

On The Cross

A comment, on a meditation, from a Coptic Orthodox University Professor, a friend from Egypt.

Read the meditation and the comment:

1) COMMENT ON THE MEDITATION

Dear Friend

God, I praise you; Friend, I love you. Lord may your light shine more and more and Your visions explode and spring out like fireworks and great flashes of light in all the hearts and minds of your children. Amen.

Your words are like ice on a wound, like ice-cream on a hot summery day, like a shower of clean water on minds badly covered with dust of unorthodox corrupt teaching!!!

Yes, indeed the **"CROSS" is the CENTRE** of our Faith, life, worship and glory!!! I pray that no one has misunderstood me, or thought that I was **"EXCLUDING"** the cross from the work of our Salvation, when I was stressing that **not by the Cross ALONE** or by the **Death of Christ ALONE** that we have been saved but by the **fulfilment** of the **WHOLE ONE ECONOMY and PLAN of the TRINITY**, which we celebrate as a **ONE INDIVISIBLE GRACE** in the **Seven Great Feasts of Our Lord**, as I will explain again.

But WHAT IS the CROSS?

1) First, what it is not: The cross is not the 3 hours of suffering on Good Friday, or even a 12 hour episode of humiliation, whipping, beating, tearing, spitting ... and 3 hours nailed on the wood, as Mel Gibson's film "The Passion" portrays it. It is not, as the Western medieval teaching says: **"A PUNISHMENT INSTEAD OF A PUNISHMENT"**... from a vengeful Father onto His Son, to save humans from the same sadistic wrath and anger of a medieval monster created in the West and named "the god of justice." Thank you, ever so much, for making this point very clear in your meditation; I seldom hear this witness, from a Copt, as clear and unambiguous as you put it. Thank you. **The Cross, in Orthodoxy, is not an object of mourning but of rejoicing and praising. The Cross in Orthodoxy is never an object of punishment and vengeance but of grace and glory.** We do not weep in sorrow because of Christ's pain. We cheer and shout with joy!!! Read the prayer of the 6th hour (the hour of crucifixion) in the Agpeya and you will see the joy and rejoicing at the foot of the Cross!!! **We speak of the GOOD FRIDAY not SAD FRIDAY. The medieval Western tradition sees the Cross as an object of vengeance and punishment, of lamentation and mourning.**

2) Second, what the Bible says about the CROSS:

- St Peter gives us the **"TIME SCOPE" and "STATIONS" of the Cross**, when he says: "knowing that you were not redeemed by corruptible things ... but by the precious blood (= life granted to you) of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed **was FOREORDAINED before the foundation of the world**, but was made manifest in these last times for you (only possible by the **INCARNATION in our Earthly Time**), who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead (**DEATH & RESURRECTION**), and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." (1Pt 1:18-21)

- **The basic BIBLICAL REASON for Christ dying on the cross is** evident in St Paul's words: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same (**INCARNATED**), **that through DEATH He might DESTROY him who had the POWER OF DEATH, that is , the devil, and release (by the RESURRECTION) those who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**" (Heb 2:14-15). Notice here a very important teaching: that it is the Devil, **and not God**, who "had the power of death"; the Devil who was the "murderer from the beginning," as Christ said (Jn 8:44).
- St John also saw Christ "in the **midst of the throne** ... stood a lamb as though it had been slain," (Rev 5:6) and continues to tell us the Time Scope of when He was slain: "the Lamb slain **from the foundation of the world**," (Rev 13:8). Hence slain from Eternity to Eternity; before the foundation of the world and in the midst of the Eternal Throne.
- St Paul explains how Christ started to carry the Cross since He "**emptied Himself of His glory**" by His will and full intention: "but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men." Since when? **From Eternity to Eternity in the heart of God the Trinity**, for as we pray: "I believe, I believe, I believe that this (the Body and the Blood of Christ) is the Truth, amen, ... that **His Humanity parted not from His Divinity, not for a moment nor for a twinkle of an eye**," (=ETERNAL, although revealed to us in our time, only, 2000 years ago).

