

“Donald Macleod’s work is always stimulating, sometimes provocative, and never less than excellent. This is a contribution to thought on the atonement that is both timely and incisive. It should be required reading for students, theologians, ministers and anyone interested in learning more about the stupendous atoning work of Christ.”

Robert Letham, director of research and senior lecturer in systematic and historical theology, Wales Evangelical School of Theology, Bridgend

“This book explores ‘the way of the cross’ from the Gospel narratives and then examines ‘the word of the cross’ as it is explained in the rest of the New Testament. Donald Macleod writes with careful analysis and persuasive clarity about the great issues that have absorbed the attention of preachers and scholars throughout the ages, including substitution, expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, satisfaction, redemption and victory. In the tradition of Stott, Packer and other evangelical leaders, he provides a theology of the atonement for the general reader, argued from Scripture, but helpfully engaging with debates about the meaning and significance of biblical affirmations about the cross.”

David G. Peterson, emeritus faculty member, Moore College, Sydney

“Donald Macleod has written a welcome and convincing exposition of the cross of Christ. He skilfully blends biblical exegesis and engagement with systematic theologians to produce a robust defense of the classic evangelical view of penal substitution which anticipates objections, places it in a wide framework and implicitly rebukes sloppy thinking. His clear style makes this book not only a must-read on this topic but also a joy to read and an educative treat.”

Derek Tidball, visiting scholar, Spurgeon’s College, London

“Those who have heard Donald Macleod preach or who have read his writings will know that the crucified Christ is, of all theological topics, his forte. He has dazzling insight matched by a way with words which together serve to bring out aspects of the person and work of Christ with memorable beauty. Thus it is a pleasure to be able to commend this book. If you are familiar with Donald’s work, you know what to expect and know that you will be challenged and edified. If you have never read him before, you are in for a treat.”

Carl R. Trueman, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

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PREFACE

Any first-century missionary who prided himself on rapport with his audience would have kept silent about the cross. It was a ‘most vile death’, and the idea that the Son of God could save the world by dying would have seemed both scandalous and ridiculous.

Things are no different in the twenty-first century. Yet from first-century Corinth to modern Korea, the story of the cross, and the doctrine of penal substitution, have brought peace to millions who have faced the truth about themselves, and light, joy and power to drifting lives.

In my case, if I may paraphrase the dying words of John Knox, this is where I first cast my anchor; though the surrounding theological seas have always had their own fascinations it is this rock that really matters. I owe it everything, and all that remains now is to see it from within the veil.

It is hard to know where to draw the line when it comes to acknowledgements. All the books I have ever read, all the preachers I have ever heard, and all the believers I have ever met, have made their own contribution to this volume. I have tried, however, to keep quotations to a minimum, and some of the omissions will seem very strange. But it is precisely to such works as John Stott’s *The Cross of Christ*¹ and James Packer’s *What Did the Cross*

1. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986) [20th anniversary edition 2006].

*Achieve?*² that my debt is greatest: so great that had I returned to them in the course of preparing this volume it might well have ended up as no more than a rewrite of theirs. I had to maintain some semblance of independence.

I am especially grateful to Dr Philip Duce, Senior Commissioning Editor (Theological Books) at Inter-Varsity Press, for his patience, encouragement and guidance. He not only homed in expertly on blemishes, but allowed me to expand certain sections (my idea of the perfect editor).

Donald Macleod

2. James I. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?: The Logic of Penal Substitution*, Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture, 1973, repr. in *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, vol. 1 (4 vols., Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998–99), pp. 85–124.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers, 10 vols.: < http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html >
BAGD	W. Bauer, <i>A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , tr. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958)
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
Gk	Greek
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960)
KJV	King James Version
Lat.	Latin
<i>Luther's Works</i>	Martin Luther, <i>Luther's Works</i> , 55 vols., tr. and ed. various (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–86)
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NPWF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: < http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html >

NRSV New Revised Standard Version
RV Revised Version
TDNT G. Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of
the New Testament*, 10 vols., tr. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley
(Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1965–76)

PART I

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

1. A MAN OF SORROWS

The apostles clearly saw it as their duty not only to proclaim the cross, but to explain it. St Paul, for example, speaks of both the word (*logos*) of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18) and the word (*logos*) of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Yet the cross is not in the first instance a doctrine, but a fact, and no interpretation of the fact can make the suffering of Christ more or less awful than it actually was. Whether we speak of the cross as penal, piacular, expiatory, propitiatory, vicarious, substitutionary, exemplary, liberating or conquering makes no difference to what Jesus had to endure. The cross remains a fact. With this fact the church, and indeed the whole world, has to reckon; and with this fact all our thinking about the atonement must begin.

The centrality of the cross

The story of the cross is proclaimed in all four canonical Gospels, and the first thing that strikes us is how much space it occupies in the overall narrative. Mark, for example, devotes eight of his sixteen chapters to the last fateful journey following Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, and one-fifth of his material is taken up with the story of the crucifixion itself. The same focus on the cross appears in Matthew, who again makes the confession at Caesarea Philippi pivotal. In Luke, Caesarea Philippi is placed in chapter 9, while no fewer than

four-and-a-half chapters (19:28 – 23:56) are devoted to events between the triumphal entry and the resurrection. John omits all reference to key events such as the baptism, the temptations, the transfiguration and the institution of the Lord's Supper, concentrating, from chapter 7 onwards, on Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem. He devotes chapters 13 to 17 to the last night of Jesus' life, and two chapters (18–19) to the crucifixion.

It is clear from these details that the evangelists had no interest in writing conventional biographies of Jesus. His childhood, adolescence, education and early manhood, so central to modern biography and psychology, are passed over in almost total silence. Instead, the proportions of the Gospel narratives underline the centrality of the cross in the evangelists' understanding of Jesus' mission; and that understanding was derived from Jesus himself. In Mark 10:45, for example, he declared that the very reason for his coming was to give his life as a ransom for many, and according to John 10:18 the commission he had received from the Father was to lay down his life. From this point of view the Gospels strike exactly the same note as St Paul: 'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1:23). Precisely for this reason, the proportions we find in the Gospels become the criterion for all interpretations of Christianity. However important the teaching of Jesus, it was not there that his primary significance lay. It lay in his death. Muslims may glory in the teaching of their prophet. Christians glory in the death of theirs (Gal. 6:14).

