

Introduction

Two thousand years ago, a man named Jesus from the town of Nazareth was crucified at Jerusalem. He was by no means the first person ever to be crucified, and certainly would not be the last either. Nothing particularly significant can be observed by his death which at a glance would appear much like countless other executions that have taken place throughout the centuries. And yet, his death would resound throughout history, and lead to the formation of one of the largest and most influential religions the world has ever known. Attached to his death was a profound meaning, particular that all his followers, and in fact all of humanity, were *saved* by his death on a cross.

A variety of images and metaphor were used by his followers to elucidate this notion of salvation that Jesus had apparently made available to humanity. They were made up of ideas of sacrifice, redemption, justification, revelation, deliverance; concepts that were easily understood in Jewish Palestine, and also in the Gentile world. Such ideas would carry up to our present and enable a Church two thousand years later to understand and believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Savior of the world.

An over reliance on metaphors has at times proven itself to be problematic. When taken in a completely literal way, they can lead to inconsistencies with the New Testament account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ that will inevitably lead to skepticism about the saving interpretation of the cross. One thus needs to develop an understanding of the cross that is not dependent on the metaphors used to describe it. One must first answer the question of what humanity needs to be saved from. Then he/she must deal with the problem of how Jesus, by dying a brutal and horrible death on a cross, delivered humanity from that state of needing to be saved. After dealing with the historical development of the notion of Atonement, we will attempt to develop a contemporary understanding of the soteriological character of the cross.

Historical Presuppositions and Background

In this study, rather than deal with problems of the incarnation and sinlessness of Jesus, as well as the historical justification of his death and even of his resurrection, we will take these notions as givens. We will not deal with issues regarding whether or not Jesus was in fact the second person of the Trinity; whether he lived a life completely in union with God, his Father, never sinning or turning away from that Father, whether he did die by crucifixion, or whether he rose from the dead three days later.

We will however briefly deal with what led Jesus to be crucified. Political and religious motivations are usually cited as having primary responsibility. The Romans may have regarded Jesus as a threat to the peace in their province, and saw him as a traitor (Goergen 21). The Jewish Sanhedrin may have seen Jesus as a threat to their authority with regards to his seeming disregard of Sabbath and ritual purity laws, or perhaps feared that his mission would lead to political uprisings, and therefore they handed him over to the Romans (ibid. 25). In determining who was responsible for Jesus death, one tends to waver back and forth between the Romans and the Jews, but we can not forget about the role that Jesus own disciples played. According to all four Gospel accounts, one of his disciples betrayed him, and the rest abandoned him. Peter, who led the disciples and in many ways represented them, went so far as to deny Jesus three times. Even the women at the cross, on not finding his body, fled from the tomb in fear. The faith of all the disciples in Jesus had not survived through his death (ibid. 31). Thus we can see that in one way or another, everyone involved shares in the responsibility for the death of Jesus, and the Gospels make this explicit in order to imply that in fact all of humanity shared in the blame (Hengel 67).

Crucifixion at the time was by far the most brutal and humiliating form of capital punishment. In fact, it was even shameful to speak of crucifixion (Kasper 133). The image of the cross brought with it intense notions of horror and shame. For the Jews, the

scriptural passage "Cursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree" (Dt 21:22) would prove that Jesus was certainly not the Messiah as some had believed.

We can say however that the life that Jesus lived made his end at the cross inevitable. His actions and his teachings, particularly those regarding acceptance of tax collectors and those viewed as sinners, his reinterpretation of the Law and claims of authority over it, his proclamations about the "Kingdom of God" (to which people would make messianic connotations), and his disruption in the Temple would all require some form of response on the part of the authorities (Kasper 113). Jesus would have been regarded as a nuisance and possibly even a threat to the established order (Thompson 206). He had to expect that he would be dealt with eventually. From the inevitability of the cross, we can see it as the climax of his work on behalf of the Kingdom . His saving power was active throughout his life, and came to completion and fulfillment at his death, which did nothing but summarize that life. We may even infer that Jesus was born to die on the cross.

Jesus obedience to God in fulfilling his mission would inevitably lead to the wretchedness of the cross. His life "put him on a collision course with murderous men and made violent death in that sense "necessary" (O'Collins, Christology 286). The "powers of oppression" (Thompson 208), or the oppressive and sinful nature of humanity was in this sense responsible for his death. One such as Jesus, perfect in his love and generosity, could not survive in such a corrupt and alienated world. The only way that Jesus could have escaped his fate would be to abandon, and thus betray, his cause. He did not, and thus remained free of sin.

Historical Development of the Notion of Atonement

Origin

Quickly after his death, Jesus disciples began to realize that his death had achieved their salvation. Jesus had given his life "as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). Some might suggest that the notion of Atonement came to be revealed to, or was perhaps even invented by the disciples in retrospect of the seemingly meaningless and disastrous culmination of his life. However there is good historical reason to suppose that the notion of Atonement originated with Jesus himself (Hengel 47). Hengel suggests that Jesus himself developed the notion of dying for his disciples, and for everyone (72). In addition to the verse in Mark just cited, we have the Last Supper's presentation of the bread and wine representing Jesus' body and blood. The broken bread represented his broken body, and the wine represented his blood which would be "poured out on behalf of many" (Mk 14:24), and would lead to a new eschatological covenant which God would found to deliver all of humanity to Himself. By giving the meal to his disciples, Jesus gave them and all Christians the fruits of his passion (Hengel 72).

