We Preach Christ Crucified

Donald Macleod

Edinburgh Theological Seminary, 15 North Bank Street, The Mound,
Edinburgh EH1 2LS
dmacleod@ets.ac.uk

When Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he clearly felt himself forced on the defensive. Some parties in the church there were highly critical of his ministry and compared him very unfavourably with the 'super-apostles': men distinguished both by the superior wisdom they taught and by the rhetorical skills they deployed in delivering their message. Paul has no inclination to answer the charges on these terms. He cannot claim to be either as erudite a philosopher or as mesmeric an orator as these brilliant communicators. But, then, that wasn't what he was about. His call was to a very different kind of ministry: 'we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Nor was he merely claiming that this was the best style of ministry for him personally. His claim was that if we are called to the ministry of the word (whether as apostles, prophets, evangelists or pastors) this is the only legitimate way of performing the duties of our office.

But, more specifically, what is he saying?

FIRST AND FOREMOST A PREACHER

He is saying that first and foremost he is a preacher: we *preach*. Of course, Paul did much else besides. Sometimes he organised collections, sometimes he set structures in place for infant churches, sometimes he encouraged young men like Timothy and Titus, and sometimes he wrote letters. The 21st century minister will similarly find himself involved in many different activities: visiting the sick, looking for the lapsed, providing hospitality, to name but three. And sometimes, like the original apostles, he will find himself distracted by having to serve tables (or, more likely in the case of most of us, by the state of the church-roof or the condition of the drains). Every problem becomes his to solve, every activity demands his presence, and if he is not careful he will find himself reduced to a firefighter rushing from one emergency to the other.

Then there is the more subtle pressure generated by the social problems of the wider community. Involvement in these can bring the sort of

immediate and tangible rewards mere preaching can never deliver. What is more, the community itself, far from being scandalised by the church's social work, is delighted by it and sees it as 'real Christianity'; which, of course, it is, but it then becomes tempting to conclude that this is what makes our ministry worthwhile and that preaching, after all, is only a small part of the work of a pastor.

Paul, by contrast, saw it as the main part of his. His appointment was as a 'herald' (1 Tim. 2:7). First and foremost he was a minister of the word; and if the minister of the word doesn't preach the word, who will? Other tasks such as pastoral care he shares with the elders, some others with the deacons, and yet others with that army of fellow-workers who strive with us for the cause of the gospel (Phil. 4:3). But he is the preacher, and no amount of involvement in any other task, no matter how worthwhile, can make up for his neglect of his own specific duty. Nor can anyone perform it in accordance with the terms of their commission unless they make it the main business of their lives: the preoccupation of all their waking-hours; the stuff of their dreams (and of their nightmares).

A PREACHER OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

But then, secondly, Paul states the great theme of his preaching: *Christ crucified*. Here again we have to say that this was not the only topic on which he preached. Many other themes also featured in his proclamation: the Parousia, coping with suffering, the use of spiritual gifts and the respective duties of husbands and wives, to name but a few. But the cross stood in the forefront, as he makes plain in 1 Corinthians 15:3: 'I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins'. Whether he was evangelising a Gentile city or addressing the elders of a young church (Acts 20:28) or asking for liberal contributions to a collection (2 Cor. 8:9) or pressing home the duty of putting the interests of others before our own (Phil. 2:4) the cross was never far away. Just as Christ is united to every believer, so the cross is united to every other doctrine. Nor is this confined to St Paul. The story of the cross dominates the gospels: so much so that they have been rightly described as 'passion-narratives with extended introductions'. In St John the cross is the greatest demonstration of the Father's love (Jn. 3:16). In St Peter we owe our redemption to the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19). In the Apocalypse it is the crucified Lamb who stands in the centre of the throne (Rev. 5:6). And when we look at the central rite of the New Testament church, the Lord's Supper, we find the cross once again at its very heart. It is precisely the death of Christ we are to remember and recount; for his sacrifice we are to give thanks; on his body and blood that we are to feed.