The climax of his suffering

A word of caution is needed here, however. The centrality of the cross must not beguile us into ignoring a second striking feature of the story of the passion: the cross was but the climax of Jesus' suffering. His whole life, from the cradle to the tomb, was suffering. The principle underlying this was that from the moment of his birth Jesus was identified with sinful humanity, and all the circumstances of his life reflected the fact that he was bearing the sin of the world (John 1:29). In solidarity with us, he was 'the Man of Sorrows' (Isa. 53:3, KJV).

This is not to say that his life was one of unrelieved gloom. There were moments when he rejoiced in spirit (Luke 10:21), there was the satisfaction of doing his Father's will and there was the constant anticipation of 'the joy that was set before him' (Heb. 12:2). But none of this detracts from the fact that his whole life involved suffering. The tension is underlined by the circumstances of his birth. At one level its glory is attested by the miracle of the virgin conception and such other signs as the acclamation of the angels, the adoration of

the shepherds and the visit of the Magi. At another, the details paint a picture of lowliness, poverty and exclusion. The condescension already implicit in the incarnation is aggravated by his being laid in a manger and by all that was implied in the fact that there was no room in the inn.¹ Shortly afterwards, the family are forced to flee to Egypt. On their return, they have to reside in Nazareth, out of which there could come nothing good (John 1:46). In the eyes of the Jewish elite this would forever define him as a provincial. He clearly had few educational opportunities; in later life, in fact, people were well aware that he had never had a formal education and were amazed that nevertheless he could teach (John 7:15). The Christian imagination has lingered lovingly over the image of him as a carpenter, and the image itself has cast lustre over that noble trade. But nothing is heard of Joseph after Jesus' visit to the temple at the age of twelve, and his total absence from the accounts of the public ministry strongly suggests that Jesus lost his father at an early age.

Once the public ministry commences, the pressures and privations are immediately obvious. They begin with the temptations in the desert, underlining the fact that though Jesus was free from sin he was not free from temptation. On the contrary, he was tempted just like ourselves 'in every way' (Heb. 4:15). Behind the phraseology, sanitized by centuries of quotation, lies the harsh reality that Jesus was dogged and harassed by the Prince of Darkness throughout his life. But there were more mundane pressures as well, and they clearly took their toll, even of his physical appearance: so much so that he could be taken for a fifty-year-old (John 8:57) when he was scarcely thirty. He was poor beyond our imagining, owning only the clothes he stood in; homeless, without a pillow for his head; oppressed by crowds demanding a sign and plying him with endless questions; often exhausted, as when he lay dead to the world in the stern of a tiny fishing boat caught in the eye of a fearful storm (Mark 4:38). He was misunderstood by his family, who feared for his sanity; pursued by the sick and their desperate relatives; stalked by the Pharisees with their undisguised hostility and their sly coadjutors with their entrapping conundrums (Mark 12:13). His whole life followed a pattern of rejection: rejection in 'his own country', Nazareth; rejection by the religious establishment; rejection by public opinion, always fickle; and rejection, at last, by his disciples, who all forsook him and fled.

1. The general meaning of *katalyma* is 'lodging-place', sometimes more specifically a 'guest room', as rendered by the newer NIV and some other recent versions (Luke 2:7). However, the translation 'inn' remains firmly embedded in the traditional Christmas narrative and is retained by ESV, NRSV and NASB.

Add to these the sheer horror of life among sinners for one so morally and spiritually sensitive. We skip lightly over the words, ‘made his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14), forgetting that he had come ‘from highest bliss, down to such a world as this’²: a world where he was surrounded on all sides by the sights of misery and wickedness, the sounds of profanity and blasphemy, and the stench of poverty, death and corruption.

That had been the story so far. Pontius Pilate was the climax, not the commencement, of his suffering. It is tempting to surmise that because of Jesus’ inner strength he was able to rise easily above such pressures and continue on his way unruffled and serene. But Jesus’ endurance and courage were not those of the insensitive and unfeeling. The pressure hurt, and sometimes there were tears (John 11:35), sometimes anger (Mark 3:5), and sometimes an almost mortal sorrow (Mark 14:34). This is what undergirds the sympathy highlighted in Hebrews 4:15: Jesus was tested in every way, just as we are.

Dawning realization

Yet apart from the divine identity of the sufferer and his remaining sinless despite the full force of temptation there is little that is unique in the catalogue of Jesus’ sufferings prior to Gethsemane. They express his solidarity with us, but do not set him apart from us. What sets him apart is his cross: not only *a* cross, but *his* cross, a road no-one had travelled before and no-one has travelled since. The full horror of it would have dawned on Jesus only gradually, and only carefully and gradually did he introduce the subject to his disciples. His mother doubtless shared with him the mysterious words spoken to her at the annunciation. These had made plain his messianic destiny, as had the words spoken by Elizabeth (Luke 1:42–43) and by Simeon (Luke 2:29–32), but they had also made plain that he would be ‘a sign spoken against’; and Mary had been warned of a sword that would one day pierce her soul (Luke 2:35).

We can be sure, too, that Mary had introduced him to the prophets. He would have read his own destiny in their delineations of the Messiah, not least in those neglected passages which spoke so clearly of his suffering and death. He may at first have pondered, like the Ethiopian eunuch, ‘Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ (Acts 8:34); or, like the angels, probed the great predictions of the suffering of Messiah and the glory that would follow, wondering to what, and to when, and to whom they referred (1 Pet. 1:11). As

2. ‘See amid the winter’s snow’, Edward Caswall (1814–78).

he read, the Spirit of his Father would have guided him and led him to the core truths of messianic suffering: that one day he would be led like a lamb to the slaughter; that he was called to give his life a ransom for many; that the sword of Yahweh would strike him; and that at the end even his heavenly Father would forsake him.

