


Why I Think the Crucifix is Cool

by Ron MacDonald


Many of you are probably thinking that I have now lost mine; – cool, that is. Honestly, I am not creating radical ideas to be controversial; these are places I seem drawn to as I continue my quest for the Holy Grail, the Passover “cup event” when our Lord drank from it when he established our *sacrament* of Holy Communion.



This has been an ongoing journey for many years now, and the places it has taken me are both ancient and more timely and relevant than I could have imagined. Evangelicals have long embraced the Reformation’s resistance to the Roman theology of the Mass, but have themselves institutionalized its significance. Many believe that we are on a collision course with a New Reformation, however this time, returning to the roots, or as Alan Hirsch calls it, “The Forgotten Ways”.¹ The issues of the first Reformation still insist that Christ is no longer on the cross and ritually re-sacrificed during the Roman Mass. Yes! That is true, and the Good Friday message, “It is finished” is accurate and crucial to Christ’s redemptive work as our Passover Lamb. But there is more. There always is.

Paul, writing to the church at Colossae says some unnerving things to some of the ears of Evangelicals.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.²

 Our elder brother, Jesus *still* feels the pain, and also the emotion of joy, all embraced on the cross for us, his brothers and sisters³. Of course not in the same way, but he has not only “been there and done that”, he still is there, with us as we walk that path destined for all those who would live godly in Christ⁴. He even sings about us through the “thousand tongues” his body now has.⁵ Today Jesus still feels the pain that is inflicted upon his “new” body, but that joy is also there to sustain *him* until the time when he too, receives his Body, his Bride, the Church, free from its vulnerabilities and suffering of evil. Here – now before us – love contains both joy and pain. This we know all too well from our loving others, and this is what our Lord still embraces as the continuing cost of loving us.

Evangelicals have been quick to dismiss the crucifix as focused around the Mass and Communion. We have joyfully announced at Easter that his ordeal was finished on the cross and now he has been raised from the dead. Wonderful indeed! Scripture states that if the Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave lives within us, how much more will he give life to these bodies we wear that are destined for decay⁶. All of this is both compressed and expanded in time, that great mystery that drives us with a myopia of the "moment by moment" but on the other hand has us seated with Him in heavenly timeless places! As echoed by the many Churches on Good Friday, "it is finished", –yet it still reverberates along the corridors of time as the lamb slain before the foundations of the earth, up to the present as Paul saw it as his part to rejoice in his own sufferings. *In that sense*, Christ's body is still on the cross even though the covenant has been accomplished in due season as a point in time. It has been incarnated and accomplished 2000 years ago, and like some great exploding super nova has broadcast its energy, not only throughout the universe, but through time – past and present. It is finished and it is continuing for us.

He still feels the pain, your pain—

So as the Catholics proclaim in their Mass, Christ is still on the cross, if properly understood – his body is not the one he walked with in Galilee, but the one with which he walks the streets of Pittsburgh, or your home town. He still feels the pain, your pain – but now it is shared.⁷ And is not the Mass really an institutionalization of the Passover, the communion where we are exhorted and even warned with deadly implications about the necessity of discerning the Lord's body?⁸ Communion is the recently popularized Greek word, *koinonia*. Paul, when mentioning his desire to share in Christ's resurrection, in the same sentence included the fellowship (*koinonia*) of Christ's suffering. On occasion I have mentioned that Jesus is at the bottom of the spiritual food chain – that is – eating his body and drinking his blood.⁹ Might I suggest that we are right down there with him. I think it was the late Keith Greene who had a line in one of his songs, "Lord, make me bread for the nations." Jesus said that as the Father had sent him, Jesus was also sending the disciples, and those of us who would believe their testimony.¹⁰ Even greater things than Jesus did would be accomplished by the body he took upon himself at the cross.¹¹ This is the paradigm the Church must embrace if it is going to see the breakthrough of the Kingdom of His own dear son into the earthly dimensions in our day.¹²

This is also why being in a relational Christian community is so crucial for our survival; it is a good place to go with one's pain--- if joy also lives there. So, am I saying that Christ is still on

the cross, suffering the cost of reversing the diabolical sucking of life from nations, cities, individuals, and all of creation? No, it is us on *our* cross, and we that have now become the ministers of Reconciliation.¹³ He is no longer on *his* cross, but rather *ours* with us and in us, because we are also a part of the actual body¹⁴ of Christ. When I see a crucifix I see His work for us, and His work through us; both will cost us our lives¹⁵. Oh! you did take it up...right?

Important Endnotes

¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press, Baker. 2006)

² Colossians 1:24 *"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church"*.

³ Heb 12:2 *"-- who for the joy set before him endured the cross,"*

⁴ 2 Tim 3:12 *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"*.

⁵ Heb 2: 11-12 *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.";*

Zeph 3:17 *"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."*

⁶ Rom 8:11 *"And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."*

⁷ 1 Cor 12:26a, *"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it."*

⁸ 1 Cor 11:28-30 *"Everyone is to examine himself and only then eat of the bread or drink from the cup; because a person who eats and drinks without recognizing the body is eating and drinking his own condemnation. That is why many of you are weak and ill and a good number have died."*

⁹ John 6:48-57 eg. *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."*

¹⁰ John 17:18, 20 *"As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. --- My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,..."*

¹¹ John 14:12 *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

¹² This will be expanded in another issue.

Philippians 2:2-8 *"make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"*

¹³ 2 Cor 5:18 *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"*

¹⁴ The word *body* is more than a metaphor. As his originally incarnated body "housed his spirit and soul" so do our bodies; not exclusively but corporately and cooperatively, doing his will and sacrificially laying our lives down for others.

¹⁵ Some of you might be thinking, "Whoa. This wasn't "what I signed up for!" Don't stop thinking about this now, because it might bring some understanding concerning your present circumstances. If you missed this up front it wasn't because it was in the fine print. Like pirated software out in the world, you might think you have the authentic product, but when problems come and you check with the company, you might find they have no record of any transaction—they don't know you. Yes, there are hugely discounted gospels out there, from the black market to TV info-commercials, but in the end you will find it only a limited worthless version. We are not able to deal with the involved issue of "is it free or does it cost" in this article (Isn't that the usual American question?) The important matter right now is that you go to the right source and work out the arrangements with Him.

Matthew 10:38-39 *"Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it."*

Luke 14:26-35. ff *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?..."*