The Gospels would develop the salvation theology of Jesus death. A particular example can be found in Mark's Gospel, where at the moment of Jesus death, the veil of the Temple is torn in half (Mk 15:38) indicating that his death has in a sense opened access to the Holy of Holies and thus to God himself, for everyone. The darkness that covered the area also clears upon Jesus final cry (Mk 15:33,37), a reference to the lifting of the darkness of sin as a result of Jesus death. Matthew's Gospel speaks of the dead rising at the moment of Jesus' death (Mt 27:52). Clearly, by the time of the writing of the Gospels, the saving action of Jesus on the cross was entrenched in the minds and hearts of Christians, and numerous forms of imagery were used to provide an understanding of this.

Isaiah 53

With Is 53, a theology of vicarious suffering of an innocent person developed. Because of the obedience of a servant of God, that servant suffered, and in Is 53, that suffering is interpreted as being on behalf of sinners. The suffering that servant endured was the inevitable result of their obedience (Goergen 40). It is possible that this notion developed in the light of the persecution of certain righteous prophets, like Jeremiah. According to Isaiah the suffering of that servant would be regarded by those around the servant as being due to the guilt of the servant, even though that servant was in fact completely innocent. Thus the suffering, rather than being completely without meaning, comes to be regarded as being for the sake of others.

It would be very surprising to the Jewish people, and perhaps inconceivable, to see the anticipated "Messiah" in the role of the suffering servant (Hengel 59). Only in light of Jesus was this connection made. Jesus had been a servant throughout his life, and often emphasized in his teaching the importance of service and humility. His washing of his disciples feet (Jn 13) exemplified his humility, and this humility would be repeated on the cross (Goergen 63). His integrity and fidelity to his mission would make him a victim (ibid. 67). His life and death would as a result be regarded, as in Is 53, as a sin offering, made on behalf of all for their sins. In addition the work of the servant would not end in defeat, as it did not in the case of Jesus, although in Isaiah, the nature of the vindication that the servant would receive is unclear.

Sacrifice and Vicarious Death

The notion of vicarious death however would have been very commonly understood by both Jewish and Pagan cultures. The Graeco-Roman world had a myriad of examples of sacrifice of a hero in one form or another from both their mythology and their history. The idea of dying for law or truth would be easily understood (Hengel 15)

as would the notion of atoning sacrifice (ibid. 19). Jewish tradition of course was also filled with sacrificial imagery. It is likely that by the time of Jesus, the Greek and Jewish concepts of sacrifice and atoning death were united into one common understanding (ibid. 5).

These images would be used to bring an understanding of Jesus death. First of all, the passion of Jesus occurred at the time of the Passover festival, so it is not surprising that in addition to seeing Jesus death and resurrection as a sort of "new exodus" from the realm of evil and death, his death would also be compared to the Passover sacrifice (O'Collins, *Christology*, 283). John's Gospel, which calls Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29), would situate the time of Jesus death at around the time when the Passover lambs were sacrificed in the temple (Loader 95).

The letter to the Hebrews strongly emphasizes the comparison of the death of Jesus to the sacrifice on the Jewish feast of *Yom Kippur*: the Day of Atonement (Heb 9). Being without sin, Jesus takes upon himself the results of sin on behalf of sinners (Thomas 347). He suffers and dies like a sinner, although he is not one, and in doing so experiences the suffering of others. He is thus compared to a sin offering, an unblemished lamb (1 Pt 1:19, Jn 1:29,35, Rv) which when sacrificed can make reparation for sinners and allow for their forgiveness (Hengel 68). It should be noted that in Hebrews, Jesus is regarded as both sacrifice and "High Priest" (Heb 9:11), signifying the voluntary nature of the sacrifice, and Jesus role as mediator.

In the New Testament Jesus death is also understood as a sacrifice that seals a new covenant between God and Israel, and the rest of humanity (1 Cor 11:25, Mk 14:24). This new covenant would allow for a renewed relationship with God, a covenant that would last "forever."

The idea of God sacrificing His Son would conjure images of Abraham, who almost sacrificed his son. John has Jesus carry his own cross as Isaac unwittingly carried

the wood for his sacrifice (Loader 97). Jesus would be regarded as the Lamb that Abraham said that God would provide (cf. Gn 22:8).

Of course others ways of understanding atonement are used, such as revelation, redemption, justification, and so forth. The reason for such a diversity of images is that they are all metaphorical, including the sacrificial imagery. A vast number of soteriological models have developed in order to allow a large number of people from a variety of different cultural circumstances and social contexts to understand why Jesus died and how his death gives life. However, over-emphasis on one or another image can lead us to an inaccurate expression on the whole truth of Jesus' saving death. Over development of any one of these models can lead to interpretation that are inconsistent with those of the New Testament of the Passion (Carroll and Green 266).

