

R.C. Campbell 1950

The Glory of the Cross

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

GALATIANS 6:14.

Paul could have gloried in philosophy, scholarship, tradition, superior opportunities and attainments, but he did not. He gloried in but one thing, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the truth, power, and influence of Christianity.

With Paul everything yielded in importance to the cross. It was the heart of his theology, the electric current of his power, and the accent of his ministry. He was fearful lest men would make the cross of "none effect."

The cross has ever had its enemies who have sought to rob it of its saving virtue. In Paul's day, as in ours, there were ears itching for broadness of doctrine and latitude in plans of salvation. They clamored for a variety of dainties in which the shame, stigma, and sacrifice of the cross were not mentioned. Paul did not stoop to feed such wanton appetites and shallow desires. There is no more convincing argument for a

diseased and sickly stomach than the loathing of wholesome and solid food, and a longing after artificial, sweet, delicate diets. Among such spiritual dyspeptics the food of angels would be contemptible. The cross to Paul was more than just an emblem to wear around the neck; it represented the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Through the ages of Christianity there have been nice, clever, diplomatic persons, as well as bold and blatant ones, who sought to rob Christ of His supernatural powers and thus make the Cross of "none effect." There are many who are "men pleasers." Preachers may thunder in eloquence, flash the brilliance of genius, scatter the flowers of poetry, diffuse the light of science, and magnify precepts of morality from the pulpit, but if we do not make Christ crucified the heart of our preaching we have forgotten, or we are neglecting, or else we are mistaken as to, our mission. Without the Cross of Christ, Christianity is a heaven without a sun, a rainbow without colors, a broadcasting station without power.

Once Paul had gloried in traditions, rites, forms, ceremonies. Now he cried, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul gloried in the cross because of its victim.

Jesus is the sublimest fact in history. We are told of a memorable meeting in London years ago. The towering leaders of thought were there. Dean Stanley, who presided, asked this question: "Who will dominate the future?" Professor Huxley spoke: "The future will be dominated by the nation that sticks most closely to the facts," he declared as he brilliantly argued his thesis. Those present were profoundly impressed by the dominance of physical science and material data fur-

nished by it. After some moments of silence, the dean called on Edward Miall of Parliament and president of the Royal Commission of Education. "I have," said Mr. Miall, "been listening to the speaker with profound interest, and agree with him that the future will be dominated by the nation that sticks most closely to the facts; but I want to add, 'All the facts.' " Then he concluded, "The greatest fact in history is God."

It is not in creation, but in re-creation that God is sublimest. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Christ, the Son, is there on the cross. There we see love in His pierced hands; love on His bleeding brow; love in the wounded side. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace is upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." In Him we see God. In Him we see man. In Him we see the God-man. Dr. E. L. House says: "As a man, He was born of a woman; as God, His advent was sung by angelic voices. . . . As man, He was smitten and afflicted; as God his touch acted as a panacea for the removal of diseases in man. . . . As man, He was crucified and put into a tomb; as God, He broke forth out of the tomb and triumphed over death."

Christ makes men new. He transformed Saul into Paul, Cephas into Peter, a monk into Luther, a shoe-cobbler into William Carey, a cotton-mill operative into a Livingstone. He transforms wavering weaklings into spiritual giants, hopeless vagabonds into kings, slaves into servants of the most High God. He gives robes for rags, riches for poverty, heaven for hell. His "name is above every name." "He shall be called Won-

derful, Counselor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He is the Rock of Ages, "The rose of Sharon," "The fountain in a desert," "The lily of the valleys," "The fairest among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely."

Jesus is the world's leader. He composed no poetry, wrote no books, made no scientific discoveries, perfected no invention, built no great business, held no degree from any institution of learning, chiseled out no sculpture, painted no madonna, was elected to no office, yet his teachings, life, death and power will transform the ages.

He is not a mere symbol of religion. He is a person with power to transform the world. We cannot imprison Christ in a creed, nation, color, denomination, tradition. He has broken the boundary lines of the nations and obliterated the color scheme of the races. If we insist in wrapping him up in a creed, nation, church, race, tradition, he will burst out through the heart of a Paul, a Luther, a Wycliff, a Huss, a Calvin, a Carey, and show that His field is the sphere of the whole world. His influence will span every sea, ascend every hill and mountain, subdue every race, and bring the nations to their knees.

The only real possession of Christianity is the old, old story of Jesus and His love. He is an ageless, measureless possession. He is all the church had when it was young. In the heyday of Christianity the churches had no creeds, rituals, formalities. All they had was Christ and Him crucified and alive forevermore. Today we have much. We are cluttered up, butchered up and tangled up with many things. Surely our day has more light, but less life; more profession, but less possession; more goodness, but less godliness; more activity, but

less vitality than any generation has known. Many of our churches are filled with an apathy carrying the virus of deformity. Many church members worship more at the shrine of gold than at the altar of God, show more concern about church membership than they show in true discipleship; are more sensitive to the quantitative measures of Christianity than they are to its qualitative values.