Jesus embarked on his public ministry with these thoughts already firmly impressed on his mind, and his forebodings may well have been conformed at his baptism, when the voice from heaven spoke words which were at one level so comforting, at another so disturbing. Here the Father acknowledges him as his beloved Son, but in words clearly reminiscent of the command to Abraham: ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac . . . and sacrifice him . . . as a burnt offering on a mountain that I will show you’ (Gen. 22:2). He was to be God’s Isaac. The words of John the Baptist, spoken shortly afterwards, confirmed that this was indeed the path Jesus was to tread. He was the Lamb of God, bearing the sin of the world (John 1:29).

From the very beginning of his public ministry Jesus’ own utterances betray not only the expectation of a violent death, but his perception that this death was the very heart and purpose of his mission. The earliest recorded reference to it is in Mark 2:20. In the context, Jesus is being challenged as to why his disciples never fast. He answers with a rhetorical question: how can the guests fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But he adds, ‘the day will come when the bridegroom will be *taken from* them, and on that day they will fast’. This verb, *apairō*, occurs twice in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 53:8, referring to the violent death of the Servant:

By oppression and judgment he was *taken away*.

Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was *cut off* from the land of the living;

for the transgression of my people he was punished.

Though the word does not always imply the use of force, the context here clearly requires it; and its use by Jesus makes plain that he set out on his mission fully aware that it would end violently.

Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi marks a watershed, Jesus judging that the time has now come to speak explicitly of his violent end: ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and . . . be killed and after three days rise again’ (Mark 8:31–32). The sequel is fascinating. Peter finds the whole concept of messianic suffering abhorrent, just as he would later find the idea of the foot washing (John 13:8), and says, in effect, ‘Don’t talk such rubbish!’ Jesus’ response is sharp,

almost harsh, as if Peter had touched a raw nerve: ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ The disciple’s words clearly presented a temptation, a temptation with which Jesus was already wrestling and which would come to its climax in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). How plausible, for a moment, must Peter’s argument have seemed! He was the Messiah; the Messiah should not suffer; he could bypass the suffering, then! It all seemed so logical, and to think that it came from a disciple! It was its very plausibility that made Jesus angry and drew from him the harshest rebuke he ever directed at an individual. Later, as they make their way through Galilee, Jesus brings up the same subject again (Mark 9:32), but the disciples still don’t understand, and they are afraid to ask. ‘Possibly,’ comments C. E. B. Cranfield, ‘they understood enough to know that to know more would be painful. Possibly they could see that the subject was painful to Jesus himself.’³

In the Gospel of John the clearest allusion Jesus makes to his impending death is in chapter 12: ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ (12:24). The most remarkable thing about these words is their context: ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’ (John 12:23). This is the paradox of the cross. ‘Without the “death” of the seed,’ wrote C. H. Dodd, ‘no crop: without the death of Christ, no world-wide gathering of mankind.’⁴ By dying, Christ brings life to millions. By dying, he is glorified. This is linked to John’s use of the verb, *hypsōō*. In Philippians 2:9 Paul uses it (with the prefix *hyper*) to express the hyper-exaltation of Jesus, but John uses it of his crucifixion. This is particularly clear in John 12:32, ‘I, when I am *lifted up* from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ John himself adds the explanatory comment, ‘he said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die’. It would involve, quite literally, his being lifted up. The following verse makes plain how the crowd understood the words: ‘We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain for ever, so how can you say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”?’ They clearly heard the words as if they meant, ‘the Son of Man must be hanged’. Yet, as Carson points out, John has chosen this precise verb because it is ambiguous.⁵ Jesus is not only ‘lifted up’ on the cross, he is also ‘lifted up’ (exalted) to glory. The point of contact between the idea of crucifixion and the idea of exaltation is clear enough. The cross involves physical elevation and for that very reason becomes

3. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 306.

4. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 372.

5. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), p. 444.

a symbol of the personal spiritual elevation of the Messiah. But it is not mere symbolism. Through the cross Jesus will return (bringing human nature with him) to the glory he had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). This is why, on the eve of the crucifixion, Jesus can pray that the Father would glorify the Son, and he would do so because 'the hour' had come: the hour when the Father would glorify his name (John 17:1).

The story of the foot washing is also prefaced by a reference to 'the hour': Jesus knew that 'the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father' (John 13:1). The foot washing as such does not contain any direct allusion to the cross. It is an acted parable to highlight what is meant by the attitude or 'mindset' (Phil. 2:5) of a servant: the willingness to perform the lowest-grade task for our equals and even for our supposed inferiors. It is precisely in this attitude that Jesus, knowing that he had come from God and was returning to God (John 13:3), is at his most 'matchless, God-like and divine'.⁶ This immediately relates it to the cross. There is no service that Jesus is not prepared to render, whatever the cost, and Jesus now fully appreciates the cost. He must love 'to the end' (*eis telos*). This is the point of no return, where he knows the price of love and steels himself to face it. Love will not merely wash feet. It will lay down its life.

All of this gradually-dawning realization finally overwhelms Jesus in Gethsemane. But before Gethsemane comes the transfiguration and it is important to see it in its original context, closely linked to the cross. During his earthly ministry Jesus' divine identity was normally veiled by his human form and by his low, servile condition. Now for a brief moment the veil is removed, his whole appearance changes and the underlying *morphē* of the divine briefly breaks through the veil of the human. The disciples become, as Peter reminds us, eye-witnesses of his majesty (2 Pet. 1:16). This is why A. M. Ramsey preferred to speak of the *glorification* rather than of the *transfiguration* of Jesus.⁷ He and his disciples are given a glimpse of the glory which was his even while he was on earth, and this is reinforced by the voice from heaven, 'This is my Son, whom I love' (Mark 9:7). The same voice had spoken to Jesus on the threshold of his public ministry (Mark 1:11) and now, as he sets his face toward Calvary, he is reminded once again who he is; and reminded, too, of the Father's love and approbation. When the crowd around the cross mocks (Mark 15:29), he must remember the voice which came from heaven and which gave him honour and

6. From 'Great God of wonders!', Samuel Davies, 1769.

7. Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), p. 101.

glory (2 Pet. 1:17). It is as if Abba were saying, ‘Son, in all you are now going to face, never forget who you are, never forget that I love you, and never forget how proud I am of you.’ Whatever the pain of his ordeal, it would be a pain in which the Father would share.