Penal Substitution Understanding of Anselm

Sacrificial imagery, together with the image of Jesus suffering horribly on the cross according to the will of his Father, can potentially lead to the development of the idea of a wrathful and punishing God, whose anger must be satisfied. This notion would seem to contradict Jesus' teachings, which reveal God as his loving Abba (Thompson 205). None the less, such a 'wrathful God' was developed by Anselm in the middle ages.

Anselm's interpretation of the Paschal events revolved around the idea that God, who is a God of justice, must have his justice satisfied. Thus punishment must be exacted for the sins of humanity. God is however also a God of mercy, and rather than punishing all of humanity for their sins, He essentially punish Himself, through His Son Jesus. God is incapable of just giving forgiveness, because that would not be fair, and because sins are of great impact, being acts of hostility toward the great God. As only God can make reparation for humanities sin (that is without wiping out humanity) and only humanity is indebted to God, the Incarnation arises, in which God and Humanity are united into one person, Jesus (ibid. 349).

This notion can be very problematic. First of all the idea that God cannot control His own anger or that He is somehow subject to some higher moral order to which He must conform is inconsistent with God being God, the supreme being in every way (O'Collins, *Christology* 263). The idea of God as punisher does not seem to be what Jesus was trying to reveal either, but rather was trying to demonstrate that God is love (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ* 105). A loving God is even harder to imagine when seen as one who would willingly immolate his own son.

Anselm's model seems to be somewhat at odds with the New Testament. The Gospels never develop the notion of a wrathful God demanding reparation. Paul, in developing a theology of the cross, uses a huge variety of images and metaphor, but Anselm's notion of penal substitution is not among them (Carroll and Green 263). Paul never regarded the cross as the cause of God's saving love, but rather as the effect (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ*, 108). O'Collins offers an alternative to Anselm's notion:

Rather than allowing that God directly willed Christ's atrocious suffering and death, we should think of the passion and crucifixion as the inevitable consequence of Jesus loving fidelity to his mission which he lived out for us in a cruel and sinful world. (*Christology* 285)

This alternative will be elaborated further.

Anselm's notion was developed within the context of feudalism in the middle ages, and a strong case can be made that his soteriological model was developed to legitimize and help sustain that social system (Thompson 349). It essentially gave divine sanction to the feudal system which required quick retribution for crimes and a strictly maintained order to allow that society to survive the difficulties of the middle ages (Carroll and Green 263). In developing his model, he does not seem to account for Jesus' identification with the poor and the oppressed. In addition, it sanctions excessive forms of penance and self sacrifice. Overall it can seriously damage one's concept of God, and compromise the intent of Jesus entire mission. However his notion still has a strong influence on many. Stott's understanding of soteriology is based on the belief that God

must be true to His own nature, and thus must judge, and react to evil that is contrary to himself (123). There are some true underpinnings in this terminology, but the "judgmental nature" of God must be re-evaluated, and a better understanding of it must be reached.

Anselm's model seems to be a result of the over-extension of the sacrificial metaphors used in understanding Jesus death. It shows the importance of not over-emphasizing such metaphorical language (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ*, 108). In fact, it can be seen that in society even today, such metaphors have a tendency to be literalized, creating problems of understanding for Christians and non-Christians alike.

Toward an Understanding of Salvation Through the Cross

A Christian, in the process of presenting her beliefs to her non-Christian friend, may find herself having to answer the question, "How does Jesus' crucifixion do me any good?" Facing this question, that Christian may decide to use one of the aforementioned metaphors to explain how Jesus saves through his death. Upon using that metaphor, she may find that her friend raises other questions which test the value and limits of the metaphor. Having no answer, she may have to resort to using another metaphor, leading once again to more questions, and so the process goes on. In the end, rather than giving an understanding of her faith to her friend, she has actually facilitated a lack of understanding for herself. Her over-reliance on metaphor has been her downfall.

In coming to understand how Jesus saves, we must address the question of what *actually happened* on the cross. We need a clear understanding of God's nature, our human condition and need for redemption, what experience Jesus went through in his life and in his execution, and what he accomplished by having that experience as the Son of God. The use of metaphor may be unavoidable, it being at the very heart of language and communication. However, in our pursuit of this understanding, we should try to use

metaphor as little as possible. We are trying to determine the reality of the event, not the symbol. Once we have determined *what happened* on the cross, then we can proceed to develop a rich system of symbolism and metaphor to facilitate the spirituality that springs forth from the cross.

Sin and the Human Condition

The first step in developing our understanding of how Jesus saves us is in determining what Jesus saves us from. The notions of sin and death have to be developed with respect to our relationship with God. The teachings of Jesus indicate that peace, happiness, and fulfillment are all tied to this relationship with God. It is only with God that we will be happy, in complete childlike reliance and trust in Him. God creates us in union with Him, capable of being stewards of His creation (Sloyan 141).

