



The Crucifixion of Christ in its milieu and its spiritual significance today

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Abstract

A large preponderance of scholars agree on the historicity of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The earliest accounts of the death of Jesus are contained in the four canonical gospels. There are also other references in the New Testament epistles. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus predicts His death in three separate places. Each of the four Gospels end with an protracted narrative of Jesus' arrest, preliminary trial at the Sanhedrin and concluding trial in Pontius Pilate's court, where Jesus was lashed, convicted to death, and then led to the place of crucifixion initially carrying His cross before Roman soldiers induce Simon of Cyrene to carry it for Him. Jesus was thus crucified, entombed, and Resurrected from death. This article based on a literature review of relevant articles in academic journals and other works interrogates what early Christians believed concerning death, the Roman modus operandi of Crucifying one, the Crucifixion of Jesus as reconstructed from historical sources and the two tombs of Jesus identified in Jerusalem. It additionally expands on the critical spiritual significance of the Crucifixion for Orthodox believers.

Keywords: Crucifixion, redemption, Grace, fallen humanity.

Introduction

“Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Lossky (1997) states that Subsequently the “triumph of Christ over death” is so integral to the very existence of the Church—and since it is the ultimate paschal proclamation, as in “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!”—then the Orthodox Church will never concentrate on a “theology of the Cross” at the expense of the Resurrection. Rather, the one paschal mystery will always embrace both Cross and Resurrection in a balanced manner”.

Early Christian views on the meaning of death

For Christians the earliest evidence on how Christians thought about death in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians (15:21). Death was a once off event and it was not a natural state but was brought about by original sin (Clark-Soloos, 2006:60). Paul asserts in his letter to the Romans (3:23) that all people sin and fall short of the Glory of God. Death was given human characteristics and was an enemy, namely the devil (Acts phil, 110. 4,7). Jesus however, would take his power away(Hebrews 2:15). The death and resurrection of Jesus would bring this about. Death was viewed as a seed that is planted but can rise again from the earth (Ferguson, 1993). Tertullian in his *A Treatise on the Soul*, states that death is a separation of the soul from the human body and Lactantius advises us to achieve what we can that is good because we only have one opportunity. Just as in the case of Jesus in the tomb for three days



death is merely a falling “asleep” (Acts 13:46). It was also referred to as a departure in Paul’s letter to the (Philippines 1:23). Peter’s second letter tells us it is like taking off one tabernacle which is an earthly house (2 Peter 1:13-14). Christians believed that a body dies but there could also be a second death after the second judgement (Revelation 2:11). Either way, physical death and spiritual death are due to sin (Romans 5:12-21).

Theophilus of Antioch, advised that humans are faulty vessels that need to be remade (ANF 2:104-105). Just as in the life of Jesus after the resurrection those judged worthy will be spotless, without sin and live forever. Justine Martyr viewed death as a debt that people had to pay (ANF1:166). Death was put in place to limit human sin (ANF 1:448). A human body had thus to be buried so that it could be reproduced as pure and without corruption and then it could unite with the soul. Jesus death and resurrection allowed Him to defeat death forever (1 Corinthians. 15:55-57). Tertullian maintained that the souls of sinners and of the righteous go to Hades. However, the righteous go to a place of light where Angels are and protect them also referred to as a Abraham’s bosom (ANF 5:222). The Cross made sunset change into sunrise and death into life according to Clement of Alexandria (Strom 1.11.114).

In the Graeco-Roman world a dead body had to be washed, wrapped in linen strips and the mouth of deceased was closed, while the jaw and face were bound up around the persons head (John 19:40). The wealthy put perfume on the body and also spices in between the different strips of linen (John 19:40). People mourned for a deceased person at the family house and the body was then carried on a bier (Luke 7:12-14). Funerals took place at sunset or before but it was generally immediate for hygienic purposes (Meyers & Strange, 1981). Tertullian said people should not grieve because of the promise of the resurrection (ANF 3:713), so all sadness should be done away with. Cremation should be done away with (ANF 3:545) as it was sinful to burn one made in God’s image.

