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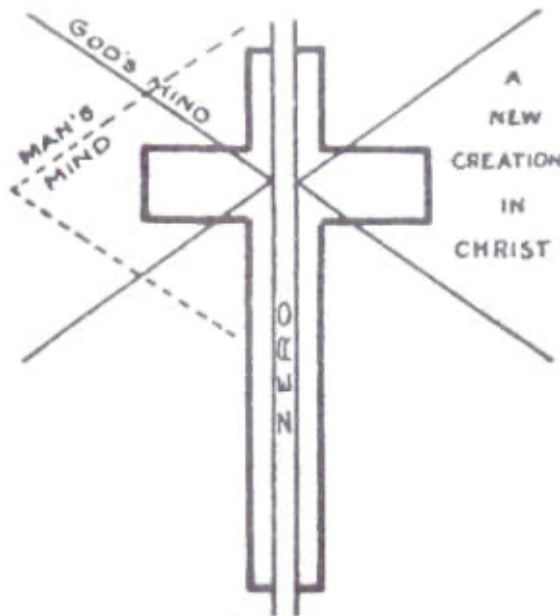
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The Cross of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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The Cross of Christ



The Zero Hour of the Creation
By T. A-S.

Zero. The dictionary tells us that

(a) Zero is the point in the scale of the thermometer from which positive and negative quantity is reckoned.

(b) In military operations, the point of time from which the start of each movement in a timed programme is at a specified interval.

The combination of these two definitions is exactly what we mean when we speak of the Cross of Christ as the zero hour of the Creation. From that point all positive and negative values are determined, and all movements are fixed.

Through the ages preceding the Cross of Christ there had been a double movement. One of expansion and enlargement; the other of contraction.

The one of development was on the side of man, and it related to three things in the main,

1 Man himself.

2 Sin.

3 The devil's kingdom.

The movement of contraction was from God's side, and represented His attitude toward the three.

Let us look at these points more fully.

1. Man himself.

Man was made on a very high level and was endowed with great capacities. The destiny fixed for him was nothing short of world-dominion. But he was placed on probation, the nature of which was that of utter confidence and obedience to God. To make this confidence and obedience something practical and not merely theoretical, he was bound to God by a law of dependence. The temptation which came to him was that he could - if he chose - realize his destiny apart from the dependence; he could be independent of God, and rather than lose, he could gain. It was a matter of *self*-realization without being bound to God. He fell to the temptation and started on the career of independence to realize his own destiny. Well, he has certainly developed a great deal; he has invented, discovered, adapted, expanded, explored, and exploited on an immense scale. God has let him go on his self-chosen way, but there is a snag in it all. All his development is carrying him nearer and nearer to his doom rather than to his Divinely intended destiny. He invents, and his inventions are employed for the greatest amount of human destruction. His machinery has resulted in unemployment which leads to moral decline, revolution, and many other troubles. It has also resulted in the strange contradiction of there being over-production of the necessities of life and terrible shortage in the actual supplies to the people. All this could be shown to be the case in numerous directions, but it is enough to point out that at this time in the world's history all the immense developments of man are being directed, as never before, to the destruction of all that he has built and cherished. At the moment, the greatest brains are occupied with the question of how - by means of a ray - by the pressing of a button, the greatest number of men and their equipment can be paralyzed and put out of existence. Should such a ray be discovered or invented man will have made this world a place impossible to live in. This is no fiction. There are many things in use now which would have been unbelievable only a short time ago. That has been man's course in breaking away from God, and that is the price he is paying.

But God knew all this from the beginning, and He has never accepted that situation, really.

From the outset God said No, and He fixed a point at which He would register that No fully and finally. The Cross of Christ was God's way of saying to the universe - I do not accept that Adam-race man, I forever turn my back to him. When Jesus cried "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" it was because He had voluntarily accepted the place of a judged and condemned race, and in a representative capacity had stood in man's place before God.

One of the great meanings of the Cross, as shown by the New Testament, is that there in the representative person of God's Son, man by nature was set aside. A whole order of creation was cut off, so far as God's mind is concerned. In His resurrection Christ represents a new order, and "If any man be in Christ there is a new creation." In that union with Christ by faith, when we have accepted His death as our death, there is something imparted which is the life of a new nature, a different species. The development of *that* will see, not the doom, but the originally intended destiny realized.

2. Sin.

What is true of man is also true of sin. We cannot say that man has really *morally* gone up and up. While we admire courage, heroism, endurance, and self-sacrifice, we are horrified at the awful filth and vileness that is in human nature. The standard is such that the one who protests against its looseness and lowness is regarded as being behind the times, or an offense. Sin has not changed nor diminished through the ages, and the present colossal sufferings and miseries of the world are a terrible disclosure of the hatred, murder, pride, greed, selfishness, passion, lust, cruelty, callousness, etc., which are still here. But God has never accepted this, and in the Cross of Christ His zero has been registered.

"He who knew no sin was made sin for us" (in our stead) - so runs the Divine word.

The sin of the whole world was laid on Him and He suffered its judgment. From that zero point God regards sin as having been put away. The acceptance of Christ as the sin-bearer determines our acceptance with God. It is not now a question as to whether we are sinners more or less, greater or smaller, but whether "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" has been appropriated by us in faith, and brought to God as *our* offering for sin.

In the resurrection of Christ the new order is that in which sin has been set aside, and righteousness made to prevail. Our union with Christ by faith means a new life within which is Christ's own life of victory over, and separation from, sin.

3. Satan's Kingdom.

Behind the temptation to break away from God, behind the course of independence and self-realization with all its tragic issues, behind the sin and all its miseries, stands Satan. Man is not just taking his own free way in self and sin. From dependence upon God and the tie of love and goodness man has become the victim of a bondage terrible and mighty. The fact is that man *cannot* change his course or his life even if he would. Not until he tries to do so does he realize that he is a prisoner. Satan's object in the temptation was not to secure man's freedom for him, though this is what he sought to let man think. Jesus said of Satan that "He was a liar from the beginning," and this poor world and race in Adam is duped and tricked. The object of Satan was to get the dominion into his own power and to supplant man - for whom the dominion was purposed. Thus, oh, thou poor world and all men thereon, thou hast been tricked, ensnared, robbed, spoiled, and made captive!

But God had His zero hour for Satan also. The Cross of Christ saw the kingdom wrenched from the devil's hands and taken into the hands of God's Son. Of that hour the Son of God said, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out."

In our faith union with Christ risen and exalted we are delivered from the bondage of Satan; "Translated out of the authority of darkness, into the Kingdom of the Son of His (God's) love." That is why Christians are so hated and persecuted by all who are still under Satan's influence. But Christ is making even the devil's work to serve His ends, thus expressing His sovereignty. It is a part of the spiritual experience of the Christian to learn through faith that Jesus Christ is Lord.

So Calvary was the determining point as to all positive and negative values, and the crisis of all movements. Have you come by acceptance and consent to God's zero, and found that it is a new point for all things?