We can understand sin simply as our turning our backs on God. Rather than trusting in Him, we opt to be self-reliant, which leads to our arrogance (*ibid.*). Sin is not inherent from our nature, but develops from our *freedom*, which *is* our nature as God created us. Although we have the capacity for love and goodness, we counter it with evil and sin, leading to alienation. Separating ourselves from God, we become self-seeking and self-willed. Our whole being becomes dedicated to the cause of narcissism, which leads to our loneliness and isolation (Kasper 86). We become ignorant to God and his nature, which is one of sustaining love. Thus through sin, we rupture our relationship with God. From Paul, we see the idea that sin is a "disposition of hostility toward God and God's purpose, refusal to honor God as God" (Carroll and Green 26). By sinning, we wrong God, and thus harm God. This hurting of God takes its form in the hurting of the Son of God. In addition, through hostility to God, we are hostile to others, to the world, and to ourselves (O'Collins, *Christology* 286).

God creates all humanity to be in relationship with Him by its very nature. Matthew's Gospel indicates this in Jesus' discourse on the last judgment. In welcoming

the righteous, the king tells them to "inherit the kingdom prepared for you [them] from the creation of the world" (Mt 25:34b). The kingdom is prepared for them, thus it seems that it was intended that they enter from their creation. On the other hand, "hell" is not intended for sinners, but for "the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41b). Thus when people are in communion with God, they are acting in a manner true to human nature; when they are not, they are living contrary to that nature.

Thompson develops this notion of separation from God as comparable to idolatry. Rather than seeking God as the source of meaning and love, we decide not to trust in God, and to replace His place in our lives with "surrogate deities" (353) to give us fulfillment instead. This new allegiance can either be to one reality (monotheism), causing the disregard for the value of everything else in life, or to many realities (polytheism), dividing our loyalties and thus our very selves. Our self identity is lost, and we become enslaved to materialistic realities, things that "pass away", incapable of providing that which they promise. Disappointed, some choose to blame God for their misery, in ignorance of their internal division. This furthers our separation from God. (355)

This bondage transmits to all of society. The enslavement of one person passes in a contagious fashion to others, and soon to everybody. Anger and hatred develop. The inevitable conclusion is death, which is feared and resented, and to be avoided because it indicates the meaningless of the values that we have chosen to cling on to. Thus death becomes the result of sin, and a meaningless and empty end to a meaningless and empty life (357).

This whirlwind of alienation becomes inescapable for humans by their own power. The only hope for us against these insurmountable odds is for some intervention from the divine. God must give us the ability and the reason to trust in him by overwhelming us with his nature, a nature of love. In a sense humanity needs "divine therapy" (ibid.).

O'Collins develops the notions of subjective and objective guilt in his dealing with the human condition. In subjective guilt, he refers to individual sin, a persons personal break with God. All that is required in this case is that persons desire for forgiveness, which God will gladly give, and the relationship between God and that person is renewed (The Calvary Christ 100). Objective guilt on the other hand refers to the consequences of sin. Although sin may be forgiven, the damage of sin has been done. This damage consists of disturbed moral order and suffering in our world. God in his love must find a way to deal with this problem. Thus "Jesus suffering and death made amends for the objective guilt of human sin, thus restoring and renewing the disrupted moral order" (ibid. 101). Through Jesus mission, God "deals with sin" (Christology 287) in a definitive way, and deals with its destructive nature.

Human Freedom and God's Judgment

Tied in with the human condition is human freedom. God did not create humans sinful or flawed, but rather "limited and free" (Sloyan 142). Rather than creating us as mindless drones, incapable of separating ourselves from God, he made us more perfect, more "in His image", by creating us with freedom. Few would argue with the fact that true love requires complete freedom, otherwise it is not true love. God being love, God is completely free, and thus loves in complete freedom. By choosing to be with God and choosing to love God, we come to know the true nature of God, one of true love.

Tied with this notion of freedom, one can gain a new understanding of God's judgment. Rather than having the understanding of us sinning, and God responding by punishing and even sending us to hell, we should tie sin and punishment together as both being the same in essence: alienation from God. We sin (separate ourselves from God), and as a result we experience punishment (separation from God), and even hell (total and final separation from God). By sinning, we willingly partake in true suffering, and doom ourselves. Thus it is rather we who judge ourselves. Rather than speaking of

condemnation as being as result of lack of belief in Jesus, the Gospel of John equates the two: "but those who do not believe in me are condemned already" (Jn 3:18b). This verse goes on to describe Jesus as a light that reveals sins and those who have alienated themselves from God by their sinful actions, some of whom shun that light and prefer to remain in darkness (cf. Jn 8:19). This notion of "people judging themselves" is in fact in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church (C.C.C. 679).

Ideas of God's anger are in the light of Jesus still very prevalent in the New Testament and should not be disregarded (MacDonald, Lecture Notes). However God's anger should not be regarded as being contrary to His loving nature. Rather it should be understood as stemming naturally from it. Out of His loving nature for His creation, God will not tolerate that it be separated from Himself. In this regard he is angry with sin, and chooses to destroy it. For the sake of humanity, God must find a way to destroy sin without destroying the sinners.