Yet it is not only the underlying *divine* glory of Jesus that is revealed in the transfiguration. It is also a revelation of the *human* glory (*morphē*) that lies beyond the cross. At Caesarea Philippi he had told his disciples that he would be killed, but he had also told them that after three days he would rise again (Mark 8:31). Now, here on the mountain, he, and they, have a glimpse of his resurrection glory, and a glimpse, too, of the resurrection glory of his people. But this, too, belongs firmly to the psychology of the moment. It is part of the Father’s ministry of encouragement. He will not die in vain.

The appearance of the heavenly visitors, Moses and Elijah, also belongs to the ministry of encouragement. Immediately after Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi Jesus introduced the subject of his death, but Peter wanted to hear not a word of it. This gives particular point to the words, ‘Listen to him!’ (Mark 9:7). The attitude of the heavenly visitors differs completely from that of the disciples. The cross is all Moses and Elijah want to talk about, though Luke’s account of their conversation is extraordinary. He summarizes it as a conversation about his ‘departure’ (using the word *exodos*) and refers to it as something Jesus was to accomplish, or ‘bring to fulfilment’ (Luke 9:31). The dismissive attitude of the disciples would have brought profound discouragement to Jesus; the interest of the heavenly visitors would have lifted his heart. The cross was what all heaven was talking about. Even the angels were fascinated (1 Pet. 1:12).

Slow motion

The fourth fascinating feature of the story of the passion is that when it comes to Good Friday the Gospels go into slow motion. They have passed over in silence whole decades of Jesus’ life, and even when they pick up the threads of the public ministry there are weeks and months of which they say nothing. We are even left in considerable uncertainty as to the length of Jesus’ ministry. Mark implies at least two years. John mentions three Passovers, but does not exclude the possibility that there may have been more. Some of the early church fathers limited the ministry to one year only.

But when it comes to the crucifixion we have the sequence frame by frame; almost, indeed, an hourly bulletin. There is one remarkable parallel to this change of tempo: the account of creation in Genesis 1. This account covers

the events of billions of years in twenty-five verses, and summarily covers the emergence of vast heavenly bodies in the throwaway line, 'he also made the stars' (v. 16). But when it comes to the creation of the human species, the pace instantly changes. God pauses to deliberate, resolves to create humans in his image, does it, blesses them and then gives them the great mandates to procreate, to colonize the whole earth and to act as servants and custodians of creation. Of all species, the human race alone is singled out, and over it alone does the story linger.

The reason is simple enough. Humankind is the centre of the story, and the account of the preceding six 'days' serves merely to set the scene for the history of the redemption of our species. It is for the same reason that the crucifixion narrative goes into slow motion. It is the pivot on which the world's redemption turns, and it involves such a sequence of separate events that we assume, instinctively, that they must have occupied several days. Instead we find to our astonishment that they all occurred on one day; and the events of that one single day are reported in meticulous detail.

Our printed Bibles do not, unfortunately, highlight the significance of Mark 14:17, where the evangelist introduces his account of the Last Supper with the words, 'when evening came'. Unpretentious though they sound, they are of huge moment. The Jewish day began with the sunset, and this 'evening' marks the beginning of Good Friday. Fifteen hours later, Jesus would be crucified, but these intervening hours would themselves be crammed with drama: the Last Supper, Gethsemane, the betrayal, the arrest and the trial; then the crucifixion, followed by the entombment. From the Last Supper to his burial, a mere twenty-four hours; and so detailed is the account of his last few hours that we know exactly what happened at 9 o'clock in the morning (the third hour), at midday (the sixth hour) and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon (the ninth hour). Against the background of the previous indifference to chronology, such detail is remarkable, and serves to underline once again the evangelists' concentration on Jesus' death.

The Last Supper

The day began (on what would be our Thursday evening) with the Last Supper. The earliest written account is that of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34, but there are parallels in all three synoptics, and though the accounts contain slight variations in wording they constitute one coherent narrative. That narrative itself has bred many different discourses. Here we limit ourselves to the light which the Last Supper sheds on the death of Christ, and particularly on his own understanding of that death.

It is clear, first of all, that Jesus saw his death as, in the most formal sense, a sacrifice. We know from the synoptics that the Last Supper was a Passover meal,⁸ and in all probability Jesus had long seen himself as the Passover lamb. At the very beginning of his ministry John the Baptist had introduced him as ‘the Lamb of God’ (John 1:29), and Paul reminds the Corinthians that ‘Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5:7). The fact that he offers no elaboration suggests that the idea was already familiar to the Christian community.

It is in this Passover context that Jesus refers separately to his body and to his blood (we should remember that the blood was always treated separately in the sacrificial liturgy). In both Matthew and Mark the bread-saying is limited to ‘this is my body’, but Paul’s account adds the words, ‘for you’: ‘This is my body, which is for you’ (1 Cor. 11:24). This points clearly to the vicarious nature of his sacrifice. The body *is* for the benefit of his disciples. The bread, interpreted as ‘my body’, has already been broken, and this detail (‘the fraction’) has long been regarded as an essential step in the liturgical administration of the Lord’s Supper. The practice gains some support from the fact that some manuscripts add the word ‘broken’ (*klomenon*) in 1 Corinthians 11:24: ‘This is my body, which is *broken* for you.’ Most modern editors, however, regard this as a later addition.⁹ There is, besides, the fact to which Jeremias draws attention: the breaking of bread was ‘an established phrase for the action of the Jewish head of the household in the grace before meals’.¹⁰ We see Jesus himself performing this action when, in feeding the five thousand, he ‘gave thanks and broke the loaves’ (Mark 6:41). Similarly, when he shared a meal with the two disciples he met on the road to Emmaus, he ‘took bread, gave thanks, *broke* it and began to give it to them’ (Luke 24:30).