3) The CROSS, therefore, is the WHOLE ETERNAL PLAN and WORK

of the **"TRINITY's SELF-GIVING and UNION with mankind,"** and the whole of this Creation, in the person of His **Incarnated Son** and through His **Holy Spirit**, and for ever. The **Time Scope** is from Eternity to Eternity. The **Spatial Scope** is in the Heart of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, together; and for ever. They ALL continue to experience this Cross Eternally. God has an Eternal Cross because **"His Humanity parts not from His Divinity, not for a moment nor for a twinkle of an eye."** **His Humanity is us: "for we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."** (Eph 5: 30).

There has been, and will continue to be, an Eternal Cross in the heart of God the Father, His Son and His Spirit, **as long as even one creature of His, remains cut off from Him.** Indeed the Lamb of God remains Eternally crucified because His love may not be **echoed** by love from the whole of His creation, some reject Him and prefer Death Eternal in Hell, instead of His loving bosom. Origenus (2nd century), St Gregory of Nissa (4th century) and St Isaac the Syrian (7th century), **"HOPED"** for a solution for this **unbearable** situation (which love cannot bear), by the salvation of all .. but **the Church never accepted their hope as "dogma"** ... It remains only as a **"hope"**, and that is why we pray for every departed person, in this hope. The Church did not excommunicate these saints, in spite of their daring words. Bishop Kalistos Ware puts it like this: "It is heretical to say that **ALL MUST** be saved, but it is legitimate to **HOPE that ALL MIGHT** be saved." He adds: "**As long as free-will exists, Hell exists.**" Those who do not want God cannot be forced to live with Him, because He respects mankind and human free-choice.

4) As I mentioned before, we can describe **THE CROSS** (the whole Economy of our Salvation), as you said, in many metaphors but none can encompass the whole meaning, if we understood the scope in **Magnitude, Time and Place** as I discussed. **Salvation is, in a nutshell: We were Eternally dead in sin; now Eternally alive in Christ. All our descriptions should remain as interpretations and not solid dogma. If metaphors become dogma, they become MYTHOLOGY!!! The work of Salvation cannot be encompassed or fully described by any language or human models and metaphors:**

- The Cross is a **BATTLEFIELD**, where Christ conquered Sin, Death and the Devil. (review the song of "Ya kol assofof assama'ieen" ... destroyed the brass gates of Hades and the iron locks He broke ...freed Adam and his children from the prison and returned them to Paradise with joy...)

- The Cross is the **OPERATING ROOM** where the Surgeon cured the human nature from the cancer of Death, and proved His success, when He came out on Easter day from the operating room with the patient alive. He confirmed that by the Incarnation he had **TRANSPLANTED** His life from His Divinity into His Humanity, which is us. He gave His blood (Life) as a life-**TRANSFUSION** to the patient whom He carried in Himself, and redeemed the patient from Death to Life.
- The Cross is the **FISHING HOOK** on which He hung His bait (His Humanity) to confuse the Devil, catch him and destroy him once and for all (St Gregory of Nissa).
- The Cross is a **TRANSFORMER** which **absorbed all our human suffering, pain and wickedness, which we poured on ourselves and on Christ**, He accepted willingly and happily to TRANSFORM our useless destructive electric current of hatred into a current of forgiveness, life and love.
- The Cross is the **WEDDING CEREMONY** in which the Bridegroom accepted our gift, our crown of thorns as His wedding ring. Instead He granted us His crown of glory as our wedding ring. We inflicted our Death on Him; He granted us His pure Life from His Divinity as the new white dress to the Bride, instead of her torn filthy shroud of dead humanity, to make her fit for the Heavenly King and Wedding.

According to our Coptic Orthodox Church

We celebrate our Salvation on many occasions, in fact every day. Christ in His Divinity (being God) essentially exists outside TIME and SPACE. We should see His life on Earth, as a special revelation of the Trinitarian love, which had already, from Eternity, granted us this sacrifice of love for our sake as a **ONE FACT, ONE ACT, ONE WHOLE VISIT, ONE WHOLE MEANING, ONE WHOLE SYMPHONY** even though made of different musical notes and sentences. **NONE of Christ's works or words is MORE important or LESS important than the other.** Indeed none of His **LIFE-STATIONS or EVENTS** can be seen or taken separately. **They all constitute ONE CROSS!!!** However, when the Church, for **our limitations in TIME and SPACE** wanted to help us learn the meaning of His life in more detail, through daily worship and changing rhythm of seasons, the Church chose 14 events in His life and divided them into 7 Major Feasts, of our Lord and 7 Minor Feasts.