This, then, is the apostolic norm for Christian preaching. Whether it is addressed to the converted or to the unconverted it must never move far from the cross. We have to give our main strength to telling *this* story and to persuading men and women to believe in *this* Christ: the one who redeemed by his blood. Everything else orbits around it. The incarnation was in order to Calvary; God's love is proclaimed at it; justification is based on it; sanctification and glory are secured by it; our lives are to be modelled on it; we are to glory in it.

Yet, as we preach it we cannot but be aware, as Paul makes plain, that it is not the message the world wants to hear; and certainly not what it wants us to major on. The cultured intellectual thinks it absurd; the religious think it scandalous. No age would ever have called it 'relevant'. Indeed, the chorus of derision which sounded in the ears of the dying Christ has never subsided. Nor has the message of the cross ever appealed to the mighty, the prudent or the self-confidently pious. It carries with it in every age the enormous disadvantage that you have to become a little child to appreciate it. Contemporary music, wonders and signs, disquisitions on the world banking crisis, loud condemnations of Syria's Assad regime, are far more likely to fill churches than the gospel of the cross. But a herald has no liberty to choose his own message. He must proclaim what's on the paper: *Christ crucified*.

The precise form of human contempt for this message varies, of course, from age to age. Today, many Christian theologians shrink with revulsion from the idea that Christ was condemned in our place and that our guilt is covered by his vicarious obedience and sacrifice. But then, already in the 12th century, Abelard was expressing exactly the same revulsion: 'how cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should in any way please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world!'[1]

Today, the language has changed, but the revulsion remains. Some of the bitterest criticisms come from feminists, who see the Christian account of the cross as but one other expression of the patriarchy which has brought such misery to the world's women and children. The Christian doctrine of the atonement, they say, glorifies violence; or, it glorifies meek acquiescence in violence, particularly meek acquiescence by women in male violence. And, taking their cue from feminism, men like Steve

[1] From Abelard's *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*. See Eugene R. Fairweather (ed.), *A Scholastic Miscellany* (LCC; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 283.

Chalke and Alan Mann speak of the Evangelical view of the cross as a story of 'cosmic child abuse'.[2]

Shocking as such language seems to us, we have to listen to it patiently, and present the world with a radically different view of the divine fatherhood: one in which the Father himself bears the cost of redemption, acts only in agreement with the Son, upholds him with constant encouragement, and finally exalts him to the highest honour. But at the same time we have to remember that the ancient world used equally shocking language. Indeed, the preaching of the cross was even more ridiculous to people of the first century than it is to us, not least because of their proximity to the event itself. How could a Jewish criminal crucified only a few years ago be the Saviour of the world and Lord of creation? Nothing could be more absurd to Jesus' near-contemporaries. To follow such a religion was, as Justin Martyr records, a sign of madness (*mania*),[3] and the ancient world expressed its contempt in biting satire, most famously in one of the second-century graffiti now on display in the Palatine Museum in Rome. It portrays a crucifixion, but the man being crucified has the head of an ass, and beneath is the inscription, 'Alexamenos worships his god'.[4] 'Cosmic child abuse' is no advance on depicting Christ as an ass.

In such a world the apostles might easily have said, 'We don't do the cross,' and if we today tailor our message to the demands of the consumer we won't preach it either, because on the face of things it is a message doomed to failure. Yet it will not fail; and it will not fail because God is committed to honouring it. In the last analysis this message preached by human beings is *his* witness to his Son, and in *his* hands the foolishness of the cross becomes divine wisdom and the weakness of the cross becomes divine power. In a culture dominated by the market there is no niche for the cross. Yet our commission is clear: 'Preach Christ crucified; and trust me.'

We have to be conscious, then, of the Jew and the Gentile, each with their own contempt for the cross. But we must remember that there is a third group: the Christian believers who love the cross and can never get enough of it. If our presumed hearer is always the objector and the scoffer there is a real danger that the church itself will never be led into the wonder of the divine love expressed on Calvary or into the depths of Christ's suffering and the many-faceted beauty of the atonement. In the

---

2 Stephen Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 182.

3 *The First Apology of Justin Martyr*, XIII (ANF, Vol. 1, 1885; reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p.167.