Crucifixion as a Roman manner of execution

In antiquity crucifixion was considered to be a very vicious and disgraceful method by which to die death. It was practiced by the Carthaginians, Assyrians and Babylonians, and was also used methodically by the Persians in the 6th century BCE (Retief & Cilliers, 2003). We should note that the Romans did not use this method on their own citizens (Hengel, 1977). Crucifixion in Roman times was applied typically to slaves, discredited soldiers, Christians and foreigners and there was however, extensive torture and humiliation of victims who were executed in public sites during the day (Josephus, *Ant.*). The victims suffered immensely as their death was relatively slow, and to add insult to injury, they were generally crucified while naked. Crucifixion then was made to be the most atrocious and dreadful of punishments, and everything possible was done to make it appear as such.

So, what is crucifixion? Cicero called this punishment the most horrific of all invented by humans. Its essence is that a human body is hung on a cross in such a way that the center of gravity is in the chest. When the arms are raised above the shoulders and the person cannot find support in his legs, then the entire weight of the body rests in the chest. As a result of this tension, blood floods the chest muscles and stagnates in them. The muscles gradually begin to stiffen. Then comes asphyxiation: cramped chest muscles put pressure on the chest. The muscles do not allow the diaphragm to expand; the person cannot fill his lungs with air and begins to suffocate to death. Such an execution sometimes took several days. In order to speed it up, a person was not simply tied to the cross, but often nailed. Forged nails with ridges were pounded between the radius and ulna near the wrist. On its path, the nail met a bundle of nerves. By itself, touching a bare nerve causes horrible pain; here, these nerves were crushed. But this is not all. In order to breathe in this



position, the person must find a fulcrum in his own body in order to free the chest for breathing. For a nailed person, the only fulcrum is his own feet which are also nailed through. The nail enters between the small bones of the foot. The man must push against the nail which goes through his foot, strengthen his knees, and lift up his body, thus relieving the pressure on the chest. Then he can take a breath. But because his arms are also nailed through, they begin to pivot around the nails. In order to take a breath, the man must pivot his arm around the nail, which is not smooth but covered with ridges and burrs. Such a movement is accompanied by pain on the verge of shock. (Protodeacon Andrei Kuraev, 2011).

Death, usually occurred after six hours and could have at times taken four days. Death was usually due to the after-effects of obligatory scourging and maiming, haemorrhage and dehydration causing hypovolaemic shock (severe fluid loss making it impossible for the heart to pump an adequate amount of blood to the body) and pain, and the most significant factor was progressive asphyxia triggered by impairment of respiratory movement. The resultant anoxaemia (which is a deficiency in the amount of oxygen in the arterial blood), magnified the hypovolaemic shock. Death was commonly accelerated by cardiac arrest, caused by vasovagal reflexes, initiated *inter alia* by severe anoxaemia, severe pain after bodily blows and the breaking of one's large bones (Retief & Cilliers, 2003). Ropes may have been used to draw out the life of the crucified person and increase an individual's suffering, nails, being more horrific, accomplished the overall goal more efficiently.

Roman guards on duty could only leave the crucifixion site after the victim had died, and were known to hurry death by means of intentional fracturing of the tibia and/or fibula, spear stab wounds into the heart, sharp blows to the front of the chest, or a smoking fire built at the foot of the cross to asphyxiate the victim. The victims were generally left to decompose on their crosses or they could have been consumed by wild beasts or even crows and other birds. The Jews were allowed to bury their dead, thus there was a practice of the Romans allowing bodies to be taken down from crosses and then buried (Josephus, *Life* 75). In the case of Jesus' crucifixion, his body was not left to rot on the cross as a concession by the Romans to the Jews (Matthew 27:58; Mark 15:42-46) since the next day was a high Sabbath for celebration of the Passover feast (John 19:14, 31, 42). The Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross overnight and since the Jewish day began at sunset, the body of Christ was then taken down, prepared, and buried before the Passover began at sunset. Thus, Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Jesus for burial and the Romans acceded as this was set by precedent in Roman law.

To intimidate the Jews, and in order to scare them during the war of 66-70 CE, the Romans left crucified bodies on the crosses on crowded roads, and did not observe normal burial practices (Josephus, 1895). Josephus records Florus as having nailed 2,000 Jewish soldiers in order to control a rebellion, and also that Titus' soldiers nailed thousands of Jews to crosses during the protracted siege of Jerusalem (Josephus, 1965). Nails were often extracted from crosses and from their victims and used as amulets - "good luck charms", believed to confer protection upon their owner. Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, eradicated crucifixion in the Roman Empire in 337 CE out of adoration for Jesus Christ.

