

# Orthodox Theology of the Cross

## Part Two

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24 March 2015



The holy Cross goes forward; it brings joy and  
consolation  
to every quarter where Christians live;  
and these God-fearing people, elated,  
stand in their doorways and greet it reverently,  
the strength, the salvation of the universe, the Cross.

(Constantine P. Cavafy)

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# Hymnography of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday

- Come Adam and Eve, our first father and mother, who fell from the choir on high when you tasted from the tree in Paradise. See, the Tree of the Cross, revered by all, draws near. O precious Cross, partaking of your fruit, we have gained incorruption; we are restored once more to Eden.
- In Paradise of old the tree stripped me bare; for by giving me its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the Tree of the Cross that clothes humans with the garment of life has been set up on earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy.



# Hymnography of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday

- O Christ God, of your own will you accepted crucifixion, so that all humankind might be restored to life. Out of love for humankind, you took the pen of the Cross in your bloody fingers and in the red ink of royalty you signed our absolution.
- **Colossians 2:13-15** And you, who were dead in trespasses..., God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, erasing the record (χειρόγραφον) that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.



# Reconciliation

- **Colossians 1:19-20** For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- **St. Irenaeus of Lyons** (2<sup>nd</sup> century) The Lord redeemed us by his blood and gave his life for our life, his flesh for our flesh, and poured out the Spirit of the Father to unite us and reconcile God and man, bringing God down to man through the Spirit, and raising man to God through his incarnation, and by his coming truly and surely conferring on us immortality by means of our fellowship with God.



# Orthodox Theology of the Cross?

**Anaphora of St. Basil:** Becoming incarnate from a holy virgin, he **emptied himself** (ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν), taking the form of a servant, conforming to the body of our lowliness, that he might change us into the likeness of the image of his glory. For, since through man sin came into the world, and through sin death, it pleased your only-begotten Son, who is in your bosom, O God and Father, to be born of a woman, the holy Theotokos. Born under the law, he condemned sin in his flesh, so that those who died in Adam may be brought to life in him, your Christ.



# The Divine Kenosis

**Philippians 2:5-11** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became **obedient unto death**, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



# The Divine Kenosis

- Kenosis of divinity almost to point of extinction - darkness of non-being and forsakenness by God!
- “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” In the name of creation, the God-Man cries out to God that he has forsaken him.
- The bottomless depth of kenosis is equaled only by the depths of God’s love.
- Divinity cannot die; but it co-dies with Christ’s dying humanity. This is the mystery of the *hypostatic union*.



# The Divine Kenosis

- *Docetism* is denial of Christ's incarnation and work.
- The God-Man suffered and tasted death not only in his humanity but in his Divine-Humanity
- This is perhaps the most valid reason for the seemingly excessive use in Orthodox hymnography of "Christ our God" instead of "Christ the Lord" or other such phrases - danger of over-emphasizing the divinity, but that's how serious the Church took the danger of Docetism and other heresies that threatened the divine participation in redemption!



# Orthodox Theology of the Cross

**Anaphora of St. Basil:** Having cleansed us by water and sanctified us with the Holy Spirit, he gave himself as **ransom** to death in which we were held captive, sold under sin. Descending into the realm of Death through the Cross, that he might fill all things with himself, he loosed the bonds of death. He rose on the third day, having opened a path for all flesh to the resurrection from the dead, since it was not possible that the Author of life would be dominated by decay. So he became the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep, the first-born of the dead, that he might be himself the first in all things.















THE RESURRECTION





# Holistic Theology of the Cross

It is often claimed that the Orthodox Church downplays the significance of the Cross because it emphasizes the Incarnation, Resurrection, Transfiguration - and deification as the essence of salvation. There is some truth to this criticism - IF we take Western theology as the standard by which to measure Orthodox theology. But Orthodox theology takes a more **holistic approach** to the subject of redemption, and so the Cross of Jesus Christ is not seen in isolation as the only event that brought salvation. The cosmic approach of Orthodoxy also avoids the narrow views of some Western theologies.



# Holistic Theology of the Cross

Clear teaching in NT that Christ offered the redemptive sacrifice of his blood to take upon himself our sins:

- **Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption (**ἀπολύτρωσιν**) through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.
- **Romans 5:8-10** But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.



# Holistic Theology of the Cross

- **St. Irenaeus of Lyons:** He who was powerful Word and also truly man redeemed us by his own blood and gave himself as a **ransom** for those who had been taken into captivity... attaining his purpose not by force... but by way of persuasion.
- The Lord restored us to friendship through his incarnation, becoming the 'mediator between God and man.' On our behalf he propitiated the Father, against whom we had sinned, and **canceled** our disobedience by his obedience, restoring us to fellowship with our Maker and submission to him.



