

The Crucifixion and the Role of the Cross

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Abstract

God's inner life is shrouded in mystery that cannot be penetrated by the human mind, but the same God has revealed Himself to creation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The cross is however the essence of faith and it embraces the entire world in the revelation of Christ. It is a symbol of religious thinking, piety, and indeed all Christian spiritual life and all experiences. Through the fall, man lost the 'image of God' and was unable through his own actions to recapture a state of likeness to God which could only be attained by God's atoning actions through Jesus sacrifice. This article examines the crucifixion and the role of the cross by engaging with biblical texts and other sources. In especially Orthodox dogma, the cross characterizes the saving grace of God as He redeems humanity through the crucifixion of Christ.

Keywords: Logos, redemption, atonement, crucifixion, salvation.

1. Introduction

The Orthodox canon of human redemption includes the doctrines regarding Christ's incarnation, death and His glorious Resurrection. Epistemologically, it is important for us to know the basis of our religious truth which must be grounded on material facts. It is then natural that Christian thinking should begin with the Incarnation since it is based on the relationship of individuals with God the Father through His incarnated Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:8-9). In the Orthodox faith, Jesus thus Christ occupies the central place when it comes to believers confessing that he is indeed the Logos of God, the incarnation, and also a mediator through the role of a comforter, the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) and God our Father. Jesus is for us a divine –human hypostasis the partner who creates an important dialogue between us and Him as our God. He is truly the Word or Logos who was created in the image of the Father, and we are created in His image. He created the world through an act of love and it is by this act that God offers Himself to the world and His creation as a gift to redeem us. It was pre-ordained that Jesus would die to redeem humanity. In 1 Peter 1:19-20 we read "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you".

Since we are created in His image we are also called upon to make sacrifices for others and for their wellbeing. Creation as such has an ontological foundation since all things are linked to the Logos in which we contemplate the divine in human form. God's love for humanity is shown through the life of Jesus who was a vital historical entity whose incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are vital to our salvation. The historical fact of Jesus as the object of our faith, is what makes our faith effective. Thus an apologetic which focuses on Christ the man-God (Theanthropos) allows us to maintain a focus on the gospel (Lossky, 1997). Christ who was transcendent became incarnate as a historical entity, but did not lose His transcendence. Montgomery (2004) asserts that: "In Christ, God truly entered the human sphere. And if this is the case, the human events of His life objectively display His deity and are not adequately explainable apart from it."

The Holy Church Father St. John Chrysostom, teaches that the whole of creation was incorrupt before the Fall just as was man because the entire creation was made for man (St. John Damascene, 1958). In fact not only Paradise was incorrupt prior the Fall but the whole of creation was devoid of death and corruption (St. Symeon the New Theologian, 1994). Man as the possessor of both a body and a soul was the connection between the incorrupt material world and the noetic world of the holy angels. What were the consequences of the Fall? The proto - man, Adam, fell from an immaculate state and took himself and all creation into a state of corruption and physical and spiritual death. In Genesis (2:17), God orders Adam: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". Thus Adam died spiritually by eating of the Tree of Knowledge and he lost the Divine Grace in which he had been fashioned (St. John Damascene, 1958). Thus mankind's nature became tainted and lost the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit and was totally lacking in Grace. Humanity became separated from the Creator and his spiritual death made Adam subject to physical death as well (St. Gregory Palamas, 1995). Man's body thus became a victim of death and his spiritual corruption also made his soul incapable of partaking in an everlasting unification with God after his death (Seraphim Rose, 2000). When they died Adam as well as Eve, and all their successors went down into hades which is a habitation of waiting, and especially of separation from the Creator. In Romans 5:12 St. Paul tells us that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. Following this he says in Romans 8:20-21, that the creation passed into corruption since mankind sinned. We are the inheritors of the death and corruption that cross the threshold into man's nature at the Fall. St. Gregory Palamas asserts that through Adam's spiritual death, both spiritual and physical death was distributed to all humanity men since we are all of the people of Adam (St. Gregory Palamas, 2002). By conquering death Christ has a permanent priesthood, and consequently we have a high priest that is living and who incessantly intercedes for humanity (Hebrews 7:24, 25).