God must also find a way to reunite humanity to Himself without violating its freedom; rather His reunion should strengthen that freedom. The "metaphor" of the shepherd and the lost sheep can help to elucidate. Jesus' parable does not conjure an image of the shepherd, upon finding the lost sheep, dragging it back to the flock kicking and screaming. Rather the image is of the sheep, upon realizing the length to which the shepherd went to retrieve that lost sheep, and realizing through this action the profound love that the shepherd has for the sheep, learns how to return the shepherd's love (this is of course a big stretch of the parable, but I think that in light with the entirety of Jesus message, it is justified). It is possible that God could have reunited humanity to Himself by the mere snap of a finger, but this reuniting would be empty, a sign that the great experiment of "making us in his image", with freedom, had failed. Instead, human freedom must be preserved, and allowing it to be preserved, God would bring us to true knowledge of Himself.

The Cross: Jesus Abandonment By God

The next thing that must be considered is the cross itself, and what Jesus experienced there. It has already been explained that the cross was the inevitable result of the life and mission that Jesus pursued. As Kasper puts it:

Jesus obedient death is...the final transcendent culmination of his whole activity....The helplessness, poverty and insignificance with which the Kingdom of God appeared in his person and activity came to a final, even scandalous culmination in his death....The story of Jesus, and its end, remain a question to which only God can give the answer. (121).

The Gospels depict Jesus healing and helping people, but also experiencing the alienation from society that those that he healed had experienced. In exorcising the Gerasene Demoniac of his many demons, the people of the town quickly became frightened of Jesus, and essentially drove him away from the area like one who is possessed. In this way Jesus experiences the suffering that the possessed man had experienced earlier, and in healing him, took on the man's alienation from his society (cf. Lk 8:26-39). In Mark's account of Jesus healing of a leper (1:40-45), Jesus' healing results in his being unable to enter any towns openly (due to the crowd that he drew). In this way Jesus takes on the experience that the leper would have had, being consigned to remain in desert places, and stay away from populated areas. In his mission to reconcile sinners, Jesus had to go among them, and as a result of associating with them experience the rejection from their society that sinners received. In reconciling the dead, Jesus would have to go among the dead.

As was pointed out earlier, in the end of his life, Jesus was completely alone, abandoned by everyone. His religion and countrymen had condemned him, the gentiles had scourged and executed him, and his friends had abandoned him. Throughout Jesus life, he continually expressed frustration at the lack of understanding he received from the Jewish authorities, and particularly from his own disciples. This frustration would reach its climax at the cross, as would the lack of understanding of others. To those around him, his execution would cancel all validity of his teachings and mission, and destroy the

faith of all who had trusted in him and believed. Jesus last journey was made completely alone, abandoned by all (Thompson 209).

Unlike the deaths of many heroes from the past who nobly went to their end for their cause, Jesus' death would seem to lack any form of dignity (Moltmann 146). To the people around Jesus at the time, who had not understood his mission, his death, rather than affirming that mission, would sharply contradict it. Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus crying out in agony from the cross, calling out the words of Psalm 22: "My God my God, why have you forsaken me." It is likely that the words in Mark actually go back to the historical event itself (ibid. 147). In his bitter cry Jesus expresses his feeling of complete abandonment by his loving Father.

...it is the experience of abandonment by God in the knowledge that God is not distant but close; does not judge but shows grace. And this, in full consciousness that God is close at hand in his grace, to be abandoned on the cross and delivered up to death as one rejected, is the torment of hell (ibid. 148).

This experience of abandonment, in the full contradiction to the message of the closeness and love of God that Jesus knew to be true, would be the horror of the experience of the cross. Jesus' death would mean the death of his cause (ibid. 149).

Jesus felt he was abandoned by God. More than the idea of being abandoned by one's society, one's religion, those that one is close to, it is perhaps this notion of abandonment by God that causes us to shudder the most. This agony would be especially felt by Jesus, who had full knowledge of the closeness of God. Thus the horror of the nature of the abandonment is intensified when one considers it in a Trinitarian context: the separation occurred within God Himself (Biro 283). Separation to this extent could only be experienced by Jesus, who was in full union with God, being the Son of God.

Moltmann points out that it is only in the context of his abandonment that the cross of Jesus Christ is unique. By his willing obedience to his Father which led him to the cross, Jesus put in jeopardy his whole proclamation about God: "the Fatherhood of his Father" (151). As Jesus died, the relationship of closeness that Jesus had stood for his

entire life would seem to be extinguished (149). By evoking the words of Ps 22, Jesus calls upon God for God's own sake, calling God not to forsake Himself (242).

All would understand Jesus death as having been the result of his unrighteousness, the inevitable result one would suffer for their rejection of God. Of course being free of sin, he had never rejected God. On the cross Jesus experienced all the sufferings in history, in that he experienced the consequences of total rejection and hostility to God (ibid. 242). However despite his feeling of abandonment, Jesus did not lose hope in his Father, but would have remained in a state of trust. This is accounted for in the final words of Jesus from the cross in Luke's and John's Gospels. His beliefs and mission that had carried him to the cross had merely come to its climax. Although he *felt* God's total absence, he *knew* God's presence at the cross. It is through this continual trust in the face of hopelessness that Jesus conquered all forms of separation of God, and rendered them powerless. In retrospect, Jesus experience of "abandonment" and separation from God would reveal itself as the total closeness and love of God, for his Son, and for humanity.

