be empty and ineffective. Invective achieved nothing, and hatred only spawned its further, deadly offspring. Those there must carry their burden home with them, but home would never be true home.

The Quiet Triumph

If that were all, then something would be seen to be missing from our going to Calvary. Much was achieved: indeed, all was achieved. Satan and his system were unmasked and exposed for what they were and had always been. The Devil’s only weapon, guilt—the fear of death and the judgment—was torn from his grasp. Evil’s brilliance was made pallid in the victory of Christ’s humility. That one’s Sermon on the Mount was the true brilliance of Divine love and righteousness and in the Cross-event its glory shone, never to be extinguished. Humility triumphs

over arrogant pride. To give and not to destroy is the heart of the Godhead. So all that is evil left Calvary with no triumph and only a heart-sickening knowledge of irreversible defeat.

‘Forever the Family’

The Family is the good fruit of the travail of his soul. The mother and the son, Mary and John. The women and their mission. The sons of Zebedee and their ambitions dissolved. The Holy Family displaying its inner heart to the family of the Old Adam and turning it to be the Family of the New Adam. Human relationships liberated into the love of God. The new ways in an old world: love replacing hatred.

The suffering children, the affronted children and the sinful children, all now freed from their griefs and sorrows—if they would have it so—for he had taken those. All healed from their wounds, for his wounds had healed them. The ones angered at injustices, now free to forgive the evildoers, and so free to live without let or hurt. Thus the Family came away from Calvary that day with the ‘new deal’ of forgiveness, and the life of relationships that are possible where *agape* reigns.

The Human Race, the People of Adam

The sinful human race: what of it? Did it have to carry forever above and beyond its own sins the heinous one of crucifying the Son of God? This charge has often been sheeted home to the Jews, but the early church did not see

them as the sole offenders. They said, as they quoted Psalm 2:

Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit,

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples imagine vain things?
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place.

Both Israel *and* the other nations were there that day, and all must take responsibility for the act. In fact all humanity was there, for the world was crucified with him, and each person singly and intimately was crucified with him, for ‘I have been crucified with Christ’ is true for all who are glad to have it so. Since God made him to be sin, he has therefore borne in his Calvary body the sins of all human beings. In this sense the charge of crucifying Christ can be laid at everyone’s door. The way out of that dreadful act is coming to repentance, faith and forgiveness.

Even so, this is not the way the Scriptures talk; that over and above all our sins there is the crime of murdering him. The Cross is always presented as the place of grace, the place of healing, the place of eternal forgiveness. The captains, the kings, the nations and the people have all departed, but all must needs return to that Cross. There is no other way home but the way of the Cross.

A Conclusion to the Matter

The Matter is Important

I must confess that what impelled me to write this book was the sense that not too many books can be written on the Cross-Resurrection event. I mean the matter cannot be over-written, and it is certainly under-written. As I wrote the book, the material of other books I have written and hundreds of sermons I have preached kept coming back to me. In addition, the books others have written, the songs and psalms they have composed, and the art which has depicted the deepest in this sacrificial event have also emerged from my depths. I wished this present volume could speak simply and practically to readers and grip them enough for them to want to read to the end. My initial urging of readers to come to Calvary may have repelled those to whom it sounded like some street-corner fanatic shouting out his religious wares. This is not really the case. I read innumerable books, watch films and plays and think about the plots and eagerly search for greatness in art and literature. Whilst much is grand—even majestic—not

enough is substantial. Often the very beautiful is a powerful and even a distracting substitute for the really great. I am more often disappointed than delighted.

I am sure the reason for my disappointment is the almost banal way in which creatures and things of the creation are treated. Whilst I acknowledge the legitimacy of entertainment as part of life, I am disappointed at the banality of much humour, and the caricature of human greatness in the plots which concern human relationships, and which place sexual orgasm as the highest of all experiences and, really, about the only one that makes much sense of life. This thoughtless sexual action is generally called 'loving', but it is a caricature of that relational reality which is genuine love. Somehow often linked with what is called 'sex' is violence, and its depiction is increasing, as though it is the prime adrenalin-raising agent. I am not unaware of the fierceness of much human love, and the passionate drive towards total fulfilment and satisfaction, but ignorance of love's true ways defeats even this, in the end.

Of course there are thoughtful people, writers, artists, composers and other human beings. There is much sanity, but I fear that those who long for constant stimulation in emotion are—consciously or otherwise—seeking to evade the more magnificent issues of life and death. The selfish use of created things and persons to dodge true human living means life is lived from the cradle to the grave for personal satisfaction. Dissatisfied human beings have made crude playthings of bodies, organs, and the sanctity of human purity. The play has been banal, sad, empty and purposeless.

Against this foil others play out life in good ways, and often in grand ways. Yet even culture—art, literature,

music and richness in thought, to say nothing of religion—can be other forms of evading what our fathers and mothers used to call ‘the great eternities’. I think it was C. S. Lewis who said that the greatest citizen of time is the citizen of eternity. The wise old preacher Koheleth said, ‘God has put eternity in our hearts’: a magnificent saying. Along with that goes the humble saying of yet another, ‘Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One’. This person acknowledged that to be truly human is to be truly great. It is the wastage of greatness which disturbs me.

The Greatness For Humanity Lies in that Cross

All this I have said above is but a lead in to expressing my belief that, until men and women have been to the Cross, and have met their own crucifixion, they have never really seen the greatness of God, nor for that matter, the true worth of Man, or what Man can really be. St Paul’s statement, ‘[Christ has] abolished death and brought life and immortality to light’, opens to me vast vistas of what can be human greatness and high achievement. True enough, it depends upon the continuing grace of God and on His attendance upon the human spirit, but the abolition of death is a great relief. It releases the human spirit into the realm of immortality, and the kind of immortality which figures here, on this planet, and in our human ways of life. Bringing ‘life and immortality to light’ must stimulate and evoke the response of all the beauty a human being can see in God, his fellow-creatures and in himself.

So, then, the going to the Cross has rich rewards. Yet, as we have been seeing, the Cross is not a terminus. There is no powerful death which is not sealed and made perpetually effective without the Resurrection. Both the Cross and the Tomb are empty; a crucifix is an atavism and a tomb is for cultural pilgrims to gape at. Christ is risen, but his rising does not just outclass the great religious leaders who died and have not risen. Christ is not the *prima donna* amongst these religionists. He is the New Man in whom are all the new people, the men, women and children who have come to the Cross and responded, who have been taken up into that place of sacrifice, down into that temporary tomb, and then up and out into true life—the life they call ‘eternal’. Death has lost its sting of sin, and its power, because the guilt of the law has been neutralised.

Because he killed death in his death, he could bring ‘life and immortality to light’. All of this becomes translated into the ways of human action which we call ‘everyday living’. As a famous theologian put it, ‘The Spirit and the gifts are ours’. Not much more can be said than that.

Come! Come to Calvary!

One does not have to read a small book such as the present one in order to make his or her way to the old rugged Cross. God as Father would lead us there. So would His Son and His Spirit, for they would have us take time out of our human living to contemplate, to open our minds, and to drink deeply in our spirits. The Cross, along with its companion Resurrection, holds all the wisdom of God, and so all the wisdom human beings need. Understanding this wisdom we achieve true greatness.

Come! Let Us Go to Calvary!

There is no 'beyond Calvary' and 'beyond Resurrection'. Both of these hold the key which unlocks the future. They are the way back into true humanity from fallen humanity, and they are the way forward to the brilliance and the beauty of what God has in store for Man.

So I say, gently, yet pressing you firmly, 'Come! Come to Calvary!'