In order to create a new communion between God and humanity which was broken because of the Fall, the Word of God manifested Himself in the creation so as to restore the link with humanity and thus bring about the atonement of man to the Creator. Through Jesus Christ the essence of humanity is elevated to the image of God the Creator through our participation in the Spirit. The word of God thus created a new relationship between man and God which is ontological and very dynamic. This is perfected through the energy of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ becomes the core of creation and is able to relate to everything and He calls upon believers to seek the source of reason which exists in Him alone (Borgwardt, 1993). Atonement therefore comes through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ upon the Cross at Golgotha. While humanity is the property of God it has debased itself through sin and corruption, and has become a prisoner of evil. However the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross restored humanity to God the Father. Jesus' atoning death on the cross surpassed the "perfect sacrifice" that a range of Old Testament sacrifices could only propose but never achieve (Hebrews 10). Jesus' sacrificial death was exceptional in that it was a "once for all atonement" (Hebrews 10:10) which resulted in the forgiveness of human transgression. Christ also provides Himself as both high priest and sacrifice. He thus officiated and offered himself. Humanity is still plagued by evil which separates people across the globe and it is the incarnate Word which unites people through the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit but through Christ's sacrifice we have redemption.

In 1 Corinthians Paul tells that the words of human understanding are powerless and that the agnostic cannot know God or comprehend spiritual issues, and that the understanding of this world, and indeed human wisdom, believes God and His strategy for human salvation to be irrational.

“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Corinthians 1:17-25).

Paul also stresses:

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. ... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 14).

2. On the Cross

Christ had to die in a manner involving the shedding of his blood, without which there could be no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). Given that “life” (Hebrew – nephesh) resides in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), it was essential that Jesus should shed his blood to achieve humanity’s redemption. Isaiah states that the Messiah’s “soul/life” (nephesh) would be “poured out” unto death (Isaiah 53:10-12). In Matthew 26:28, Jesus states “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins”.

The Gospel message is clear that God granted us redemption from sin through the crucifixion of his Son (Colossians 1:19–20). The Cross of Jesus Christ and his suffering, death and resurrection, provides us with our purpose for life (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). The crucifixion of Christ made possible our reconciliation with God. The cross was the means through which God chose to restore to himself his entire creation, and consequently the entirety of human life (Colossians 1:19-20). In the Crucified Christ, God is not merely a distant spectator but rather is involved in the suffering on the Cross and places optimism in the life of all sinners through the Resurrection of Christ. The scourging, flagellation and ultimately crucifixion and death of Jesus remained the outcome of his public ministry and preaching in a world anticipating a political Messiah. Jesus’s death is no way a remote act of redemption disconnected from what became obvious in his life. Our redemption through Jesus Christ commenced with his incarnation and when he took human flesh, and then became like us in everything excluding sin (Hebrews, 4:15). He deified our human nature by assuming a human nature. We thus have potential for deification by nature and sonship, and are deified by grace and adoption. Jesus offers his body to be put to death in place of all, and offered it to the father. This he did out of sheer love for us, so that in his death all might die and the law of death thereby be abolished” (St. Athanasius the Great, 1993). In the first Epistle of St. Peter we see Christ labelled as an unblemished sacrificial lamb: “Ye were redeemed with the precious Blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot, who was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20).

It was the fall due to the human revolt in Eden and the subsequent wickedness of humanity that necessitated a redemptive act to reconcile God and mankind. Thus on the cross, Christ took the entire sin of the world upon himself for the sake of fallen man. Humanity selected to believe and to live out the lie of Satan instead of the word of life given by the Creator (Genesis 3:1-8). The destructive and subjugating influence of iniquity contaminates every feature of human life. Sin has touched all aspects of life (Genesis 3:7-24). The Jews were to be the channel of God's redeeming love for the whole of creation and for all the nations (Genesis 12:2-3; Exodus 19:30-6). Moses obtains the law for the people, and there are priests, prophets and kings to sustain the kind of life that suggests what God wants for His people. The people however falter and fail to embrace His redemptive purpose as is evident in II Kings (17:7-23).

