

Why Is the Cross Necessary for the Redemption of Man?

The 11th century theologian Anselm once pointed out man is prone to question God's wisdom for "redeeming mankind" through the death of Jesus. He wrote:

*If God were unwilling that the human race should be saved, except through the death of Christ, when He could have saved them by **His simple will**, see how, in so judging, you question His wisdom; for even if man were for no sufficient reason to do with great labor that which he could have done with ease, he would certainly not be judged wise by any one.*

Anselm is asking "**Why did God adopt so painful a way to redeem man when He might have accomplished it merely by an act of will?**"

The easy way of merely exercising His infinite power and saying "Let Man be redeemed," much as He had said "Let there be light," would never have served to show at what personal cost God was prepared to effect man's redemption as a showing-forth of His love.

The hard way was necessary: for otherwise there was no justification for the creation of a race of men who were capable of falling into sin. No good could have come out of the tragedy of human experience, only the undoing of it.

And so one must examine carefully the mode of our Redemption, requiring as it did that God become Incarnate in the world He had created and there subject Himself to many of its laws for man's sake. The Crucifixion stands as the pivotal point upon which all else depends. All events, and all achievements, acquire their significance only in its light. It was a unique event requiring that certain circumstances should come about:

- 1. First**, there are those circumstances which relate to the historical setting, the theatre as it were, upon the stage of which the Lord at one particular and appropriate time in history entered into the stream of human affairs and sacrificed Himself.
- 2. Secondly**, there are circumstances which relate to the manner in which His physical death actually came about, circumstances which bear critically upon the nature of Adam's body when he was first created, and therefore upon the kind of physical world which had to be planned for Adam from the very beginning.

If there is meaning to the universe, the key to that meaning is to be found in the birth and death of Jesus Christ, **the Second Adam**, because the physical world itself was required in order that these two unique events could take place.

The Incarnation and the Crucifixion together are, therefore, the cause of all that is related to the planning of the natural order, and of the creation of man as its most important member. For God's love is not shown forth here in a way which is self-evident so that angels or even animals could understand it merely by witnessing it, but in such a way that only a creature such as man could comprehend it. For this comprehension depends upon a certain kind of spiritual and mental constitution, with the power to see its meaning in the light of personal need, a need which neither the animals nor the angels are aware of.

This need does not relate solely to the spirit, for then perhaps the angels would have understood; nor does it relate solely to the body, for then the animals might have been brought within its compass. It relates to a need which is both spiritual and physical. It relates to a death which is both spiritual and physical, a death of a representative Man, which was not "natural" in the sense that other events in the universe are "natural," but which was necessary in order to abolish the death (which all other men now suffer "unnaturally"), and in so doing to demonstrate the love of God whose Son became Man.

The death of Jesus Christ was unique – even from the physiological point of view. The uniqueness of it was possible only because of the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth was possible only because of the manner of the creation of Adam as a potentially immortal creature out of whom Eve was taken while he was yet in an immortal state. It is important to understand that immortality here means not that Adam could not die, for he did so; but rather that he need not have died if he had maintained the conditions of life originally appointed to him.

Man therefore stands apart from the rest of creation because though he is now a mortal creature and seemingly little different from the rest of the animal world, yet he was not created as such in the beginning. Death is quite natural for other creatures but not for man. And indeed, he has always been persuaded that he need not or should not die at all – or that if he must die he will still live on in some other way. The death of a human being has an element of tragedy about it which the death of an animal in old age has not. As for the angels who, in their normal estate, are purely spiritual beings, we do not know what the meaning of "death" to them could be. We do know from Scripture that some angels have sinned. But we have no idea whether it would be possible for God to find some means of redeeming them. To redeem man, God became Man and not angel. because the process of Redemption required the sacrifice of a life which was like that of the subjects to be redeemed.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an absolutely essential part of His Crucifixion, and it depended entirely upon the fact that it took place within the framework of a physical order of things. The universe as a substantial reality was therefore needed not merely for the initiation of the redemptive act in terms of Crucifixion but also for its completion in the terms of a bodily Resurrection. It is in this sense that the universe has meaning. It has meaning because it was essential to the plan whereby God displayed His love, and because man was the special object of that display. Man becomes the key to the universe, not man in himself but man as the special creature of God's love for whom the physical world is essential.

It is customary to look upon man's body as a burden to him, as though only his spirit had eternal significance. And yet Scripture is very clear in stating that the Crucifixion, by which his eternal destiny was determined, was dependent upon One who sacrificed His body. He was made flesh (John 1:14 and 1 Timothy 3:16) that He might bear our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). We are reconciled now in the body of His flesh through death (Colossians 1:21, 22), and perfected forever by the offering of His body (Hebrews 10:10). Man is not a spiritual creature who happens to have a body. His body is as much a part of his total being as the Lord's glorious body of His total glory; and man's bodily resurrection is as essential to his completion as the Lord's bodily Resurrection was to his Sacrifice.

The Second Adam, an immortal Creature who need never have died, truly represented the First Adam, an equally immortal creature who need never have died. He thus stood as an exact counterpart of the First Adam, accomplishing for man by an act of will what the First Adam by an act of will failed to do. Through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, mankind is redeemed in both body and soul.

(Both Lesson 13 and Appendix 21 are adapted from Arthur Custance's *Noah and His Three Sons*)