The 7 Major Feasts are:

1) The Annunciation; 2) Christmas; 3) Epiphany (Baptism, Al Ghetas); 4) Palm Sunday; 5) The Resurrection Day; 6) The Ascension Day; 7) The Pentecost (Receiving the Holy Spirit in mankind forever).

Now where is GOOD-Friday? Is it not part of the Major list?!!! It is and it is not!!! **We do not celebrate DEATH but LIFE**, in all these Feasts of our Lord. During the Pascha you will notice during the litanies, the words: "Pray and ask for this Holy Pascha, that is for our Good Saviour, that He **may complete it** for us in peace and **reveal to us the joy of His Glorious Resurrection**, keeping us safe, and forgive us our sins." During the Pascha and Good Friday, we **REMEMBER His PASSION**, His **LIFE-GIVING PASSION** and His **LIFE-GIVING DEATH** on the Cross. **We then CELEBRATE this GIVEN-LIFE, given to us, when He CONFIRMS and REVEALS to us OUR RESURRECTION in HIS Resurrection on EASTER DAY: On Easter we celebrate His LIFE-GIVING DEATH on the Cross, having received this life for certainty, which the Cross has made possible for us to see and touch.**

Now what does this mean? It means that **His death on the Cross was very essential and absolutely necessary and without it we would not have been saved.** Why? Because, although as we say in the Liturgy that "the Death which entered the world by the envy of the Devil You destroyed by the **Incarnation** of Your Only Begotten Son ..., " **we realise that unless Christ our Lord had actually experienced all our human nature, with all what it is, and with all its pain and suffering, where DEATH is the worst climax of all this suffering, we would not have believed that His Incarnation (becoming a real human) had actually and truly occurred, or even saved us, and granted mankind any real victory over DEATH, even if He were to be seen "RAISED TO GOD IN HEAVEN ALIVE,"** as some non-Christians say. Unless Christ drank all the cup of what being human means, including the most bitter part, which is DEATH, we could not have believed Him being more than another good man, who simply disappeared off the face of Earth and gave us nothing of great value in our own nature. That is why St Paul says: If Christ had not died and been resurrected, then all our Faith and preaching are worthless. We would still have had no real hope of **OUR ETERNAL LIFE**. He would have played a very nice theatrical role and travelled abroad, nothing more!!!

So, Orthodoxy does NOT celebrate our Redemption, ONLY on the "Good-Friday Cross," but, on a Cross that spans from Eternity unto Eternity, manifested and interwoven, like a golden thread through the beads of: 1)Conception of Christ by our Mother The Virgin Mary, who said "YES" on behalf of us all, **2)His birth,** 3) life with us, suffering with us all our wickedness and all its bitter results and humiliation, unto the most wretched and awful **4) Death** by crucifixion, **5) Resurrection,** **6) Ascension** and 7) The Eternal **indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us.** It was the **ONLY right way to prove that He Truly became man, in the full meaning,** to die like all of us, so we can be sure that, IN HIM, as St Athanasius said, and we will continue to repeat for ever:

"God became man that man may become God." (On the Incarnation 54:3)

St Athanasius also answers the question? Why not any other death? Why on a cross? He answers by saying that it had to be **public and witnessed and guarded by His enemies,** so we would have no hint of a doubt about His True Humanity (us) having died with Him and having been raised with Him ...Praise God.

So, where is the problem in Western medieval teaching?