Jesus comes to realize the expectation of Israel for a Messiah and to fulfil Israel's role by conveying God's salvation to a fragmented world (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus asserts that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and that God's supremacy by the Holy Spirit to unshackle and heal the tainted creation is now present in him (Mark 1:14-15). He is not however viewed as the political Messiah Israel hopes for, a leader who will liberate the Jews from the oppression of the Romans. Creation is still in bondage to iniquity and death and Satan continues to assert himself (II Corinthians 4:4). The Messiah had to become a human being and this was portentously articulated in Genesis 3:15, when God pronounces His judgment against the serpent subsequent to the fall of Adam and Eve and He says: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." The term "offspring" refers to progenies and the Messiah would be a descendant of the woman and thus a human being. This is fulfilled according to Galatians 4:4-5: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Christ is the mediator of the new testament that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews, 9:15).

While the Mosaic Law brought an alerting of consciousness concerning sin, and sacrifices played their part in bringing about a measure of atonement for sin and partially curbed the wrath of God, this was not enough. The sacrifices in their various forms were merely a prefiguring of the impeccable sacrifice in the person of Jesus Christ. He became man so as to become a perfect, flawless and immaculate sacrifice that took away the sins of believers. Christ's sacrifice was the final solution and essentially non-repetitive sacrifice. Christ's death on the Cross was the perfect act of as love and is evidence of God's love for humanity. Sin grieves God and yet He provided an alternative way for malefactors to escape His wrath and sent down his Son to die in the place of all sinners (John 3:16). Christ assumed a human nature so as to lay down his life on a cross in Israel. The Saviour of humanity consents to utter humiliation, excruciating pain, death, and, ultimately leave-taking of His divine powers to realize humanity's redemption. Christ's expiating death is the ultimate demonstration of his love for humanity (Romans 5:8). God asserted that He would renew and restore humanity to Himself and save it from the corruption of sin (Isaiah 2:2-5; 9:6-7). Christ's death then puts to an end to the Old Testament sacrificial arrangement because He is the faultless Lamb without spot of blemish. John the Baptist acknowledged Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice that would redress the sins of the world and states "... Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). At the cross of Christ, God the Father acknowledged the goodness of what His hand created and he basically responded affirmatively to the creation.

John 1:1, 14, 17 states that "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." God made provision for humanity's redemption (Pearlman, 1937:186). St. Symeon the New Theologian, asserts that: "Christ's death...was an indispensable sacrifice also for the pious ones who died before His coming in the flesh" (St. Symeon the New Theologian, 1994). The cross validates the victory of God's saving love over the disparaging influence of sin (John, 12:30-33;

Colossians, 2:15). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God delivered the ultimate blow to human sin and revolution, and consummated the salvation of the world. Paul writes: "If by one man's offence death reigned by one [Adam], much more they which receive abundance of Grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign by one, Jesus Christ" (Romans, 5:17). Christ also said of Himself: "The Son of Man came ... to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew. 20:28). Paul also says that Christ "... by the Grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews, 2:9). St. Symeon the New Theologian stated that: "God, Who is incomparably higher than the visible and invisible creation, accepted human nature, which is higher than the whole visible creation, and offered it as a sacrifice to His God and Father.... Honouring the sacrifice, the Father could not leave it in the hands of death. Therefore, He annihilated His sentence" (St. Symeon the New Theologian, 1994).

It was in the cross that Jesus entered completely into the human condition when he took on the sin of the world and totally extinguished the power of evil. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). His love for humanity secured the redemption of the human race and by his glorious resurrection he conquered death and granted humanity the possibility of eternal life thus bestowing life to those in the tombs. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus tells us that Christ could not redeem what he did not take on himself-so that, what is not assumed cannot possibly be redeemed (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2007). "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also the whole world" (1 John 2:2). In Christ's crucifixion and resurrection we see Jesus declare the message of God's saving love in the face of human revolt and sin. We also see that the message of God's love is rejected and the messenger despised and viciously put to death. Additionally we see the love of God who offers His Son who exhibits the instant victory over the power of sin. The Resurrection of the Lord is also symbolic of God's ultimate victory over sin. Christ in his renewing exertion on the cross emphasized His assertion that He is the Lord of all. God's redemption of humanity is a mystery which Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers help us to come to grips with. As God, Christ knew He had come to earth to die for humanity, and in dying to rise from the grave. One day before His crucifixion, He uttered the words: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27).