4 See Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 19.

New Testament, however, it is precisely the church that is the presumed reader: the saints at Rome, Corinth and Ephesus; Theophilus and his circle (Luke 1:3); the elect scattered throughout the world (1 Pet. 1:1). And if they are the presumed readers they must also be our presumed hearers, otherwise we are not faithful expositors. They have a divine right to hear all about the cross because only then can they engage in 'joyful eucharist' (Col. 1:11-12). We certainly have no right to stand over one of the great atonement-passages and say, 'This is too deep for my people! This is only for theologians!' Nothing in the New Testament is only for theologians. All of it is food intended by God for his children, and to hold back any part of it will result only in a flock suffering from serious malnutrition. It is a terrible mistake to aim all our preaching at the unconverted and to direct our sermons to 'the cultured despisers of religion'. We are pastors with sheep to feed, and the cross in all its glory must be their daily diet.

SACRED RHETORIC?

There is, however, one caveat. As we have already seen, Paul made no attempt to imitate the rhetoricians. Indeed, if he himself is to be believed he wasn't cut out to be a brilliant communicator. He had no magnetic presence, his diction was poor, and he was always extremely nervous (2 Cor. 10:10; 1 Cor. 2:3). These were natural limitations: one, or all of them together, may have constituted Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). But it wasn't simply that he was by nature ill-adapted to be an orator. As a matter of principle, he avoided the persuasiveness of human wisdom. (1 Cor. 2:4)

This doesn't mean that if we have natural gifts we shouldn't use them. If we have the dynamic force of a Thomas Chalmers, the voice of a Charles Spurgeon, or the cumulative persuasive power of a Martyn Lloyd-Jones, of course we should capitalise on them. But what Paul is saying is that it is not the *how* of the message that matters, but the *what*. It is to this we must give our strength. There is no point in the delivery being brilliant if the message is not 'Christ crucified'; and if that is the message, it needs no embellishment. It was the false teachers who had to use oratorical 'wizardry' (Gal. 3:1). Paul even seems to suggest that the cross cannot be preached in enticing words. It won't fit into such a mould. Instead, it needs 'great plainness of speech' (2 Cor. 3:12, AV). What matters (and sometimes we have to sweat over this) is that our words be accessible to ordinary people and persuasive to whatever audience we are addressing. Our sermons, like the Bible itself, have to be in servant-form, accepting the humble (though immensely honourable) role of explaining the sacred text.

When Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones first spoke of giving his life to the Christian ministry, someone asked him, 'But how do you know you can preach?' 'I don't,' he replied, 'but I know I have something to say.' That 'something' is the great thing: the thing we must get out. But Paul was also close to paranoid about giving a false impression as to the power of the message, lest people attribute it to himself. It might sometimes be said of George Whitefield, for example, that it was easy to understand how so many could be won over by such brilliant oratory.[5] Paul went out of his way to ensure that this could never be said of him. He was an earthen vessel and must never give the impression of being anything different. In Christian proclamation, there is no place for being preoccupied with the question of how well we are speaking. God is given the glory.

THE SOURCES

What then is the source from which we draw this message? The short answer is, The New Testament account of the cross. That account, however, contains two different kinds of material: the diachronic and the synchronic.

The diachronic is the cross in narrative form: the story, frame by frame, of the road to Calvary; and then, in slow motion, the events of that extraordinary 24-hour period (Good Friday) that began with the Last Supper and ended with the burial of Jesus (Mk. 14:17–15:47). As we have seen, it is not so much that the gospels *contain* passion-narratives. They *are* passion-narratives, and any preaching of the cross must give them sustained and repeated attention.

The temptation is to assume that because these are *narratives* all we have to do is repeat the story as if there were no theological issues to be explored here. Nothing could be further from the truth. The story of the Lord's journey from Bethlehem to Golgotha raises some of the most challenging (and most rewarding) moments in the whole of biblical revelation. Part of this is the way that key moments such as the Baptism and the Transfiguration bring out so clearly the involvement not only of Jesus but

[5] Jonathan Edwards's wife, Sarah, described Whitefield's preaching as a mixture of 'spiritual zeal and raw charisma'. See Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: the Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), p. 98. Cf. Noll's own summary of Whitefield ministry in London in 1737: 'In the pulpit he simply exuded energy; his speech was in the highest degree dramatic; he offered breathtaking impersonations of biblical characters and needy sinners; he fired his listeners' imagination; he wept profusely, often, and with stunning effect.' (Op. cit., p. 81).