The problems are many:

- 1) They believe that Christ redeemed us **ONLY by His Death on the Cross.**
- 2) They believe, as Anselm of Canterbury and Martin Luther taught, that His death was a **PENAL DEATH,** demanded by a god who felt insulted by our sin and must see blood and death to be satisfied, hence this monster god was pleased by the death of Christ, only because it was a **"PUNISHMENT INSTEAD OF A PUNISHMENT."** This is the ONLY meaning of Redemption, Salvation and Atonement (Kaffara) in the Dictionary of teachers who adopt this corrupt non-biblical teaching.
- 3) The first mistake they did, to build up this corrupt theory, was by **RE-DEFINING SIN.** Instead of understanding sin, as all the Eastern Fathers of the Church did (as being a **suicidal action** by mankind, only destroying man and the Creation), Medieval Western teachers saw sin as **a crime and an insult directed only against God's Justice and Majesty, which made Him very angry and could not be satisfied except by the death of mankind or a substitute.** **This teaching is non-biblical and obviously illogical.**

It actually, insults God's love and mankind's intellect, at the same time. It saves only, if it does, the honour and dignity of the monster god and the medieval clergy, who created it, to seek revenge from their enemies. They created this god to defend their own wickedness, which enjoyed holding **inquisition courts** for those they did not agree with, **burning their enemies** at the stake and **selling indulgences,** to make money. Hence they used their god as a weapon of man's destruction and a bank for making money, by **trading in forgiveness,** **places in Heaven and merits of saints,** which these clergy thought Christ gave them to sell, because they can "bind and loose" anything on Earth and in Heaven" as they wish!!!

Lord have mercy.

So, Rejoice in the Cross of joy. Have a very Happy Easter.

Hany Mina Mikhail

On The Cross

A comment, on a meditation, from a Coptic Orthodox University Professor, a friend from Egypt.

Read the meditation and the comment:

2) THE MEDITATION

Why the Cross?

The Cross is our Pride and our Sign of Salvation... we were brought up to know that the Cross is the Sign of Christians and that our whole Christian faith and belief has its Centre at the Cross. We were always made to know that the Crucifixion is the one main event that changed our lives and that the Cross was the one sole path without which we could never have been saved. We were indeed made to believe that there was no other way but that of the Cross by which our Lord Jesus Christ could have fulfilled His Mission of Salvation.

However, recently some of us were exposed to a somewhat “different” kind of thought, which magnifies the “Incarnation” and “Resurrection after Death” as having been the most crucial events in our Salvation, rather than that of the suffering and dying on the Cross alone. I realized that this was not as much undermining the essence or the role of the Cross but I always grappled with the question that continued popping to my mind, namely “If through His incarnation and Resurrection Christ completed His mission of Salvation, so why did He have to go through all that suffering along the path of the Cross and on the Cross? Why the Cross in the first place?”

I continued asking this question to those who claimed to me that our Salvation was completed through His Incarnation and Resurrection, and not through the blood, thorns, whippings, piercing, and horrible nails. However, I have to admit I was never fully satisfied with any of the answers I got.

Today, Friday, 23rd March 07, during morning Mass, I suddenly felt like my eyes were suddenly opened and that I GOT the answer to my persisting query – suddenly I felt I KNEW and I couldn’t but hold the pen and started writing those thoughts that came to me even while in the middle of the Holy Mass.

These might be common knowledge to some/all of you – some of you may not agree to them – some may not get the meaning that I am trying to make (I may not be very good at explaining myself) – some may feel that it is too repetitious and full to unnecessary details. However, I just felt an urging need to share with you those very humble thoughts that, for me, were the result of what I dare call: “flashes of revelation”, i.e. moments when certain matters/issues that someone have been thinking and worried about for a long while all of a sudden get uncovered and become very clear and very logical too.

The cross was indeed a must, but by all means NOT because Christ had to fulfil the “so-called punishment” that the Father inflicted on Man ever since he committed Sin.

First of all, the idea that a punishment like that of the suffering on the Cross or even that of “the whole path of the Cross” is totally incompatible with the nature of the original sin, i.e. “being totally and by one’s own free will separated from the Essence of Being – from God”. Such a punishment seems to be undermining the grand nature of this kind of Sin! Physical pain or suffering – even if it goes as far as all what took place along “the path to the Cross” and “on the Cross” – **looks like it is too small a price to pay in return for the “Grand Separation” that Man chose for himself through his original and on-going “sin/s”.**

On the other hand, I do believe that the Cross was the “normal development” (expected direct consequence) of the disruption that was caused by the power that Evil managed to gain for itself and which was caused by no other than Man who chose to give up his original Heavenly status and belonging to “Good” by his own free will, i.e. by choosing Sin and all its outcomes!