One fears that in some quarters the pulpit is more humanistic and modernistic than it is evangelistic, that its voice is more vibrant on topics of the day than it is on the topic of the ages, that its instrument is a flute giving forth a confused and uncertain sound rather than a trumpet with the voice of certainty, that the revealed Book has been supplanted by the review of books, that salvation through the process of culture is preached more than salvation by the way of the Cross, that its message is more apathetic than it is prophetic. No wonder such pulpits have degenerated from thrones of power into platforms of mere pretense.

However, there are evidences that we are becoming conscious that our supreme need is Christ and Him crucified. We need to call ourselves back to the old rugged cross and to point a broken, bleeding, disillusioned, lost world to "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Christ is the power of Christianity. He lays hold on the soiled children of men and washes them white in His blood. He blends life's discords into harmonies. He softens life's sobs into melodious music. He rekindles man's fading hopes into tapestries of fadeless glory. He is not a load for us to lift; He is a dynamic to lift us; He is not a chain to bind us; He is a power to liberate. He does not appeal to the sordid selfishness

of the hour; He appeals to the heroic strength of the ages. He does not call for acquiescence in the things of the world; He calls for conquest of the world. His emblem is not a cross of gold; it is the cross of Calvary. No wonder He changes cemeteries into gardens blossoming with resurrection glories.

What shall our answer be to those who say Christ is no more than a man, a child of man's imagination, a myth and no more than a myth? We shall answer them for the sake of argument: Let Christ be a myth, let the whole Christian system be founded on a legend—a mere child's story. What will the doubter have gained and what will Christianity have lost? This idea—this myth—this legend—this fairy tale for children—has been the most potent force in all history. This mere idea, this pigmy, has transformed life. This figment of the mind's vagaries has given us love for hate, hope for despair, purity for lust, fineness for filth, optimism for cynicism, salvation for damnation. Such a myth as the story of the Nazarene is grandly pragmatic. Such a fairy tale is phenomenally potential. Such a legend is miraculously transforming. If Jesus as a myth can lift empires off their hinges, if the legend of the Galilean can put heart and hope into man and transform the ages, then, we declare, all honor to the legend! All hail to the myth! Jesus, good paragon! Thou crystal myth!

It is no wonder Paul glories in "Christ and him crucified." The wonder of all wonders is that all Christians do not make Him their supreme joy and glory.

Paul gloried in the Cross because of its revelation. It was by way of the cross that Jesus revealed sin in all its blackness. Sin hounds the human race like a wailing ghost. It plows its crooked, ugly furrows through

the fields of humanity. It blights hopes and damns souls. It crawls like serpents, or clanks like an army of demons along every highway, street and path, and creeps up every back alley, and grins in at every keyhole in the wide world. It would turn God into an imp of hell.

It was sin that hid the sun while Jesus was dying on the cross. That darkness was emblematic of a world without a sun, humanity without a Saviour. It looked as if no sun would ever shine again; no more hope stir in humanity's heart, no more flowers blossom, no more dewy dells and rippling streams again gladden man's view. Ugly, ghastly ruin mantled in sin's blackest shroud, and, led by hell's yelling demons, held sway. People wondered if heaven's smile had become a frown, its star of hope darkness, its balm bitterness.

On the cross we see the appalling sinfulness of sin. If sin would nail the Son of God on a cross of infamy it would bathe the earth in tears, blot out its hope, convulse it in sorrow, dry up every fountain of comfort, kindle the fires of deepest passion, blanket it in despair, hush the voice of every apostle of salvation and good will, weave our tapestries into burying shrouds, convert our lounges into coffins, send funeral processions creeping through every street and along every highway, transform flower gardens into graveyards, and damn every soul in perdition.