also of the Father and the Holy Spirit, reminding us that the cross is an act of the triune God, and that in that act both the distinction between the divine persons and the communion between them are seen with brilliant clarity. But they remind us, too, that at critical moments in the Lord's journey the Father and the Spirit exercise a ministry of encouragement toward God the Son, attesting him and assuring him of their love. Gethsemane, too, is part of the diachronic narrative, but what a window it gives us into the emotional life of Jesus! And what challenges it throws up! Why did Jesus dread death in a way that the dying Socrates, for example, never did? And why was it not possible for 'the cup' to pass?

These are issues with which God, the supreme witness to his Son, intended to confront the Christian mind, and the story of the Lord's last hours presents even more. We cannot simply ignore the great cry of abandonment, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' This, after all, was the curse which Jesus suffered for us. What was that place where love couldn't reach? How could God be forsaken by God? Was the pain only on the Son's side, or did the Father also suffer loss? Of course, these are not 'problems' waiting for solutions. They are mysteries. But we have to show the mystery. We have to let the adoring church see the mysteriousness.

And what are we to make of the last words in the story, when Jesus himself chooses the exact moment of his dying: 'Abba, into your hands I commit my spirit.'

This is not simply a narrative of what God did. God is what God does,[6] and the cross is therefore the preeminent revelation of who he is and of what his love is. It is this story that is remembered and recounted every time we 'eat this bread and drink this cup'. It is for this story that we give thanks. And it is this story that we sing and pray. Here there is an interesting parallel with such Old Testament passages as Psalm 78:3 – 4, where the psalmist sings of,

> what we have heard and known,
> what our fathers have told us.
>
> We will not hide them from our children;
> we will tell the next generation
>
> the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD
> his power, and the wonders he has done

This (and other examples such as Psalm 126) is the precedent for great narrative hymns like, 'When I survey the wondrous cross', where we both

[6] On this see further C.M. LaCugna and K. McDonnell, 'Returning from "The Far Country": Theses for a Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41/2 (1988): 191-216.

pour our eucharist into song and respond to the song in eucharist. It is the *story* as such that we sing to one another as our hearts make music to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

THE *LOGOS* OF THE CROSS

But alongside the diachronic accounts we also have the synchronic, giving us not the story but the meaning of Calvary. Here the cross is seen as one single, completed event, but one which does not become good news unless it is interpreted. Indeed, in itself the cross is far from good news. How, after all, can the execution of an innocent man be good news, especially when that man was the Son of God, who was 'delivered up' by his own Father and abandoned by him in his hour of need?

What the synchronic account offers is what Paul called the *logos* (doctrine) of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18): the divine logic which lies behind Calvary. We have to remember, however, that the two accounts, the diachronic and the synchronic, are not independent of each other. It is obvious enough that the doctrine presupposes the narrative, but it is no less true that the narrative presupposes the doctrine. Indeed the story of the Passion would never have been written were it not that the death of Jesus was from the very beginning seen as an atoning sacrifice.

This is why it would be a mistake to assume that while the gospels give us the external details it is the epistles that give us the inner, theological meaning. Some of the profoundest statements of the divine significance of the cross are to be found in the gospels, and we can be sure that it was in the light of these statements that they were written. In Mark 10:45, for example, we hear Jesus's own 'word of the cross': 'even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' This already brings out the underlying reason for the death of Christ. He died in our place, as the preposition *anti* strongly suggests; and the object of his death was to secure our redemption. We can be sure that it was in the light of such statements as these that Mark wrote his gospel, and we can be equally sure that when John wrote his he did so in the light of the greatest synchronic statement of all, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' (Jn. 3:16). Here, Calvary is clearly an expression of the Father's love: a love which exists before the cross, but also a love which exists before our faith. Our faith is not what wins the love of God. On the contrary, his love is what our faith responds to and believes in. But the greatest wonder of all is how that love expressed itself: God 'gave' his Son. He was no detached observer of Calvary, but an active participant: the priest who sacrificed his own Son. Every doctrine

of the atonement has to wrestle with this fact. It is relatively easy to see the cross as an expression of the love of Jesus, the Son? But how was it an expression of the love of the Father?