What Jesus Accomplished

Jesus who was without sin underwent the consequences of sin on behalf of sinners. He lived his life in service of others. His death was the "ultimate expression of a life lived on behalf of others" (Carroll and Green 268). Throughout his life Jesus sought to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. In this way he acted as mediator between God, of whom he had full knowledge being of God and from God, and humanity, as by becoming human he had full knowledge of the experiences of humanity, particularly that suffering and death that results from separation from God. Jesus did not suffer for his own sake, but in his commitment to unite us with the Father, he suffered for our sake out of his complete love. All of his actions, his life, and his death were accomplished in complete freedom, and in fact complete determination to do his Father's

will. Out of love for his Father and love for humanity, he takes on the cross, submitting by his own free choice to the sinful world to be led to destruction.

Within O'Collins' framework, Jesus "dealt with sin" in a final and total way, out of total love and goodness, and provides us with the means to rise above the slavery of the sin and alienation from God within our world (Christology 287). Throughout Jesus life, he frequently preached that sins were forgiven. Jesus would have known that this forgiveness would have demanded that the price of sin would have to be paid, and the consequences would have to be fully experienced. We can say that he made that statement in the knowledge that the price would be paid by his own presence in the world, and particularly in the culmination of his life, his death on the cross (MacDonald, lecture notes). "Jesus made amends for the objective guilt of human sin, and doing so restored the disrupted moral order" (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ* 101). By suffering and dying, Jesus enters into complete solidarity with humanity, and even goes beyond solidarity to the point of taking its place in experiencing total separation from God. He thus offered it a way out, a chance to be in solidarity with him in experiencing his victory over the powers of sin (ibid.).

In 2 Cor 5:21, Paul explains the Passion by saying that Jesus, who knew no sin, had been made sin so that we might become righteous. Rom 8:3 speaks of God, through the actions of the cross, condemning sin. This is essentially what God does on the cross (MacDonald, lecture notes). The anger of God at sin is experienced by Jesus on the cross, and through this event God effectively destroys sin, and does so in a way that redirects the destruction from those who are in the bondage of sin. Jesus by taking the destructive nature of sin on himself takes away its power to destroy, and thus destroys sin. This is something that only Jesus, the Son of God, completely in union with God, could accomplish.

What we need never experience again, because Jesus in innocence experienced it for us, is separation from God. His separation was total and complete, in a way it could

be for no other human, because Jesus is the Son of God. This consequence of human sin has been experience in its fullness by Jesus on the cross. In this sense Jesus takes our place by suffering for us. In the light of Jesus, suffering is transformed from separation from God to union with God: union with Jesus suffering on the cross. Death ceases to be the end of life and the indication of the meaninglessness of life and something to be dreaded. Instead it is transformed to the beginning of a new and total union with God, that which allows us to return to God as Jesus did.

What God Accomplished

In a way it is hard to understand how God could willingly allow His Son to suffer and die abandoned and separated from Him and His love. From a Trinitarian context however, one can reconcile this difficulty very quickly. Jesus is one of the three persons of God. In the Incarnation, Jesus becomes separate from God as a part of humanity which is separated from God. This separation reaches its culmination in his death. By rising he is reunited with God, and as human, takes humanity with him, allowing all people to be reunited with God as well. The passion stemmed from God Himself and was an expression of God's free love (Hengel 74).

One must understand that God the Father participated in the passion just as much as God the Son. By allowing Jesus to be forsaken, God did forsake Himself. It was just as difficult for the Father to deliver up his Son as it was for the Son to be delivered up. The Father suffers complete sadness at the death of his beloved Son (Moltmann 243). Both parties were involved in the sacrifice for humanity, both suffered as a result of the separation that took place. From this event proceeded the Spirit of love, the creation of love which brings death to an end and yields new life (ibid. 245).

Through the Incarnation, God participates in the experience of humanity, in complete communion with it, including all suffering which was a result of humanities choice of rejection of God. On the cross, God experienced all the suffering of human

history. Through God's action, He takes the history of humanity up into His own history, a history of creation. All suffering in history becomes God's suffering. All death in history becomes God's death on the cross.(ibid. 246). As Moltmann puts it: "...there is no life, no fortune and no joy which have not been integrated by his history into eternal life, the eternal joy of God" (ibid.). By making human history God's history, God allows that it not end in the oblivion of separation from Him, but as part of Him it may in end in complete union with Him for all eternity.

The separation experienced through the cross is in fact greater than separation of humanity from God, being within God Himself (Biro 283). By overcoming this separation, God overcomes all separation from Him. No evil, no death, no alienation is more powerful than the reuniting love of God. In this sense God is truly all-powerful.

The unity of Jesus and God is absolutely necessary for this salvation. It is through their union that humanity comes to be in union with God. The salvation of humanity, as achieved through the life and death of "The Word" of God, Jesus, are all a consequence of God's initiative. Jesus is God's reaching out to us all to bring us back to Him.