On the cross sin was most sinful, treachery most treacherous, murder most murderous, brutality most brutal, viciousness most vicious, hell most hellish. Never did sin raise its ugly, defiant head so high, nor did ever demons yell in such hellish glee. The dragon of the bottomless pit attacked the Son of God in a death grapple. But there on the cross Christ conquered

death, hell, and the grave. Now the victorious cry is, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The Cross reveals the principle of the inalienable right of the individual to approach the throne of God for himself. The cross is the very epitome of soul liberty. Christ hangs on the cross between God and man; He is man's only go-between, man's only mediator. He is our High Priest, and the only priest with power to forgive sins. I quote here Dr. George W. Truett in thought more than in words. All others who would assume to themselves such power are but counterfeiters and deceivers. Their claims are false; their acts are sacrilege. The Bible teaches the glorious doctrine that every individual has the privilege and blessing of direct approach to God, through Christ, without the interference of deputies, proxies, priests, or popes. The Cross, Christ, the New Testament know no form of sponsorial religion. Everyone must repent for himself, believe for himself, be baptized for himself, and account to God for himself. What institution, however venerable; what individual, however powerful or wise; what tradition, however hoary with age, has any right to come between the individual soul and God? To all who would make such claims for themselves God's Word declares, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." "All institutions, however holy; all states, however strong; all churches, however sacred; all persons, however near; are to stand aside and let the individual soul approach God for himself." The grace, mercy, and pardon of God cannot be manipulated by any man, creed, custom, council, confessional, ecclesiastical formula, system, or tradition. For anyone to arrogate to himself

such prerogative is a blasphemous impertinence, and a defamation of the crown rights of the Son of God.

The cross reveals God's compassion for a lost world. "God so loved that he gave . . ." Winning the lost is our supreme opportunity and obligation. Christianity has made progress and flourished to the degree that its devotees have gone out in compassion to win the lost. When we lose our compassion, we lose our spirit of conquest. We have moved forward only as our pathway has been lighted by the incandescent glow from the fires of evangelism. The brighter these fires have burned, the greater the progress we have made. We grow the fastest when the fires of evangelism burn the hottest. The church or denomination that does not evangelize will soon be paralyzed. Blood that does not flow, coagulates. Coagulation means death. The great days of our progress have been the high days of evangelism. In such times old frontiers have been pushed back to new horizons. When compassion for a lost world has been at low ebb, Christianity has moved with the drag of a paralytic.

Our pulpits and pews must burn with fires of evangelism and missionary zeal. Then we, like the early Christians, can storm the gilded dens of vice and godlessness, attack festering social customs, drive king alcohol from his throne, purify the currents of barbaric civilizations, and usher in a reign of peace. Christians totally surrendered to God can change a chaotic world into order, spiritualize the churches, vitalize our organizations, evangelize the masses, and revolutionize the world. The lack of virility in our religious life has muffled the church's voice, retarded her progress, compromised her testimony, made decrepit her

step, deadened her spirit, shifted her emphasis, and rendered her woefully impotent.

Paul gloried in the cross because it meets the deepest needs of the soul. The cross teaches that salvation through grace is the only hope for man. Thank God, we do not have to observe rites and ceremonies, depend on traditions, go on a pilgrimage, or join a crusade in order to be saved, but simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that "to the Jews the cross is a stumbling-block; to the Greeks it is foolishness, but to all who believe it is the power and wisdom of God." I cannot explain it, but I accept it with all my heart.

I know not how that Bethlehem's Babe
Could in the Godhead be,
I only know the manger child
Has brought God's life to me.

I know not how Calvary's Cross
A world from sin could free.
I only know its matchless love,
Has brought God's love to me.

We cannot understand it. It was a transaction that took place in the heart of God far back in the eternities. Christ is "the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world." When John saw Him coming to the Jordan to be baptized, he cried, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

To those who say, "Away with your bloody religion!" the Bible answers, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sin." To those who declare it a cross of shame, we shall say, "In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time, all the

light of sacred story, gathered round his head sublime." To those who spurn the cross we shall sing, "I'll cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown." We shall shout from the housetops, "Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power; Till all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more.

One Sunday after having preached to three hundred state prisoners, I looked and saw one of the prisoners coming to me. He was a man I knew. His face glowed. He could not conceal the ecstasy of his joy. He exclaimed, "I am the happiest man in this state today." "Why are you so happy?" I asked. "The governor has pardoned me. He has already signed my pardon papers. At sunrise tomorrow I will go out through that gate a free man."

As I drove home I thought of the time when, as an intermediate boy, I was in prison, the prison house of sin. The experience that had been mine on that August day in a little fourth-time country church house in Rutherford County, North Carolina, flooded my soul. Seated there in the pew, I received my pardon papers. They were not signed by the chief executive of a great commonwealth, they were signed by the hand of God after He dipped His pen in "the blood of the Lamb." In my heart there was a song, "Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe. Sin had left its crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."

Does Jesus save? Is it a glorious fact, or is it just an illusionary fancy? Ask Mary Magdalene. Ask the poor drab woman at the well! Ask the dying thief on the cross! Ask the naked, crazed Gadarene, now clothed and in his right mind! Ask Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted Christianity, now declaring, "By the grace

of God, I am what I am." Ask vagabonds, now redeemed; harlots, now made pure; thieves, now honest; drunkards, now sober; the myriads of all tongues, colors, and classes, now making up the ransomed throng around the throne of God! Hear the answer of this innumerable host as they reply, Yes, "Jesus saves, Jesus saves, waft it on the rolling tide, Jesus saves, Jesus saves." The angels shout it! The stars sing it! The devils know it! God declares it! "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!"