In Christ's incarnation, man was still incapable of actualizing the possibility of deification. This is since man was spiritually corrupted. Christ thus came to overcome the obstacle of nature at His incarnation, and broke down the barrier of sin through His death by Crucifixion and His glorious Resurrection (St. Nicholas Cabasilas, 1998). The cross was salvific in light of what God has accomplished in the Resurrection of Jesus. The Crucifixion should be viewed as the ultimate manifestation of humanity's rejection of salvation from God which was accessible through Jesus. It was not God, who placed Jesus on the cross. In Leviticus we read that God detests human sacrifices (Leviticus 18:21-30; 20:1-5). It was humanity which essentially placed the Lord on the cross. God did not interfere to save Jesus on the cross, where Jesus utters "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" but did not abandon Jesus either since Jesus is ultimately raised from the dead and glorified. Jesus liberated those who had been taken captive (Ephesians 4:8) and emerge as the glorious champion who broke the chains which hold humanity captive to Satan.

3. The Gospel of Luke

While each of the four New Testament Gospels explains how Jesus' life led to his death on a Roman cross and its historicity is reinforced by other Christian, Jewish, and Roman sources, it is the New Testament and the Christian tradition which are commonly more concerned with interpreting Jesus' death. Luke's Gospel elucidation of Jesus' suffering and death (the passion) tends to concentrate on the political and theological consequences of Jesus' death. Luke considers Jesus' pacifist stance to Roman subjugation and what it takes for one to be saved. Luke highlights the political charges levelled against Jesus (Luke 23:1-5, Luke 23:14)

and tells us that King Herod questioned Jesus (Luke 23:7-12). After this Luke says that Pontius Pilate declared him to be guiltless at least three times (Luke 23:4, Luke 23:14-15, Luke 23:22). Luke states in chapter 23, that Jesus was tried by Pontius Pilate, then sent for crucifixion together with two thieves. Luke merely says: “they crucified Jesus” (Luke 23:33) whom he portrays as a threat to Roman rule.

The Roman raconteur Quintilian (35-90s C.E.) noted “whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect” (Declamations, 274). Thus Jesus was publicly humiliated, disgraced and executed. Luke states that Jesus was crucified as an impending threat to Rome and shows the Sanhedrin (Jewish leaders served in the Sanhedrin which was the supreme religious body in Israel) as being highly influential in driving Jesus’ execution. Luke does however not implicate the Pharisees as accomplices in the events leading to Jesus’ death. Luke asserts that Jesus expected and understood his violent impending death but nonetheless ask God to forgive those responsible. Luke, views Jesus’ death as a fundamental part of God’s plan to provide salvation for the fallen world. Luke portrays Jesus praying that God would pardon those responsible for his execution (Luke 23:34) and also takes account of the words of the two crucified thieves beside Jesus, and he includes Jesus’ declaration that one of them would join him in paradise (Luke 23:39-43). Luke tells us that a sign was placed above Jesus’ head stating: “This is the King of the Jews” (Luke 23:38).

The accusations brought against Jesus are clear in Luke:

“ And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.” (Luke 23:1-5; Luke 23:14).

Previously in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus predicted his death as a way of fulfilling God’s saving purpose (Luke 18:31-33). The way Luke narrates the story of Jesus’ trial and death repeatedly ties Jesus’ destiny to Israel’s Scriptures, and he quotes from Isaiah 53 (see Luke 22:37) and refers also to Psalms 22 and 69 in, Luke 23:34-36, and Luke 23:46 respectively. Jesus conveys the message to his followers that all the Scriptures expect his suffering as God’s Messiah for humanity (Luke 24:25-27, Luke 23:44).