Let’s take the story step by step.....

Our Lord Jesus Christ, decided not to leave us without hope, in this world and the hereafter.... His absolute Love and Great Mercy refused to abandon us to the world of Evil and all that comes along with it, even though that was the outcome of our own decision out of our own free choice (remember it is not just Adam and Eve – it is also each and every one of us choosing “to sin” every day of our lives; hence all of us deserve to live within the sphere of the kingdom of evil and all that comes along with it of pain, suffering, injustice, persecution, etc....!!!)

Our Lord Jesus decided to take up our own fallen nature in order to restore to us the original Heavenly Nature that we had abandoned by our choice of “sin and evil”. He thus took up our own flesh and blood and got INCARNATED; with this mere act of incarnation, our fallen nature already became restored, as the LORD’s Divinity restored us to the original Divinely ordained Human Nature: “He took what was ours and gave us what is His.”

However, the story couldn’t end at that point. Why?

With the fall of Man, and his free choice of “sin and evil”, it was not only that man’s nature got disrupted and distorted, but rather that Man surrendered himself and his world to that of the kingdom of evil and “Evil-doing” with all outcomes and consequences that result from it – be that pain, suffering, persecution, injustice, hatred, envy, etc.....

Now, as Christ took our fallen nature through His incarnation, He also had to experience the same outcomes of evil that Man had originally brought onto

himself by his own choice of Sin. Hence Christ had to experience all those sufferings ever since the very first moment of His birth in Bethlehem! He was rejected the very first human right of being born in a “decent” place and found nowhere to be born but amongst animals and sheep!

Our Saviour had to suffer the Evil and Injustice inflicted upon Him, all along His life on earth, simply as a normal result for the fact that HE is our Saviour and He came to earth to live the life that we as Man chose for ourselves – to live with the outcomes of evil which we unfortunately chose for ourselves not realizing that it will bring about all that unpleasant outcome, not only for us but for our dear Lord who chose to share with us these outcomes without having had anything to do with our original “bad” choice!

Here is what I would compare it to: it seems to me like a father who chooses for his son a lovely house to live in... but that son doesn't appreciate the blessing he has been granted and therefore decides he would like to try something different... he sees a house that looks lovely from the outside and gives up the one that his dad (who had warned him beforehand) had given him in order to go and live in that other “apparently nice” house. However, when he enters the house that son discovers that it is absolutely rotten from the inside and that he has to bear the result of his own choice, that is to say, to live there for the rest of his life. He had to live with the insects, the darkness, the filth and the horrible odour that fills the house, since he could no longer go back to his father's lovely grand house. The son got so sick that he could no longer attempt to cross over to that original grand place. He had to be rescued; he had to be saved!

Now, the father's heart aches as he sees his own son living in absolute filth and decides he has to save him. In order to do so, the father has to go over to that filthy place and live with his own son for a while, try to give him the treatment necessary for him to return in shape in order to be able to make the trip back to his father's house.

The father willingly gives up his kingly palace and chooses (out of extreme love to his son) to live with him and experience all the horrible conditions that he was undergoing. He even has to be attacked by, and to deal with, all the insects and worms that attack his son. He accepts all those horrible conditions until he is able to save his son and take him with him back to their original grand lovely home. **His salvation could not be “complete” (as Christ said on the Cross) except by going all the way till the very end of the path that his son has to go through – all the way till the end that came about by his son's own sin – that of “Death”,** which had never existed while they were in their original grand palace (the Heavenly Kingdom)

Our Lord Jesus Christ's suffering on earth was the “natural consequence” that Man brought onto himself by surrendering himself and his will to the forces of Evil! Christ had to go through the hardest of these inflicted pains and sufferings as a “clearly expected result” of having taken up our fallen nature onto Himself in order to complete His Grand Mission of Salvation!