In view of this we need to be cautious in asserting that the ‘breaking’ is a theologically significant detail. On the other hand, Luke’s account of the bread-saying does contain the significant (and undisputed) word, ‘given’ (*didomenon*): ‘This is my body given for you’ (Luke 22:19). This is certainly sacrificial language, reminiscent of John’s statement (John 3:16) that ‘God so loved the world that he *gave* his one and only Son’. The same idea occurs, with a hint of even greater intensity, in Romans 8:32: ‘He who did not spare his own Son,

8. For the evidence for this see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 15–88.

9. See the brief summary of the evidence in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. 562.

10. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, p. 174.

but gave him up (*paredōken*) for us all . . .’ Both passages point to a priesthood of God the Father, ‘giving’ or ‘giving up’ his only Son. There may be an echo of the same idea in the chronological detail with which Paul introduces his account of the Last Supper; it took place, he says, ‘on the night he was *betrayed*’. This is the same verb, *paradidōmi*, as is used in Romans 8:32. Did Paul intend it as a double entendre? The night of the Last Supper was both the night on which Jesus was ‘betrayed’ by Judas and the night on which he was ‘delivered up’ by God the Father.

The sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death is set forth even more clearly in the cup-saying: ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’ (1 Cor. 11:25). The immediate point of comparison between the cup and the blood is the red colour of the wine, and the metaphor was an old one. Genesis 49:11, for example, refers to ‘the blood of grapes’ and Deuteronomy 32:14 speaks of ‘the foaming blood of the grape’. In the context of the cross, however, Jesus’ reference to blood is particularly striking: crucifixion was bloodless, yet all three synoptics record Jesus declaring that his blood is to be ‘poured out’ (Mark 14:24 and parallels). This echoes Isaiah 53:12, which speaks of the Servant ‘pouring out’ his life unto death. In homicide, the slayer sheds blood (Gen. 9:6). Here, Jesus sheds his own, laying down his life for his sheep (John 10:17) in accordance with the will of the Father. His death is neither martyrdom nor tragedy, but the climactic act of his obedience (Phil. 2:8).

The cup-saying also makes clear the link between the death of Jesus and the covenant: ‘this cup is the new covenant in my blood’, or, in its synoptic form, ‘this is my blood of the covenant’ (Mark 14:24). The exodus had been explicitly rooted in God’s remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 2:24), and this covenant was renewed after the escape from Egypt, when God promised to send his angel to lead Israel into the promised land (Exod. 23:20) and they in turn promised to comply with the stipulations laid down in the book of the covenant (Exod. 24:7). This covenant was ratified by sacrificial blood (Exod. 24:5), and now Jesus speaks of a ‘new’ covenant, also to be ratified by blood: his own blood. Jeremiah had spoken of such a ‘new’ covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) and at its heart lay the promise of forgiveness: ‘I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’ (Jer. 31:34). This is echoed in Matthew’s version of the cup-saying: ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*’ (Matt. 26:28). This phraseology quickly became standard in the early church, where the blood of Christ became synonymous with his death and the death came to be linked specifically to forgiveness (Eph. 1:7), redemption (Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5) and expiation (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17). The forgiveness of sins no longer rests on the blood of bulls

and goats, but on the blood of the Mediator: a point fully developed later by the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 9:11 – 10:18).

But can we be more specific about the precise relation between the death of Jesus and the covenant? One thing that is clear is that Jesus' whole mission is set in the context of the covenant. He was not sent into the world by the imperious command of the Father, nor as a self-appointed volunteer. He came by virtue of the agreement between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to act together for the salvation of humanity. Admittedly, the word 'covenant' is applied to his mission only infrequently, yet it is clear that in his chosen capacity as the Servant he operates within rules of engagement agreed between all three divine persons prior to his coming. This is why he can speak of a work given him to do (John 17:4), and of a 'command' to lay down his life (John 10:18). This is why with his last breath he can cry, 'It is finished!' (John 19:30). Even the schedule of his mission has been agreed beforehand, hence his several references to 'the hour', as in the opening words of the high-priestly prayer: 'Father, the hour has come' (John 17:1). Events moved at a pre-agreed pace. But the covenant contains not only stipulations. It also contains promises. He will be upheld by the Father and anointed with the Spirit (Isa. 42:1); when his work is finished he will be glorified (John 17:1); and after his ascension God will pour out his Spirit to empower his church for the work of mission (Acts 1:4; 2:33).

The death of Jesus also *seals* the covenant. In the Old Testament, covenants were almost invariably ratified by sacrifice, hence the standard Hebrew phraseology, 'to cut a covenant' (*kārat bērit*). This is seen at its most dramatic in the story of the inauguration of the original covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 15:7–20). On the Lord's instructions, Abraham sacrificed a heifer, a goat and a ram, cut them in pieces and arranged them in two rows. A divine theophany (a smoking brazier with a flaming torch) then passed between the pieces. This ritual proclaimed the seriousness of the commitment for both parties. God is the initiator, but there is a solemn bond of mutual obligation, each party invoking upon himself the covenant curse (symbolized by the sacrificed animals) should he violate the covenant.

The covenant significance of the death of Jesus should probably be seen against this background. It is a pledge of the divine seriousness: the one who did not spare his own Son (Rom. 8:32) will, surely, give us all things. But it is also beckoning us into something deeper. The covenant, the divine law, *has* been broken, but it is the non-violator, the one who has not broken it, who takes upon himself the curse (Gal. 3:13) and thereby seals and pledges his love.

But the blood of Jesus not only seals the covenant, it secures all the blessings to which God is pledged. It is the ransom price, it has been paid in full, and it

lies at the heart of the church's doxology: 'To him who loves us and has freed [loosed] us from our sins by his blood . . . be glory and power for ever and ever!' (Rev. 1:5–6). He is the one who dies in the place of the many; the holy one judged in the place of the guilty. But all this presupposes a prior agreement: not one worked out by negotiation between God and man, but one finalized in eternal counsel between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This counsel provides the indispensable framework for Jesus' work of atonement. It is within this framework that the Son accepts the office of redeemer, undertaking to act as our representative and our substitute, but this already presupposes love and goodwill on God's part. He concedes that the one may take the place of the many. But he goes further. He ordains that he himself will not only *provide* the ransom, but will *become* the ransom (in the person of his Son): '*autos hilasmos!*' writes John in 1 John 2:2. He himself is the expiatory sacrifice. He will bear the whole cost.