4. The Historical Crucifixion

The significance of the cross cannot be viewed outside of the historical and cultural contexts in which the death of Jesus occurred. The historical record shows that in the Roman Empire the act of crucifixion was very common and the cruelest method that could be adopted to impose the highest possible degree of physical suffering on an individual. Most crucifixions tended to last for days rather than hours. The person to be crucified usually endured a severe beating and flagellation in a public forum and was humiliated in front of a crowd so as to demonstrate the futility of one seeking to violate Roman law which had to be respected at all times. Flagellation was so intense that victims were beaten from the upper back to the lower end of their legs so that muscles could be torn from the bone and such whippings were usually fatal (Kittel, 1967). Crucifixion was also used by the Persians when king Darius had 3,000 Babylonians crucified after he subjugated Babylon. Alexander the Great and others also used crucifixion at certain junctures. The Romans were however, the most noted for the practice of crucifixion. The victims were obliged to carry the upper crossbar to the place of crucifixion.

The injured party was forced to lie on the ground, with the crossbeam under his upper back while his arms were then nailed to it. Modern medicine suggests that the nails must have driven through the wrists, because the hand tissue “cannot bear the weight” of the body and

then the feet were nailed (Bloomquist, 1964). The Romans were not at all consistent in their technique of crucifixion but in a discovery of the remains of crucified man in 1968 in the city of Jerusalem, a 20cm nail was found wedged through the heels of a victim of crucifixion (Tzaferis, 1985). His feet probably straddled the upright beam, as nails attach the legs to both sides of the wooded post. A victim was totally unable to support his body so as to be able to inhale/exhale effortlessly, and eventually he would suffocate and usually die within 36 hours, or in extreme cases survive for days. Loss of blood volume and the inability to breathe due to the extended position of the body would lead to death (Edwards, 1985). Jesus lived only for 6 hours on the cross and his suffering as was prophesied in Psalm 22:

“I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; And thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: A company of evildoers have enclosed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all my bones; They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast lots” (Psalm 22:14-18).

Many prophecies correctly refer to Jesus, for example, he was also prophesied to be given vinegar and gall to satisfy his thirst (Psalm 69:21). Breaking the legs of a crucifixion victim (John 19:32) did not transpire in Christ’s case as He was the antitype of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46; Psalm 34:20; John 19:33; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus, unlike other victims of crucifixion, was interred in the tomb of an affluent Jew (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57). The atoning exertions of Christ are represented in the father’s response in Luke 15:23, 24 to his prodigal son’s return: “Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found...” It is thus via the atoning efforts of Christ that we are alive and not dead to sin. Humanity was lost in its sin and disgraceful state but is found and transformed into a positive relationship with God. In Hebrews 9:14 it says that Christ offered Himself flawless to God and it is through His broken body and shed blood that we have our atonement with God and: “... Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrew 9:15).

The core characteristic of Christ’s death on the cross was the atonement of fallen humanity. John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus to be our atoner when he saw Jesus approaching and said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and in Corinthians we read: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). God so loves us that He sent His only Son to save the world from His anger: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:1). Christ thus became our substitute so we could live in eternity. He paid the price for us and bought us back with His own blood so that we could reconcile with God.

5. The Sign of the Cross

In Orthodoxy the sign of the cross is a very common and ancient practice. There are certain scholars who interpret Paul’s saying that he bears the marks of Christ on his body, as his referring to the sign of the cross (Galatians 6:17). The sign of the cross originates goes back to the early Church where Christians received it in baptism where the celebrant signed them and thus declared them to be Christ’s (Clarke, 1925). The cross is the primary symbol for Christians and not merely as the instrument through which the world was saved from hell, but also as a continuous witness to the fact that people cannot claim to be Christians unless they live with the cross as the core content of their earthly lives. In Mark 8:34 and also Luke 9:23 we read “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”.