As a complete human being, he had to go through the affliction of injustice and pain of suffering and horrible persecution from Evil – which took the form of fellow human beings (whether Pharisees, soldiers, Pilate, Romans, his own apostles or his persecutors).

This is the selfsame trip that each and every Christian is called upon to go through, and to accept willingly, and even joyously (everyday, carry your cross and follow me). Our Lord decided to share in the sufferings that we brought to ourselves as the natural result of the world of evil that we entered by our own free will. Our Lord never belonged to this world of evil but carrying our fallen nature He had to bear the outcomes of our own mistaken choice. Listen to the governor who was judging our Lord:

“But the governor said, “Why? What evil has he done?” (Mathew 27:23)

And listen to the forces of Evil as they cried out insisting:

“But they cried out exceedingly, saying, ‘Let him be crucified!’” (Mathew 27:24)

The Cross was OURS (of our making, inflicted by us), not because it is our punishment required by God..... but simply because it is the climax and symbol of Evil as displayed in human brutality and cruelty. We killed Him, we are His murderers (see Isaiah 53).

Thinking of our Heavenly Father as having been so angered by Man’s Original Sin to the point that He couldn’t “forgive” him except after inflicting such a brutal physical punishment, like that which happened to our dearest Lord along the path of the Cross, is really making our dear Heavenly Father appear like a vengeful and brutal Being. It also shows our God as having the same horrible human feelings that He himself implored us each and every day of His teachings never to have. I mean those feelings of anger, hatred of the person who does you wrong, the desire to take one’s revenge, being satisfied with no other than retribution and triumph for one’s own pride, etc... How far is all that from our Lord’s teachings as He told the people:

“But I tell you who hear: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other; and from him who takes away your cloak, don’t withhold your coat also. Give to everyone who asks you, and don’t ask him who takes away your goods to give them back again” (Luke 6:27-30)

How could any reasonable person believe these two attitudes belong to the same Source!!!

The story of the Cross is as simple and as Grand as: Man fell; Man surrendered his will and himself wholeheartedly to the Kingdom of Evil; Evil took over the “world” (don’t love the world or anything that belongs to the world); Man thus continued to suffer as a result of his becoming “son of evil” rather than “Son of Man (God)”; The Lord Jesus Christ had to come in flesh and blood to restore to man his original status as “the Son of Man (God)” – “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that

which was lost” (Luke 19:9). **As our Lord lived in this world of evil, He was certainly bound to be subject to rejection, hatred, envy, criticism, persecution, up until the way of the Cross that ended up on Golgotha.**

Man’s fallen evil nature couldn’t tolerate that “All-Good Nature” of our Lord and therefore questioned, doubted, criticized, rejected, hated, plotted and finally inflicted all kinds of brutal cruelty on our Lord, finally KILLING HIM ON THE CROSS!

But our Lord Jesus Christ condescended, accepted, relented, prayed, healed, loved and forgave all that, not only to Complete His Mission of Salvation on the Cross, but also to set the example to each and every one of us – the so-called “Christians” to follow this selfsame path. He called upon us and expects us to: condescend, to accept, to relent, to pray, to love, to forgive all who still respond to that “evil fallen human nature” and to continuously remind ourselves, every time we look at the Cross, that our Lord Jesus, who had never been affiliated to evil, accepted, loved and forgave.

The Lord had to be subjected to those horrible injustices and suffering because He was “Good” in a world governed by “Evil” and because it was “we” who surrendered willingly to those forces of evil through our Sin.

As our Saviour, He not only had to be Incarnated to restore the Holy Spirit in us who purifies and deifies our fallen being, but He also had to experience the most horrible results of our Sin – surrendering Himself willingly to the forces of Evil all the way up until the end point of Evil, i.e. DEATH! Up until the Lord died, Death was looked upon as Evil as it is the end of man... But after our Lord’s victorious conquering of death through Resurrection, it became Man’s most welcomed and joyful moment, as it is Man’s path back to His original Home that His Father had prepared for him ever since the beginning of Creation!!!

Signed
Friend from Egypt