The description of the crucifixion of Jesus as reconstructed from historical sources

As an Orthodox believer, I believe crucifixion of Jesus Christ did not take place in anonymity. The four gospel writers for one, were actual figures in history that wrote, from different perspectives, about the death of Jesus Christ even though well after the event. Their writings



portray eyewitness accounts of documented happenings. Thus, if the Bible is historically accurate Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:43-52), suffered six trials - three by Jewish leaders and three by the Romans (John 18:12-14, Mark 14:53-65, Mark 15:1a, Mark 15: 1b-5, Luke 23:6-12, Mark 15:6-15). He survived beating, whipping, and mocking (Mark 15:16-20). Pilate then handed Jesus over to be crucified (Mark 15:6-15) after which he was mocked by the soldiers as they dressed Him in a purple robe and a crown of thorns (John 19:1-3). Jesus was then crucified on Golgotha (Mark 15:22) and the sky turned dark for three hours (Mark 15:33). Jesus cried out, "Father! Into your hands I commit my spirit!" and he then died (Luke 23:46).

The assortment of notions as to the events of the crucifixion and after it, and to what happened to the body of Jesus, serves merely to further establish the fact of his death. There are also other sources which mention it and one of the early references to the crucifixion of Jesus is Lucian's *De morte Peregrini* 11.3; There are also other works such as Tacitus *Annales* XV, 44-3 that only relate to the execution of Jesus. The *Testimonium Flavianum* (Jos.Ant.XVIII 63f.) also mentions the crucifixion and bolsters its Authenticity. When we consider ancient practices at the time, they give credence to the idea in the scriptures of the scourging (Mark15:15), Jesus's carrying the crosspiece (John 19:17), the nailing to the cross of hands and feet, (John 20:25; Luke 24:39). There is also astonishment at the little time it took Jesus to die (six hours). according to Mark, and also Pilate's permission to Joseph of Arimathea to bury the body in a private tomb (Mark 15:43;John 19:38).

In the *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus (37-100 CE) asserts:

There was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day
(Antiquities 18:3:3).

The Greek archaeologist Vassilios Tzaferis found an 18cm nail driven through the heel bone of a man found in a tomb, thus demonstrating the methodology employed i.e. nailing one to a cross. The nail was discovered in place within a heel bone, and it was attached to a small bit of olive wood which was the part of the cross where the man had been suspended to die. In the *Antiquities of the Jews* (93 CE) Josephus states (Ant 18.3) that Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate. Tacitus, writing in *The Annals* (15.44) in 116 CE, described the oppression of Christians by Nero and states that Pilate instructed the execution of Jesus (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44 ;Dunn, 2003).

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called "Chrestians" by the populace.

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.
(Annals, 15.44)



Eddy and Boyd (2007: 127) argue that it is "firmly established" that Tacitus (56-120 CE) offers a non-Christian validation of the crucifixion of Jesus. Apart from the literary and tradition-historical problems posed by the Gospel Passion narratives one can conclude that Jesus was tried and convicted by Pontius Pilate (John 19:16) and was crucified by Roman soldiers. The type of punishment suggests Jesus was condemned as a political felon. Mara Bar-Serapion's letter to his son, written after 73 CE but before the 3rd century CE speaks about the crucifixion of Jesus (Köstenberger, Scott Kellum, & Quarles, 2009). The execution happened on a Friday in the background of the Passover (Mark 14:12). Traditionally, the path that Jesus took is called Via Dolorosa ("Way of Suffering") and is a street in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is marked by nine of the fourteen Stations of the Cross and the last five stations are inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The likely site of Golgotha was thus in Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We are not sure of the shape of the cross. Dunn asserts that there is "broad consensus" between scholars concerning the nature of an authentic reference to the crucifixion of Jesus in the *Testimonium* (Dunn, 2003). There is also a reference to the crucifixion in the Babylonian Talmud in the below passage (Sanhedrin 43a. Babylonian Talmud) which also agrees with John against the Synoptics in the association of the day of the crucifixion to the day of the Passover:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover. Ulla retorted: Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defence could be made? Was he not a _Mesith_ [enticer], concerning him Scripture says, _Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him?_ With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government for royalty [i.e., influential]. Our Rabbis taught: Yeshu had five disciples, Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni, and Todah.