Finally, Jesus' words at the Last Supper make plain that there must be a taking as well as a giving, and a drinking as well as a pouring out: 'Take and eat . . . Drink from it, all of you' (Matt. 26:26–27). His body and blood avail nothing except through faith. But such a faith also implies total satisfaction with the divine covenant. There is nothing in God's plan of salvation that we would want out, and there is nothing out that we would want in. We can be saved only on God's terms; and faith is delighted with the terms.

Gethsemane

The supper over, Jesus goes with his disciples to Gethsemane, moving 'over there' to pray with Peter, James and John (Matt. 26:36–37). Here, as we noted earlier, the gradually-dawning realization of what was involved in his messianic destiny finally becomes almost total clarity, and the burden of knowledge and foreboding suddenly becomes overwhelming. The language used by Mark and the other synoptists makes plain the unimaginable depth and intensity of his emotions. His soul is filled with grief. The word *perilypos* itself points to deep sadness ('My soul is exceeding sorrowful', Mark 14:34, κJV), but here it is intensified by the addition, 'unto death'. The burden of grief was life-threatening, and associated with it were distress and agitation. The verb *ademonein* suggests bewilderment, anxiety and near-panic, the feelings of somebody asking, 'How am I going to cope?' The strongest word of all is the one which the κJV renders 'sore amazed' (v. 33). The best clue to its meaning is that it is also used in Mark's account of the resurrection to express the feelings of the awestruck women at the tomb when they find the body of Jesus gone and the empty tomb guarded

by an angel. It is the feeling we experience in the presence of the unearthly, the uncanny and the utterly eerie. In Gethsemane Jesus knew that he was face to face with the unconditionally holy, that absolutely overwhelming might that condones nothing, cannot look on impurity and cannot be diverted from its purpose. What would it do to him?

But the vocabulary of emotion is not the only indicator of Jesus' distress. There are other indicators as well, such as the fact, for example, that he took with him his three closest friends, Peter, James and John. It is as if he dreaded being alone and begged the simple human comfort of having other people near him: 'Please don't leave me alone!' There is the fact, too, that he asked them to pray for him. Nothing could more graphically highlight the reality of the incarnation and the sense of dependence that went along with it. But neither should we lose sight of the paradox of the Son of God, the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth, asking mortals to remember him in their prayers. Equally remarkable is the detail mentioned by Luke, 'an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him' (Luke 22:43). How the angel 'strengthened' him we can only speculate, but perhaps it bore some relation to the point made by Peter in 1 Peter 1:12, 'even angels long to look into these things'. Though the angels had no direct or personal interest in the redemptive mission of the Son of God, yet they watched the progress of his love with amazement, as it descended ever deeper into its unimaginable cost. What must they have thought as they saw their beloved Maker distraught? This must, surely, be as bad as it would get! But no! Worse was to follow: immolation, death and a heart-rending 'why?' as Abba forsook him. Whatever, the angel's would be the last word of comfort Jesus would hear, till it was all over. Then the angels, too, though owing nothing to his blood, would join in the great chorus of praise: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!' (Rev. 5:12).

But the supreme indicator of the anguish of Gethsemane is the prayer offered by Jesus. Everything about it is remarkable: the fact that he doesn't gently kneel, but throws himself to the ground; the fact that he prays three times; his 'anguish' (Greek *agōnia*) as he literally wrestles with God; the sweat of blood, signaling the terrible intensity of his struggle (Luke 22:44). Above all, there is the prayer itself, 'Abba, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will' (Mark 14:36). Why is the prayer not answered? Why does the cup not pass? He is still able to call God 'Abba', still conscious of the special filial relationship and of Abba's affection, goodwill and approbation. This should remind us that for all its darkness Gethsemane is not yet *the* darkness. It is but the shadow of Calvary. At the last there will be no 'Abba', but only the almost despairing '*Eloi*'.

His wish, what he asks for, is clear: 'Take away this cup. Let it pass.' This is what he wants; wanted with all his soul and with all his strength. He wanted God's will to be different. He asks, 'Could there not be some other way?' He knows it is God's will, 'the cup Abba has given him'. 'But, Abba, could I have another cup, a different cup?' For a moment he stands with the millions of his people who have found God's will almost unendurable, shrunk from the work given them to do, shuddered at the prospect of the race set before them and prayed that God would change his mind. But solidarity is not the main thing here. This is not a road less trodden. It is a road never trodden, before or since: the cup of the one man, the Son of God. He shudders; hesitates. For a moment the whole salvation of the world, the whole of God's determinate counsel, hangs in the balance, suspended on the free, unconstrained decision of this man. There is dread here and bewilderment and awe and self-doubt, and fear (Heb. 5:7).

It is impossible as we sit in the gallery of history not to be aware of the contrast between the discomposure of Jesus and the composure of thousands of his martyred followers as they faced the prospect of certain, and cruel, death. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed at Flossenbürg concentration camp in April 1945, the camp doctor (who didn't know who he was) watched him take off his prison garb, kneel on the floor and pray. 'I was most deeply moved,' he wrote, 'by the way this unusually lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer.'¹¹ Why, then, is Jesus so distraught? It can only be because he is facing more than martyrdom and more than death.

There is one Old Testament story which offers some slight parallel: Moses meeting with Yahweh on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16–19). 'The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear"' (Heb. 12.21). The reason lay in the stark terror of the scene confronting him, the holiness of God symbolized by uncanny physical phenomena: a thick cloud, smoke, lightning, earth tremors, a fearful trumpet-blast, a voice like thunder and the direst warnings that anyone who so much as touched the mountain would perish. Here was the supreme Old Testament revelation of God as an absolute overwhelming might, the Wholly Other who brooks no disobedience and no familiarity. And here was the ultimate in 'creature-feeling': a sense of the infinite qualitative divide between humanity and deity, a sense of total vulnerability, a sense of nothingness and of defenceless fragility.