Tertullian states that Christians should at all times mark their foreheads with the sign of the cross. The Orthodox place their first two fingers and thumb together to form a sign of the

Holy Trinity and then cross themselves from the forehead to the chest and from shoulder to shoulder, right to left. The sign of the cross is then a confession of our faith and a renewal of baptism. It is also a mark of discipleship and an acceptance of suffering in life. It is also considered to be a defense against the devil and a triumph over decadence. The sign links Christians to the body of Christ, and when we make it we remember we are joining to the body (Church) with Christ as the head (Schmemmann, 1973). The word that the Fathers of the early Church used for the sign of the cross is a Greek word that connotes what a slave owner puts on a slave, or a shepherd puts on a sheep, and is a declaration that humanity belongs to Christ (Colliander, 1960).

The sign of the cross asserts that we are prepared to embrace suffering so as to share in Christ's suffering on the cross. The cross is our inspiration and power and essentially the very content of life for Christians. The early Church Fathers also teach that the sign of the cross is a declaration of defense against the devil and his machinations and that it is the task of Christians to incarnate the truth and love of God as fully as possible within the world (Irenaeus of Lyons). We will be judged as to whether or not we have lived by the Spirit of Christ since His broken body and spilt blood unite all of humanity with God and liberates them to be able to serve one another in a "fallen" world. It is Christ who as the bearer of divine life draws the world into an existence which resides in the Triune Godhead. The cosmic presence of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross call us to make our contribution to the development and progress of the world.

6. Conclusion

The Logos established a new relationship between God and humanity, an ontological relationship which is dynamic and which is created and perfected through the energies of the Creator and affected by the Holy Spirit. Humanity was liberated from egotism to be able to enter into communion with others. Christians believe that Jesus's death was the most significant aspect in restoring humankind to a good relationship with God. Christians believe that through faith in Jesus's 'scapegoat' death and His triumphant resurrection humanity is reunited with God and receives new happiness and influence in this life as well as eternal life in heaven after physical death. The crucifixion of Jesus then, along with His resurrection re-establishes access to a lively experience of God's manifestation, love and grace as well as the confidence in the notion of eternal life beyond the mortal flesh. Christ's actions serve as guide for us not to be content with insufficient rationality but to strive to help others to find reason in Christ and His cross.

Christ's death and burial can certainly ever not be detached from His Resurrection which was a foreseeable consequence of His death, since, as it is said in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, "it was not possible for the Author of Life to be a victim of corruption" (Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, 1984). The victory achieved through the cross was made first by the disciples who had seen Jesus alive from the dead and His bodily resurrection prefigured a new day. God's victory over evil was accomplished by His Son dying on a cross. The proper implication of the cross is that it empowers us to happily submit to the rule of Christ only as the Holy Spirit works in response to our prayers. With Christ's death and His Resurrection, the penalties of the Fall are overcome including both spiritual death (the loss of the Grace of God) and physical death (Krivoshein, 1964).

We could blame Roman soldiers who carried out the orders of Pontius Pilate, and executed Jesus by crucifying him on the cross, or even blame the Jewish people who handed him over to Pilate, or perhaps even Judas Iscariot since he was the one who betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But such criticism is highly superficial since the sacrifice of Jesus had been in the mind of God since creation. In a nutshell, Jesus Christ had to die so that God's redemptive plan for humanity could be consummated fully. It was ultimately the sinfulness of humanity which made redemption highly necessary and so we could argue that it was humanity that crucified Jesus. St. Gregory the Theologian stresses: "We needed an incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him, because we were put to death with Him; we were

glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him." In Eastern Orthodox Church Christians, it is accepted that Jesus was sent by God to conquer death and Satan. Because of his faultlessness, voluntary death, and resurrection, Jesus overcame Satan and death, and arose triumphant. Humanity is no longer bound by wickedness, but is free to unite with God through faith in Jesus. The cross of Jesus allows humanity to repent of sin and trust Jesus as the personal Saviour of all. The cross of Christ was God's way of dealing once and for all with the problem of human sin and became an apologetic for the legitimacy of Christianity. Jesus' sacrifice expiated sin (John 1:29) and brought about complete access to God and reinstated the spiritual union between God and humanity (2 Corinthians 5:19).

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