Schäfer (2007: 141) is convinced that the above narrative of the execution in the Talmud refers to Jesus. A number of early Christian Gnostic sects, alleged Jesus did not have a physical body, and they denied that he was crucified (Pagels, 1979). However, Ignatius of Antioch maintained that Jesus was truly born and was truly crucified and wrote that those who believe that Jesus only seemed to suffer in fact only seemed to be Christians.

Crucifixion as a Roman method of execution

In the image below we see an 11.4 cm nail still lodged in the heel bone of the man – seemingly the people who buried him were unable to extract it. A small block of wood was positioned half way down the surface of the cross (as evidenced in the image) by Romans so that it formed a support for a convicted man's body. The person's foot was then placed against it and the nail driven through to fix it to the cross which must have caused the most excruciating pain. The nail in the ankle was preserved only because it bent after hitting a knot in the wood and therefore could not be removed from the body. The placing of the nails in the hands, or the wrists is also indeterminate. Some suggest that the Greek word *cheir* (χείρ) for hand includes the wrist. The synoptic gospels state that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The Gospel of Matthew records earthquakes, rocks splitting, and the opening of the graves of dead saints and it also pronounces on how resurrected saints went into the holy city and appeared to many people (John Yueh-Han Yieh, 2005).

In both Mark and Matthew, the centurion in charge of the Crucifixion comments on the proceedings: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) and "Truly this was the Son



of God!" (Matthew 27:54) The Gospel of Luke asserts that: "Certainly this man was innocent!" (Luke 23:47)

The two tombs of Jesus identified in Jerusalem and what they convey about how Jews of a certain socio-economic class as well as Jesus were buried

There were literally hundreds of tombs, cut into the slopes of the hills surrounding Jerusalem. These were primarily on the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus. The tombs were usually situated outside the city walls. Burial caves were used for quite a few generations by members of the same family. The simple tombs had a narrow opening, and were sealed with a square stone (See image 1 entrance). Outer entrances were sealed with blocking stones to stop wild animals from disturbing the remains of loved ones. Some tombs were sealed with slightly rounded or near perfectly rounded stones. The wealthy classes had large tombs with beautiful facades, and some were decorated with columns topped by gables with floral motifs. The tomb in Image 2 is similar to the one Lazarus arose from after being called by Jesus.

In the primary burial, bodies were placed in niches or on benches cut into the walls of the burial chambers (See image 3). Jewish tombs had stone chests with lids for skeletal remains (*ossuaries*) as in image 3. The burial chamber was lined with rock-cut benches on three sides, onto which the bodies of the deceased were laid. Only the wealthier members of society could afford rock-cut tombs. The poorer members of society apparently disposed of their dead in a manner that has left fewer traces in the archaeological record. Some were buried in individual trench graves or cist graves dug into the ground. The Gospel accounts describe Joseph of Arimathea inserting Jesus' body in one of the loculi in his family's tomb (Image 3).

The Spiritual Significance of the Crucifixion

Christ's crucifixion was a harrowing death amidst excruciating pain, as has so clearly been described in the paragraphs above. In the midst of such intense suffering, one begs the question 'What was the purpose of the crucifixion?' It is a question of paramount importance as Christ's death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, form the very foundation of the Orthodox faith. It is our intention to highlight the purpose of Christ's crucifixion from the Orthodox viewpoint as reflected in some of the aspects that comprise the Tradition of the Church. The redemptive nature of Jesus' death precedes the Pauline letters and goes back to the earliest days of Christianity and the early church. The Nicene Creed's statement that "for our sake He was crucified" is a reflection of the church's faith. One of the unique characteristics of the Orthodox faith is its changelessness, as there is a sense of continuity with the Church of ancient times that is strongly felt in the present day Church. Because of this, Orthodox worshippers adhere to the Tradition of the Church (not to be mistaken with traditions one partakes in). The definition of the word Tradition from Lexico (2019) is "The transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way". Thus, Church Tradition is the faith which Jesus Christ taught the apostles and has been passed down from generation to generation since that time. It comprises the following elements: The Bible, the Creed, the writings of the Church Fathers, the decisions taken at the Ecumenical Councils and the icons, to name a few.

It must be stated at the outset of this discussion, that the Crucifixion and Resurrection are viewed as a whole and not as two separate and distinct events, as sometimes viewed in the western faith (Roberson, 2008).