What Jesus dreads in Gethsemane is his own imminent encounter with the holy. But we have to be careful here. The 'holy' is not just an item in a series

11. Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 928.

which reads ‘betrayal, arrest, trial, condemnation, crucifixion, death’ and then, ‘encounter with the holy’. The holy (the hand of God) is in everything at Calvary, just as it was in the thunder, lightnings and tremors of Sinai. But it is equally true that the physical, observable events, for all their horror, do not exhaust the curse. Like Moses, Jesus has a rendezvous with God, but there is one almighty difference. He is not here merely to receive the Law, but to suffer its curse. There will be pain indeed, and he shrinks from that. There will be an awful loneliness, and he shrinks from that. There will be the virulent, hellish demonic, and he shrinks from that. And there will be dying and death (and its taste), and he shrinks from that. But there will be more, and it doesn’t help that he doesn’t yet know what. The curse: what will it mean? The full ransom price: what will it mean? Forsaken by God: what does that mean? The thunder and lightning of unmitigated divine judgment, condemning sin in his tiny, frail body: what will that mean?

Gethsemane is apprehension: an apprehension of the awfulness of what is still unknown. The imagination of Jesus fixes on it, but in its unfolding it will be even more dreadful than the worst forebodings of his imagination. And there is, besides, the crushing weight of responsibility. So much hinges on his seeing it through. Suppose he fails?

But Gethsemane is more than the dread of suffering. It is itself suffering; part of the road he had to walk and part of the price he had to pay, part, indeed, of the cup itself. His obedience included having to cope with the fear of death as well as with death itself. And here as nowhere else Jesus is tested: tested in his love, in his faith and in his courage. Here Satan shows him, not all the kingdoms of the world as in a previous temptation, but the full cost of his love, and here he presses home the questions: Is it worth it? Are they worth it?

There is, however, one further crucial point. Gethsemane is not the supreme moment of atonement. The ‘it is finished!’ must wait. In the meantime, it is, ‘Rise, let us go!’ It is the prelude to the great redeeming act, not the act itself, and we have to ask why. Why was Gethsemane not enough? Why did there have to be a Calvary as well? And why do Calvary, the cross, the death, the blood, become the great central reality of Christianity? Gethsemane so beautiful; Golgotha so unutterably ugly!

Suppose, for example, that the redeeming power of Christ lay, as some have argued, in his vicarious repentance; that he entered fully into our sin, made its shame his own shame, confessed it to God and said ‘amen!’ to God’s condemnation. Why, then, is the atonement not complete at Gethsemane? Here, after all, is complete submission: ‘not my will, but yours be done’ (Luke 22:42). Where, after this point, does Jesus utter any words remotely suggesting repentance? It

may be said in answer that he expressed his remorse (*our* remorse) by meekly submitting to the sentence. But that implies that there *was* a sentence, that the cross was set in a context of justice, that justice was executed on Jesus, and that that execution of justice is the basis of our forgiveness. For Jesus to say ‘amen!’ to the divine condemnation is not merely to express his general sorrow for sin. It is to say ‘amen!’ to the need for expiation and propitiation; ‘amen!’ to the divine sword of justice; ‘amen!’ to God’s right to damn him, notwithstanding his submission. He will atone, not by repenting in the place of others, but by dying for them.

Arrest and trial

Having prayed for the third time Jesus returned to the disciples. He had asked them to watch and pray. Instead, he once again found them sleeping. On his two previous returns, he had excused them: ‘The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak’ (Mark 14:38). But now his ‘hour’ has come and the time for watching and praying is over. The betrayer is at hand (Mark 14:42). The word for ‘betrayer’ is *paradidous*, and we have already noted its ambivalence. The corresponding verb is used in Romans 8:32, referring to God not sparing his own Son, but ‘delivering him up’ for us all. Judas’s traitorous act is God the Father’s priestly act. The arresting party itself consists of Israel’s finest: the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. They are emphatically men of the Torah, yet they are blind to its message and blind to their own Messiah. In a few hours they will hand him over to ‘men without the Law’ (Acts 2:23¹²) to be tried, condemned and slain.

The betrayal and arrest are followed by the trial. Two things stand out here.

First, it was fourfold: before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Council, presided over by the high priest); before Pilate; before Herod; and finally back to Pilate again. We must bear in mind that every detail of the passion is specifically ordained by God the Father as an integral element in his own all-encompassing priestly act of sacrificing his beloved Son. The fourfold trial is an indispensable part of the ritual, certifying the Lamb as one ‘without blemish or defect’ (1 Pet. 1:19). It involved both the civil and the religious authorities and it culminated in Pilate’s unambiguous verdict, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man’ (Luke 23:4). And even in all the horrors he experiences as his passion comes to its climax, Jesus’ integrity shows through.

12. See NIV footnote.

He conducts himself impeccably, without a word of lament against God or bitterness towards men: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

The second striking feature of the trial is the role of Pilate. It was no accident. On the contrary, as Calvin noted, it was a key detail precisely because of his position as governor.¹³ It was not enough for Christ to suffer any kind of death. It had to be a judicial death involving an arraignment, an accusation and a condemnation. Pilate, the authority established by God (Rom. 13:1), is the symbol and executor of a judicial process by which Jesus was formally found guilty and formally sentenced. He was not murdered by an assassin or lynched by a mob or killed in an accident. He was convicted by a judge, after due process, and judicially executed. Pilate, as the servant (*diakonos*, Rom. 13:4) of God, speaks forth the divine condemnation of the sinner, Jesus. Yet, as Calvin also remarks, Jesus was acquitted by the same lips as condemned him:¹⁴ 'I find no basis for a charge against this man' (Luke 23:4). Here, human justice condemns itself. The criminal is on the bench, not in the dock, just as in the person of Caiaphas the blasphemer is the one at the altar, not the one on the cross. Calvary exposes the corruption which is endemic to human justice. The judge acquits the prisoner, and then sentences him to be flogged and crucified.

The crucifixion

The Gospel accounts of the crucifixion are remarkably restrained, possibly because the process was all too familiar to the original readers, but also because the writers have no interest in satisfying morbid, prurient interest in the details of an execution. The original spectators derived no spiritual benefit from witnessing it in all its gruesome detail and we today would be little the better for knowing 'exactly how it was done'. It would amount, at best, to no more than knowing Christ 'according to the flesh' (2 Cor. 5:16, ESV).