What God Revealed

Through Jesus life, he claimed that he came into the world to make the Father known. Jesus' entire life was a testimony to the love that God has for humanity. His teaching emphasized God's desire that all people should come back to Him and be completely reliant on Him. Jesus spoke of the love of God as being like that of Father to all humanity who are His children, or like that of a Shepherd who loves humanity like his flock. Jesus whole message, his whole life, stated that all could put their complete trust in God because God is love. On the cross, Jesus proved it.

On the cross, a human responded to God's love as had never been done before (Sloyan 145). In his life, Jesus participated fully in the love that God has for humanity. By dying for humanity, Jesus revealed the lengths that God would go to to reconcile us

all to Himself, and the total self-giving nature of God. The shock of the cross would catch the attention of all humanity to God's profound love, and offer even those most cut off from God a glimpse of the extent of His love, all in the hope that they might return to Him. Indeed Mark's Gospel has the centurion at the cross come to realize the truth of Jesus, that he is the Son of God, at Jesus death (cf. Mk 15:39).

Through the cross, Jesus also revealed definitively the destructive nature of sin (ibid. 105). He shows the world that the nature of sin is to destroy. It even destroys one who is completely innocent and completely loving. He reveals that sin is in fact hostility to God, and thus God condemns sin. "The verdict passed against him is also a verdict passed against the world and its ruler. The world is revealed in all its lostness and sin" (ibid. 104). The "light" that is Jesus reveals sin for what it is. The consequences of our sins are that they killed the Son of God. This revelation allows sinners a chance to see the true results of their rejection of God in the hope that they might return to Him.

From the cross Jesus asks for forgiveness for those who have crucified him (Lk 23:33b). In doing so Jesus asks forgiveness for all humanity. By coming to know the love of God, one comes to know forgiveness. The removal of the state of hostility between God and humanity, humanity and creation, and between all human beings is made possible (Carroll and Green 273). By revealing the profound love of God, Jesus reveals that this reconciliation is possible for God, who is all powerful.

By coming to understand the love between Jesus and his Father, and the love of God for humanity, humanity is liberated. By coming to share in God's love, one comes to share in and to live in God (Moltmann 249). It is in this sense that the Holy Spirit, the love between the Father and the Son is made present in human history. One comes into union with God through complete self-giving for others, which joins itself onto the self-giving of God.

It was through love that the world was created. Love allows for creation, and for transformation of our lives. Without love there would be no creation, no existence at all

(O'Collins, Christology 290). The nature of one who loves is to desire greater knowledge of that one to the other whom he or she loves. Love reveals (ibid.). Jesus life and death reveals one fact: that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16b). This is the fact that saves humanity.

The Glory of God

By giving his life, Jesus glorifies his Father. God is glorified by the fulfillment of Jesus mission (Loader 109). Jesus by showing that his obedience to God is worth sacrificing everything, reveals the all encompassing importance of fulfilling God's will.

Through the cross, the Incarnation is completed (Moltmann 204). God shows His greatness through humiliation. Through helplessness, God reveals His power. Through humility, God reveals His divinity (ibid. 205).

But it is not just this humiliation that reveals God's glory, but the motivation for the humiliation, God's love for humanity. Jesus reveals the power of God over evil and death, and through the cross reveals that this power is in the form of self-giving love. God's love and God's power are equated to each other.

On the cross, Jesus reveals that God has the power to overcome all human suffering. God has the power to reunite all to Himself. The love of the God as revealed on the cross is greater than any sin we humans can ever commit. God's ability to reunite us to Him is greater than our ability to separate ourselves from Him.

The cross returns Jesus to His Father, and thus Jesus is glorified (Loader 93). Through Jesus, all can come to know the glory of God by returning to the Father through Him.

Victory Over the Kingdom of Evil

The Gospels often describe Jesus as one who conquers the evil satanic powers, and in doing so overcomes the power of death that hold humanity in captivity. Jesus is often portrayed as dealing with demonic powers in exorcisms (Mt 12:28) and his

temptations (Mt 4:1-11). John's Gospel depicts Jesus as overpowering the "prince of this world" (Jn 12:31, 16:19). Thompson suggests that "demonic" imagery is useful in that it provides us with holistic imagery to cover all sources and forms of evil in the world. He particularly notes that it looks as evil as more than just ignorance, and brings out aspects of evil like fanaticism, cruelty, and destruction as the results of separation and hostility to God (346).

As noted earlier, there is a strong notion of Jesus having "exposed evil" in its true nature from the cross (Jn 12:31, 16:11). The nature of evil is to destroy and its ultimate conclusion is death, complete separation from God. In fact, evil can do nothing but isolate and destroy and negate. In the light of Jesus, the Kingdom of evil becomes "a kingdom divided against itself" which "cannot stand" (Mt 12:25). Evil can do nothing but destroy Jesus, one who is completely loving and in complete in union with God. It is not a matter of God tricking evil into killing Jesus (Thompson 346). By its very nature evil had no choice but to kill him. However by destroying Jesus, evil destroyed its own power and dominion over humanity. The only hope for evil was to "tempt" Jesus into abandoning the purity of his mission. However, Jesus love for his Father and for humanity overcame all forms of temptation. In this way Jesus displays the victory of love over alienation and separation from God.