Concisely stated, the fall of man occurred in the following way. As Hieromonk Damascene so wisely points out, we need to acknowledge "What Adam fell from in order to understand what Christ restores us to" (2004). Before Adam's committing the first sin by tasting the fruit, man



would not die and sin and disobedience did not exist. Man was born into a body and soul that possessed the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it was God's initial intention for mankind to enjoy continual and continued communication with Him forever more. After Adam's sin, people became separated from God and fell into a state of corruption and death and the Holy Spirit, which is the power and strength of God, no longer abided in man. While man is not guilty of Adam's sin, we do share in the consequences of his actions. Through His crucifixion, Jesus who was innocent and blameless, became a sacrifice and was able to restore what had been lost (St. Gregory the Theologian, 1974). Mankind once again became spirit-filled and enjoyed communion with God. As Gregory Palamas states "The good Lord healed this two-fold death of ours through his single bodily death." Stated another way, "Christ paid the debt of sin man could not himself pay... a perfect blameless sacrifice in the form of Christ's crucifixion destroyed the consequences of Adam's disobedience ... Christ paid the debt of sin man could not himself pay" (St. Gregory Palamas, 1995).

The Orthodox Church on Good Friday does not consider Christ's human pain and suffering by itself, but rather of the distinction between His external humiliation and His innermost glory. Orthodox adherents do not just see the suffering humanity of Christ, but a suffering God (Ware, 2000):

*Today is hanged upon the tree
He who hanged the earth in the midst of the waters.
A crown of thorns crowns him
Who is the king of the angels.
He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery
Who wraps the heaven in clouds.
We worship thy Passion, O Christ:
Show us also thy glorious Resurrection!
I magnify thy sufferings,
I praise thy burial and thy Resurrection.
Shouting, Lord, glory to thee!*

The Crucifixion is not a separate happening from the Resurrection, since both are considered to be a single action. Golgotha is understood in the light of the empty tomb of the risen Lord; the Cross is thus an emblem of victory. Christ is our victorious king, not in spite of the Crucifixion, but because of it: 'I call Him king, because I see Him crucified' (John Chrysostom, Second Sermon on the Cross and the Robber, 3 (P.G. 49, 413).

One of the main purposes of Christ's crucifixion was to illustrate the power of God. Christ's crucifixion is viewed as a victory. As it says in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God". Being crucified at that time was considered a shameful and humiliating death. Thus, the use of the term "the Lord of glory" to describe a person who had just undergone so shameful a death is jarring at the very least but aptly illustrates the depth of meaning of Christ's Crucifixion (Lossky, 1997).

Another important verse that highlights the power of God is 1 Corinthians (1:23-24) asserts: "...we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Paul goes on to say in Corinthians 1:25: "for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men." This verse clearly states that one depends on the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that enables one to have the faith and discernment to see the complexity of the meaning of Christ's crucifixion. In the homilies on Matthew, John Chrysostom states: "And they divide His garments amongst them, which sort of thing is done in the case



of very vile and abject criminals, and such as have no one belonging to them and are in utter desolation. They parted the garments, by which such great miracles were done. But they wrought none now, Christ restraining His unspeakable power, for as to one base and abject, and the vilest of all men, they dare to do all things. To the thieves at any rate they did nothing of the kind, but to Christ they dared it all. And they crucified Him in the midst of them, that He might share in their reputation.” (Chrysostom, Homily 87 on Matthew).

Another aspect of the Tradition of the Church where the purpose of Christ’s crucifixion can be clearly seen is in the writings of the Church Fathers. As Father Papias also writes “He defeated sin and condemned Satan, and through His death He spread abroad the righteousness over all” (Payton, 2019). God’s relation to suffering has applied significances for Christian life. It infers that Christians are called upon to be people of both deep remembrance and action. The believers in Christ must keep the memory of human suffering and see the presence of the suffering Christ in our suffering fellow human beings.

Finally, as Church Father Ignatius of Antioch declares, “... you are living not in the manner of men, but as Jesus Christ, who died for us, that through faith in His death you might escape dying” (Kirby, 2019). The Lenten service books or Lenten Triodion serve as another source of the Church Tradition wherein Christ’s crucifixion is mentioned. These words appear in a song sung on Great Friday. “Your cross O Lord is life and resurrection to Your people . . . We sing to You, our crucified God”. During the matins service on Holy Saturday, the following words are sung, “You who are the Life, were laid in a tomb, o Christ . . . we honour Your burial and Your sufferings, through which You have saved us from Corruption” (Paton, 2019).