Such passages both intimidate and fascinate the preacher. The one thing we may not do is ignore them. 'The whole counsel of God' cannot exclude John 3:16, although a remarkable number of preachers admit (often with some pride) that they've never preached on it. Nor can it exclude the great passages in the epistles which bring out the many-faceted glory of the cross: passages which focus particularly on what the cross achieved. It expiated sin; it propitiated God, reconciled him to us, and satisfied him that it would be right to forgive us; it redeemed sinners; it secured God's victory over the powers of darkness.

These are the great concepts (biblical concepts, after all) which preachers are called upon to explain. To omit to do so is a calamitous dereliction of duty; and it is a dereliction of duty because the power of the gospel lies not simply in the narrative of the cross, but in the divine logic which lies behind it: what St Paul, as we have seen, calls the 'word' of the cross. Without such a word the cross is meaningless, or worse. We cannot find peace on the slender basis that in some way or other some Christ or other saved us from some sin or other. The preacher as ambassador not only pleads with men and women to be reconciled to God. He has to declare the basis of God's plea and explain how it is possible for him not to count our sins against us (2 Cor. 5:19). That explanation lies in the *logos* of reconciliation: the extraordinary message that what really happened at Calvary was that there 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us' (2 Cor. 5:21). Yes, we have to go on bended knee in God's name and plead with men to accept his peace (2 Cor. 5:20). But the persuasiveness doesn't lie in the earnestness of our pleading. It lies in the message itself: in the fact that the cross was God's act; that there Christ was 'for us', suffering in our place; and, most remarkable of all, that in him sinful men and women can become as righteous as God himself. This is the light that fills the dungeon; and only then do the chains fall off and the heart become free.

Here is the great foundation of justification. We are justified by faith, indeed. But our faith is not in our faith. Our faith is in what Christ did for us, culminating in his self-offering on the cross. This is the great challenge to our faith: to believe that the one single factor relevant to our relationship with God is that at Calvary Christ answered for our sins: he loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:20).

THE CROSS AND SANCTIFICATION

This link between the cross and justification has been well explored in Protestant theology. But what of the link between the cross and sanctification? This has received much less attention. Yet the New Testament makes absolutely clear that the purpose of the cross was not only to expiate sin and put us in the right with God. In a way that was only a mid-point. Beyond it lay God's ultimate purpose: our complete transformation, including our physical transformation in the glory of the resurrection, but focusing particularly on making us utterly and totally holy. This lay at the heart of what Julian of Norwich called 'the prescient eternal counsel of all the blessed Trinity'.[7] In that counsel, God predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29); it was in pursuance of this purpose that Christ died; and he died, quite literally, to make us holy, as Paul makes plain in Ephesians 5:25: 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy … and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*.' This is what was agreed in the eternal covenant between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is what 'the blood' secured. This is what Christ intercedes for (Jn. 17:17). This is why he sends his Spirit. Indeed, there is a direct and explicit link between the sufferings of Christ and the work of the Spirit. He was made a curse for us not only to redeem us from the curse of the law, but to secure the ministry of the sanctifying Spirit in every believing heart (Gal. 3:13-14).

What all this means is that holiness is a blood-bought privilege, secured for us by the death of Christ

But then we discover that there is another death which also bears directly on our sanctification: the death of the believer herself. This is the great theme that Paul develops in Romans 6. Part of what the death of Christ secured is that we would be spiritually united to him. That union takes effect the moment we believe in Christ, and in that union (the moment of our faith and baptism) the 'old man' dies. There is a splendid paradox here. The man who was dead ('in sins', Eph. 2:1) died. The man who was the slave of sin died. That old unregenerate self who hated God and hated his law and hated holiness and was incapable of faith and love and repentance no longer exists. He died and was buried the moment we became members of the body of Christ.