One of the most helpful studies of the background is Martin Hengel's *Crucifixion in the Ancient World*.¹⁵ This form of punishment was not, as is often assumed, peculiar to the Romans. It was also practised in India, Assyria, Germany and Britain; even, indeed, by the Celts, 'who offered their criminals in this way

13. *Institutes*, II:XVI, 5.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

as a sacrifice to their gods'.¹⁶ By the time of Jesus, it was taboo among the Jews as a form of punishment (probably because of its brutal use by the Romans in their 'pacification' of Judea), but the Jews had resorted to it in past ages, particularly as a punishment for high treason.

In all these cultures, the cross was seen as a deliberately degrading and obscene form of punishment, 'in which the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full rein'.¹⁷ There were, literally, no limits. Once the condemned man was handed over, the soldiers could torture, humiliate and violate as they pleased; but not all the blame for the barbarism should be laid on the executioners; crucifixion, as Hengel points out, 'satisfied the primitive lust for revenge and the sadistic cruelty of individual rulers and of the masses'.¹⁸ Nor did such vengefulness and cruelty die with the passing of ancient civilizations. To quote Hengel yet again, crucifixion is but one specific expression of the inhumanity which is always dormant within human beings and which finds expression today in constant calls for popular justice and harsher treatment of offenders: 'It is a manifestation of trans-subjective evil, a form of execution which manifests the demonic character of human cruelty and bestiality'.¹⁹

Against this background, it is hard to resist the conclusion that, horrific though Jesus' sufferings were, there was an overruling divine restraint which forbade the worst excesses of crucifixion. There is no record of any particularly sadistic acts on the part of the soldiers, who seem to have concentrated on the essentials of their task, while an overseeing providence ensured that not a bone of Messiah's body was broken (John 19:36). Clearly, while the Son of Man must suffer, the Father set limits to the indignities he had to endure, and this extended even beyond his death. His body was honourably entombed rather than left to rot on the cross as was common, and it suffered no decomposition. Once he had breathed his last, the humiliation was over and from that point onwards the whole trajectory was reversed. From Bethlehem onwards his path had been a steady descent into the abyss, but from the moment he shouts, '*tetelestai!*' (John 19:30), the trajectory is upwards. His body lies, indeed, in the tomb, but his soul is in paradise (Luke 23:43), and after the briefest of 'three days' come resurrection and then enthronement.

Christian devotion almost invariably refers to the place of crucifixion as 'Calvary'. The word, however, does not occur in the New Testament. It was

16. Hengel, *Crucifixion*, p. 23.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

introduced into Christian tradition by the Vulgate (late fourth century), which used the Latin *calvariae* to translate Luke's reference to 'the place called the Skull' (Luke 23:33). It has the advantage of being much more euphonious than the harsh gutturals of 'Golgotha' (Mark 15:22; Matt. 27:33), and well adapted to the purposes of poetry and hymnody. But in that very euphony lies a danger. It is easy to sanitize the cross, rob it of its horror and imagine Calvary as a place of serene, evocative spirituality. Anyone who has visited both the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and Gordon's Calvary (the Garden Tomb) is instantly aware of the temptation to 'prefer' the latter as the site of the crucifixion. Quiet, peaceful and beautiful, it feels much more like a holy place, conducive to meditation and prayer. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a complete contrast: noisy, tourist-infested and exuding all that is worst about religion. Yet there is cogent evidence that this was the site of the crucifixion (though inside modern Jerusalem it lay outside the walls of the ancient city),²⁰ and it is no accident that it was (and is) a horrid, ugly place. The late Dr George Macleod of Iona expressed it memorably: 'Jesus was not crucified in a Cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble.'²¹ God had chosen the site, and the atmosphere. The act was barbaric; the site, with the detritus of previous executions still lying around, horrific; the procedure a shambles. But precisely because it was all these things it dramatized the ugliness of sin while at the same time proclaiming the Son of God a despised, accursed nobody for whom there lay beyond the cross only the horrors of hell. We cannot, dare not, reduce the cross to a crucifix or Golgotha to a rose garden. The aesthetics of the crucifixion are in keeping with its criminality.

Once at Golgotha, the Gospels note two details: they stripped him naked, and 'they offered him wine mingled with myrrh, but he did not take it' (Mark. 15:23). Both of these were standard procedures. What is interesting is that Jesus declined the mixture offered to him, a concoction routinely prepared by pious Jerusalem women and offered to condemned men as an anaesthetic to dull the senses and deaden the pain. Why did Jesus decline it? No explanation is offered, but we should remember that even on the cross Jesus was still 'on service' and needed to be in full possession of his faculties. At any moment an urgent need or claim might arise, as when one of the two men crucified with him suddenly

20. See, for example, the literature cited in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (XIII-XXI): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 899; and D. A. Carson, *John*, pp. 609–610.

21. George F. Macleod, *Only One Way Left* (Glasgow: The Iona Community, n.d.), p. 38.

said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. Jesus is instantly alert and instantly reassuring: 'Today, you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:42-43). In the same way, Jesus in his dying moments is equally solicitous for his mother, commending her to the care of John, the beloved disciple (John 19:26-27). He loved and served to the end.

But quite apart from his having to be available for others, Jesus is also engaged in a titanic spiritual struggle. It was, after all, the hour and the power of darkness (Luke 22:53), the prince of the world present in all his force and cunning, hell doing all in its power to subdue and destroy the Son of God. What force there must have been in the taunt, 'Come down from the cross!' and in the thought (clearly somewhere in Jesus' mind) that he could send for twelve legions of angels. Moment by moment he must repel Satan's insidious suggestions, summon all his own strength, choose the pain and continue his journey into the terrifying unknown.

But above all, Jesus must 'taste' death: not simply die, but taste it (Heb. 2:9). This is why he took a long time dying, and this is why he had to die un-anesthetised. He had to walk, as his people do, through the valley of the shadow of death, tasting the fear of it and the encroachments of it and the power of it, and then yielding himself to it consciously and deliberately. His life did not ebb away, slowly and peacefully, ending with a pathetic death-rattle. Instead, he shouts in triumph, 'It is finished!', and then dismisses his spirit into the loving hands of God his Father (Luke 23:46).