As His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos Ware so eloquently points out, “The Crucifixion is itself a victory, but on Great Friday the victory is hidden, whereas on Easter morning it is made manifest” (Ware, 2000). The resurrection of Jesus confirms and completes all that Jesus stood for. The Christian faith is that God will be victorious over malevolence and suffering, as displayed and realized in the death and Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour. For Orthodox, believers the Cross stands as a personal protector at the core of a life that at times is highly confusing and tempting.

Another interesting aspect of the Orthodox Tradition that highlights the function of Christ’s crucifixion is iconography. The primary elements which from an outward point of view make up the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, include Scripture, Councils, Fathers, Liturgy, Canons, Icons. These things are not to be disconnected and juxtaposed, for it is the same Holy Spirit which speaks through them all, and collectively they make up a single whole, each part being understood in the light of the rest (Ware, 2000). It is well known that every aspect of an icon is purposefully included to portray the mysteries of our Faith. It is imperative to acknowledge that the sign affixed to the Cross reads ‘the King of Glory’ in the icon of Christ’s crucifixion. This icon highlights the Orthodox viewpoint that even in Christ’s most vulnerable moments He is seen as the victor over sin and death (Cavarnos, 1992).

Icons thus have a liturgical function, and are a means of worship and veneration and they are not artworks. The primary functions, are more important than the first. Like sacred hymns and music, the icon is used as a means of worshipping God and venerating His saints. As such, icons are essentially symbolic, leading the soul from the visible to the invisible, as they open spiritual vistas from the material to the spiritual, from the symbol to the prototype or original which they represent. The prototype that is venerated is in the final analysis always God, as man was created in God’s own image. the crucifix is itself an icon, an image of Christ’s crucifixion, a symbol of Christ Himself, Who is usually depicted upon it in the Eastern Orthodox Church (Basil of Caesarea, 1997).



Conclusion

Crucifixion was envisioned to deliver a death that was predominantly slow, painful and horrific, humiliating, and in public. The horrors of crucifixion were often criticised by some Roman orators such as Cicero, who described crucifixion as "a most cruel and disgusting punishment". This is what Jesus Christ endured for humanity to have access to God's Kingdom. The physical death of Jesus on the Cross is the central message and the main notion upon which all Christianity is based. Without Jesus' sacrificial offering of Himself on the cross, there is no Christianity, or everlasting salvation for anyone, and there is no heaven or any meaningful afterlife subsequent to our physical deaths. It is worth noting an additional purpose of Christ's crucifixion. Christ came willingly to His death. As Saint John Chrysostom says, "... the purpose of this ... was to teach us this lesson, that is not to fear death" (Chrysostom, Homily 87 on Matthew). "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

The cross has always been venerated by Christians (Meyendorff, 1983). John Damascene states: "I enter the common place-of-therapy of souls, the church, choked as it were by the thorns of worldly thoughts. The bloom of painting attracts me, it delights my sight like a meadow, and secretly evokes in my soul the desire to glorify God. I behold the fortitude of the martyr, the crowns awarded, and my zeal is aroused like fire; I fall down and worship God through the martyr, and receive salvation" (P.G., 94, col. 1268 a-b.). But because man fell, the Incarnation is not only an act of love but an act of total salvation. Jesus Christ, by uniting man and God in His own person, reopened for man the path to union with God. In His own person Christ displayed what the true 'likeness of God' is, and through His saving and triumphant sacrifice He set that likeness once again within man's grasp (Ware, 2000). Christ, the Second Adam, came to earth and reversed the effects of the first Adam's disobedience.

The various aspects of Church Tradition exist all around the Orthodox worshipper and are a cornerstone of the Orthodox faith. The purpose of the crucifixion has been illustrated using the context in which Crucifixion was enacted, some Bible verses, the sayings of the Church Fathers and iconography. The message is clear. Christ was crucified for our sins and by believing in Him, the believer will be saved and will enjoy eternal life in continual communion with God. As the Holy Spirit is the strength and power of God, the believer will enjoy these benefits by acknowledging and revering the crucifixion of the Living God.

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