Paul gloried in the cross because of its triumphant conquest. As Christ died on the cross, the black imps of hell yelled in gleeful delight. This was in keeping with the seeming irreparable disaster. But the resurrection morning dawned in all of its effulgent glory. The light flashed its "rose-fingered aura over the black face of the world." The cowering disciples were transformed into courageous conquerors. Christ gave His command, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

The early Christians began the conquest with resolute courage. To the world their venture seemed stark madness; a daft dream. They bore a message that they dared believe and preach as the world's one and only hope. It was not abbreviated, watered down, thinned out, sweetened up, and made meaningless. Their message shocked their day wide-awake.

If Christianity is to be powerful today, the gospel message must be preached in its fullness. Dr. Charles Goodell says: "One fears that in some quarters the pulpit has lost its nerve and forgotten the evidences of history; that whenever Christianity has been most con-

vincing, it has been most victorious, and when she has been most apologetic, she has been most feeble."

From its hands we must unfasten every shackle; from its wings we must unloose every hand; from its feet we must remove every dragging chain. If it is faint, we must revive it; if it is weak, we must strengthen it; if it is maligned, we must vindicate it. Then it will speed its way into ages we shall not see, and into lands we, as individuals, shall never tread.

The real victories of the ages are the victories of those who have followed the crucified Christ. All honor and glory to those who have discovered new worlds, charted unknown oceans, whitened the seas with ships carrying the commerce of the world to all shores, ribboned the nations with railways and highways, tunneled mountains, bridled the lightnings, harnessed the air waves, built up great industries, been elected to high office, written Magna Chartas, and blessed the world in a thousand ways! But the world's real conquerors are those who have gone out crusading for righteousness. Preachers, not politicians; saints, not scientists; disciples, not diplomats; pilgrims, not playboys; missionaries, not money barons, are the real heroes and heroines of the ages.

From the time Abraham began his overland march to destiny until this hour God's people have been crusading for righteousness.

Think of the victories of the cross! Christ began His work on the shores of Galilee. He called Peter, James, John, Andrew, and the other apostles. In three years there were a hundred and twenty believers. Pentecost came. The fires of God fell. The irresistible crusade reached the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Savonarola, John Huss,

Zwingli, became its burning evangelists. By the fifteenth century fifty million devotees of the Cross were on the march for Christ.

Christianity spread around the shores of the Atlantic Ocean—the new world was discovered. God called John Wesley, John Knox, Martin Luther, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Parker, Spurgeon, Moody, Beecher, Broadus, Carroll, Gambrell, Mullins, Truett, Scarborough, and their compatriots. The army of crusaders increased and the fires of evangelism burned like a sweeping conflagration, and institutions sprang up like magic to garrison the land. Christianity opened prison doors, emancipated whole races, and sponsored the greatest reforms in all history.

Now on the shores of the Pacific and its islands the march of the cross is felt. Japan is shaking off her age-long superstitions. Other nations are rousing from the slumbers of heathenism. For centuries our missionaries have been knocking at doors that were barred to them. They cried, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." And the people from behind those gates have answered back, "Who is this King of glory?" And the messengers of the cross have cried, "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." Now those rusty hinges are swinging these doors wide open. Our advance missionary program is seeking to make the heathen our inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth our possession. On and on God's children will go, until the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the seas, until the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. Jesus said, "All power has been given unto me in heaven and on earth."

I do not believe that the devil is the only one who is succeeding in this world. We know there is confusion and that ill-will has dipped its needle in venom and poisoned the blood stream of the age. We know that governments, diplomacy, commerce, culture, science, legislation, education, conferences, treaties, and leagues have failed. But we read of Christ, "He shall not fail." Crowns are falling, empires are perishing, dynasties are crumbling, thrones are tottering, dictators are fleeing. All this rubbish is being piled into a mountain of debris, above which rises an old rugged cross. On that cross is the Son of God. He is taken down and buried. The glory of the resurrection morning dawns, and we hear the victorious shout of triumph, "I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." We hear the shout, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father." "God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name." We hear ten thousand times ten thousand shouting, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." "Thou art worthy to take the book and open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation."

One day He was nailed to an infamous cross. On another day he will be crowned "King of kings and Lord of lords." All, all the redeemed will join in the coronation service as they shout, "It is the old cross still, Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Its triumphs let us tell, Hallelujah! Hallelujah. . . . Hallelujah! It shall never suffer loss, Hallelujah! Hallelujah for the cross!"