But not only has there been a death. There has also been a resurrection. We are united with Christ in his rising as well as in his dying. The point is made categorically in Colossians 3:1, where the whole ensuing

[7] Quoted in John R. Tyson (ed.), *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 194.

argument rests on the premise, 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ.' This doesn't mean that we can reduce the resurrection to something merely spiritual (like those Corinthians who had come to believe that the resurrection is past already, 1 Cor. 15:12). The whole foundation of Paul's argument is the bodily resurrection of Christ; and, based on this, he entertains the sure and certain hope that the *body* which is sown in weakness will one day be raised in power (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

But for Paul there has also been, already, a spiritual resurrection. The point is not merely that the resurrection of Jesus offers an analogy to the change which has taken place in the believer. It is that through our union with a risen Saviour we have already risen from spiritual death. We are now new men and women. Once we were dead, now we are alive. Once we were blind to the glory of God, now we see it. Once we were deaf to his promises, now we hear them. Once we ignored his threatenings, now they cause us to tremble. Once we were utterly indifferent to higher things, now our minds seek them and dream of them (Col. 3:2). Once we were bound in the shackles of spiritual impotence, now we are free for a new obedience. Once we were powerless, now we are empowered by the Spirit in the inner man. We have risen to a new kind of life, its source hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). His life is our life, mysterious, inviolable, inexhaustible.

Do these two ideas, the death of the old man and the resurrection of the new, point us, then, in the direction of sinless perfection? That is certainly the goal of redemption, and one day we shall attain it. But can we bring it forward into this life and argue that here, on this side of glory, it is possible for the believer to live without sinning and to be consistently victorious over every temptation? And must we abandon as utterly unworthy of a Christian the idea that in this life we have to struggle, sometimes be defeated and often have to cry, 'O wretched man that I am!' (Rom. 7:24).

If only! Paul makes absolutely clear that the new man still has much to do. He puts it most graphically in Colossians 3:5. There is, he says, much killing to be done: 'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature'. He could hardly have put it more strongly. Despite all that happened in the moment of our union with Christ, the new man still has undesirable 'members': sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed. They must be shown no mercy. 'Kill them!' says the apostle, and he returns to the theme a few moments later, though with a change of metaphor. We are to 'put away' such things as anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language (Col. 3:8).

There is no room in Paul's thinking for the idea that holiness is something we 'receive', without a struggle, as a definitive, post-conversion second-blessing. Nor does he ever hint that we should simply 'believe for

sanctification' as we 'believed for justification': a doctrine that seems to verge very close to the idea, 'Believe that you are sanctified, and you *are* sanctified.' Instead, it is precisely the one who delight in the law of God (Rom. 7:22) who confesses, 'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.' (Rom. 7:18); just as it is the man who lives by the Spirit who knows at the same time that his soul is a battleground where the flesh and the Spirit are locked in mortal combat (Gal. 5:17). In the last analysis, it is the Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) who sanctifies us, but he does not do it in an instant, or in an experience in which we are completely passive. On the contrary, he sanctifies us through our own struggles and strivings: a point Paul highlights in Romans 8:13, where he writes, 'if by the Spirit *you* put to death the misdeeds of the body'.

But as we engage in this struggle there are certain great gospel facts that spur us on. We have to bear in mind, for example, that God has been committed from eternity to conforming us to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29). We have to bear in mind that Christ secured holiness for us on the cross of Calvary (Eph. 5:25-27). And we have to bear in mind, above all, that we engage in this struggle as people already united to Christ: people for whom it would be absurd to keep living the life of the old man, because we have already buried him and now have a new life in which each believer is provided with everything she needs for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

But perhaps the greatest motivator of all is what we can infer from Romans 6:6, where Paul declares that the body of sin has been destroyed. The verb here (*katargeō*) is the same as the one used in Hebrews 2:14 of the destruction of the devil. This cannot mean that Satan has been annihilated. But he has been disempowered by the death of Christ, and that death has had the same impact on the body of sin in the believer as it has had on Satan's reign in the world. It has destroyed it. Yet (to use Oscar Cullmann's familiar analogy), D-Day, though decisive, is not yet Victory Day.[8] That will come only in the moment of our translation to glory.

But as the battle continues we know that our victory was secured at Calvary; and in the meantime God is working in us both the willing and the doing (Phil. 2:13).

This is the substance of a talk given as part of the Ministers' In-Service Training Week at the Free Church College, January 2014.

---

[8] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (1951. Revised edition, London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 84.