# Holistic Theology of the Cross

- St. Irenaeus of Lyons is one of the leading representatives of what has been called the ‘Eastern’ or ‘incarnationalist” doctrine of redemption. **Gustav Aulén**, in his extremely important and influential book, ***Christus Victor***, sees in Irenaeus the ‘classical’ theory of the Atonement, doing justice to every aspect of the work of Christ regarded as an act of God, and free from the forensic notions of the later ‘Western’ view. (**Henry Bettenson, The Early Christian Fathers**)



# Holistic Theology of the Cross

- When the Son of God took flesh, he became like us in everything except sin (Heb. 4:15). In assuming human nature, he deified it. **Since human nature is one**, this gave us the **potential** of receiving grace and adoption. But because of sin, we could not actualize this potential. So Christ, having overcome the barrier of nature at his incarnation, now had to break down the barrier of sin. He would do this through his death.
- **St. Nicholas Cabasilas**: Christ broke down the three barriers that separated man from God: the **barrier of nature** by his Incarnation, the **barrier of sin** by his Death, and the **barrier of death** by his Resurrection.



# Holistic Theology of the Cross

At his death, Christ broke down the barrier of sin. But there was one barrier left: death itself. This Christ broke down at his Resurrection. *As in Adam all die, writes St. Paul, so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man according to his order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming (I Cor. 15:22-23).*

Through Christ's Resurrection, all humankind is made capable of resurrection. This is because **human nature is one**. St. Paul affirms: *For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15:21).*



# Love: the meaning of the Cross

- “The Cross is God Himself in His revelation to the world. The Cross is the sacrificial essence of love, since love is sacrifice, self-surrender, self-abnegation, voluntary self-renunciation for the sake of the beloved. The Cross is the exchange of love, indeed love itself is exchange.
- “The Holy Trinity is the eternal Cross as the sacrificial exchange of Three, the single life born of voluntary surrender, of a threefold self-surrender, of being dissolved in the divine ocean of sacrificial love. ...Love itself, God, in the eternal Cross surrenders Himself for the sake of His love.” **Fr. Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov**



# Love: the meaning of the Cross

- **St. Isaac the Syrian:** “God surrendered His own Son to death on the Cross for the fervent love of creation. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son* to death for our sake (John 3:16). This was not, however, because He could not have redeemed us in another way, but so that His surpassing love, manifested hereby, might be a teacher unto us. And by the death of His only begotten Son He made us near to Himself. Yea, if He had had anything more precious, He would have given it to us, so that by it our race might be His own.”



# “Payment” of “Ransom”?

- **Mark 10:45** (also, **Matthew 20:28**) For the Son of Man came... to give his life a ransom for many (λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν).”
- **1 Timothy 1:5-6** For there is... one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom (ἀντίλυτρον) for all.
- **1 Peter 1:18-19** You know that you were ransomed (ἐλυτρώθητε) from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.



# “Payment” of “Ransom”?

- Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa and others said the ransom was paid to the Devil. But **St. Gregory of Nazianzus in his 45<sup>th</sup> Oration**:
- To whom was offered the blood that was shed for us, and why was it offered, this precious and glorious blood of our God, our high-priest, our sacrifice? We were held captive by the Evil One, for we had been “sold into the bondage of sin” (Romans 7:14). Now a ransom is normally paid to the captor, and so the question is: To whom was the ransom offered, and why? To the Evil One? What an outrage! If it is supposed not merely that the thief received a ransom from God, but that the ransom is God himself!



# “Payment” of “Ransom”?

- If it was paid to the Father, I ask first, why? We were not held captive by him. Secondly, what reason can be given why the blood of the Only-begotten should be pleasing to the Father? For he did not accept even Isaac when he was offered by his father, but he gave a substitute for the sacrifice, a lamb to take his place.
- Is it not clear that the Father accepts the sacrifice, not because he demanded or needed it, but because this was part of the divine plan (οἰκονομία), since man had to be sanctified by the humanity of God; so that he might rescue us by overcoming the tyrant by force...



# “Payment” of “Ransom”?

- “Where is your sting, O death? Where is your victory, O grave?” (1 Cor 15:55) You have been laid low by the cross, put to death by the lifegiver. You are dead, motionless, inert... Let the rest of the mystery be venerated silently” (*Oration 45*).
- **1 Corinthians 15:24-28** Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power... The last enemy to be destroyed is death... When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.



# Hymnography of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday

- **Oikos** Pilate set up three crosses in the place of the Skull, two for the thieves and one for the Giver of Life. Seeing Him, Death (Ἄιδης, not Hell) cries out: “O my ministers and powers! Who is this that has fixed a nail in my heart? A wooden spear has pierced me suddenly, and I am torn apart... I am forced to cast out Adam and Eve and their posterity. A tree brought them to my realm, but now the Tree of the Cross brings them back again to Paradise.”





The Broken Gates of Hades in form of a Cross – Hades personified, bound