Resurrection and the Coming of the Kingdom of God

Inseparable from the events of the cross are the events of the resurrection. Jesus death is only understood with reference to the resurrection (Goergen 36), because it was through the resurrection that the defeat of the cross was transformed into victory. The words of Paul hold true: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17).

It is through Jesus resurrection that the message of Jesus life and death are confirmed (Hengel 65, O'Collins, Christology 301). God, by raising Jesus from the dead,

proves His love and fidelity to His son, and through him, for all humanity. The resurrection proved the effectiveness of the atoning death of Jesus.

By rising Jesus is victorious over death. He removes the permanence and power of death. By rising, Jesus overcomes the greatest separation between humanity and God, death, and in doing so removes it. Through resurrection, God is once again unified with God, the Trinity reveals itself as one again (Moltmann 151). Thus victory of Jesus over death signifies the victory over death of all Christians (Thompson 347). By raising Jesus from the dead, God transform the nature of humanity. Instead of being born, living and then dying, the history of the human person is changed to being born, living, dying, and then being raised. All people are raised to life by sharing in the resurrection of Christ. In this way, the resurrection has eschatological consequences: it signals the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

The notion of the Kingdom of God sums up all forms of salvation and reunion with God (Kasper 85). It involves unencumbered communication with God, knowledge of God's love, complete dependence on God, and total obedience to God (ibid. 86). The cross encompasses all of these concepts. Kasper writes:

This death [of Jesus] is the form in which the Kingdom of God exists under the conditions of this age, the Kingdom of God in human powerlessness, wealth in poverty, love in desolation, abundance in emptiness, and life in death. (119)

The nature of the Kingdom of God in this present age often takes the form of suffering. However, through knowledge that it is of the Kingdom of God, one is given hope that this suffering will be transformed into joy. This joy becomes present through the resurrection, indicating that the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand. Because Jesus has risen, the transformation has begun already. Jesus, by dying and rising, has inaugurated the new Kingdom that promises to "take us beyond sin and all its power" (O'Collins, *Christology* 287).

"Everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Inseparable from the salvation that comes from the cross is the response in faith of the believer. God through His initiative has reunited humanity to himself. He has essentially done all the work, and offers reunion with Him as a free gift. The gift must be accepted and received in order for it to have its intended effect.

Sinners are not exempt from their need to repent (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ* 101). They need in humility to allow themselves to be exposed in the revelatory light of Christ and recognize that they are sinners in need of redemption from God. By recognizing their dependence on God for forgiveness, they come into union with God.

The cross empowers us with the ability to respond in faith to God's generous gift (Carroll and Green 277). It alerts us to our responsibility to join in the work for the Kingdom (O'Collins, *The Calvary Christ* 109). Our acceptance of the gift that God has given through the cross is needed in order to ratify that gift (ibid. 101). Jesus retributive suffering requires our consent to his representation for us in order for it to be effective (ibid. 107). In fact, our spirituality in response to the cross is proof that God's saving work has been accomplished. Translated to action, our salvation and our response to that salvation should become one in the same (ibid. 109).

Love is only love in complete freedom, in response to the love which we have been exposed to by God, we must freely choose to return that love, to God, and to others. By coming to share in love, we become able to trust in God. Our love of others allows us to overcome our dependence on materialism and narcissism for fulfillment. We become united with one another in community. Death is no longer cessation, but complete return and union with God. (Thompson 358) By choosing to live in God's love, accepting it, sharing it, and returning it, we come to experience the nature of God Himself.

Conclusion

Jesus passion is at the centre of Christian belief. Any Christian who wishes to take on a ministerial role should have an understanding of the soteriological nature of the cross. That person should be able to express not only that Jesus saved humanity by his death, but also how he accomplished this. He or she can make use of traditional symbols and metaphors, but should not be reliant upon them. One must be able to express the what God reveals in common language, attainable to anyone from any background.

One can come to terms with the death of Jesus as a saving event. His death signified the ultimate form of divine intervention in the affairs of humankind. By becoming human, God united himself with humanity, taking on their suffering and death. Jesus experienced infinite separation from the Father, and the Father responded by removing that separation, and in doing so He removed separation from Himself for all. This allowed him to transform the human situation in a way that revealed the extent of His love for all people, and it allowed humans the freedom to respond to God's love in love. By choosing to love, love of God and love of all of God's creatures, people come to know and share in the true nature of God.

In the light of the this fact, the images of the Gospels take on their meaning. References to Jesus as the "Bread of Life" (Jn 6:35), the "Light of the World" (Jn 8:12), the "Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 13), the "Resurrection" (Jn 11:25), and "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (15:1,5) can all facilitate understanding. Ideas of deliverance, reconciliation, covenant, sacrifice, and redemption can all be used to internalize and elucidate the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Through all the images that the Bible presents to expound on the cross's meaning, one's spirituality is deepened, and he or she can grow to a fuller and more profound knowledge of God's perfect and all powerful love. This was the message of Jesus' life, and ultimately of his death. The very presence of Jesus in the world revealed the extent of the love that God holds for all

creation: that God loves so much that he will undergo anything to reconcile His loved ones to himself. Thus by bearing witness to God's profound love, the cross yields salvation for all humanity.

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