

REVIEW ARTICLE

The secret of the cross in Christian Orthodox theology and its divine revelation

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Abstract

This study delves into the profound symbolism of the cross in Christianity, exploring the multifaceted significance that underlies the veneration of this emblem. The cross represents a paradox – a symbol of suffering and defeat on one side, and triumph and salvation on the other, uniting believers across denominations as the universal identifier of their faith. In fact, it stands as one of the most potent symbols in the world.

Drawing from divine revelations found in the Holy Bible, this paper reveals the deep-rooted connection between the symbolism of the cross and the act of redemption and salvation epitomised by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. By examining the imagery present in Ezekiel's vision of the divine throne, where four significant symbols – the man, the lion, the ox and the eagle – are introduced, we find a parallel in the Book of Revelation by John the Apostle.

This paper then explores the correlation between these four symbols and the portrayal of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels, each emphasising a distinct facet of His divine nature: His humanity, His role as the perfect Sacrifice, His sovereignty as the Messianic Saviour and His elevation of humanity through the act of salvation. It becomes evident that these symbols point to the centrality of the cross as the earthly throne of Christ, linking His sacrificial act to the ultimate purpose of Christian salvation. This research deepens our understanding of the cross's theological significance and its profound role in the Christian faith.

Arabic

هذه المقالة هي دراسة لتوجيه الأنظار نحو الرمزية العميقة للصليب في المسيحية؛ توضح وتكتشف أهمية الأوجه المختلفة التي تحتويها مهابة وعظمة الصليب، هذا الرمز المسيحي المقدس.

الصليب يمثل مفردات متضادة، فهو من جانب رمزٌ للمعاناة والإنكسار، ومن جانب آخر هو رمز للنصر والخلاص، إنه عنصرٌ موحدٌ للمؤمنين من مختلف الطوائف المسيحية في الهوية المشتركة العامة للإيمان، إنه بالحقيقة أقوى الرموز الفعالة والمؤثرة في العالم.

رموزٌ كثيرةٌ وجدت بالوحي الإلهي في أسفار الكتاب المقدس، وهذه المقالة توضح الارتباط العميق الجذور بين رمزية الصليب مما أشار إليه الوحي الإلهي، وعمل الفداء والخلاص الذي أسّس عليه يسوع المسيح مرتفعاً على الصليب.

ومن خلال دراسة الصور المجازية المستعانة في رؤيا زكريا للعرش الإلهي (مركبة زكريا النارية)، حيث برزت أربعة رموز مهمة وهي أوجه الكائنات الأربعة: الإنسان والأسد والثور والنسر (حز 1: 10)، وجاء ذكرها أيضاً في رؤيا الرسول يوحنا

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اللاهوتي، (رؤ:4:7)، أصبح واضحاً ما تعنيه من إشارة بل إعلان أكيد للأوجه الأربعة لطبيعة السيد المسيح (الإله المتجسد) في رسالته السماوية التي جاء من أجلها إلى العالم كإنسان ليكمل الفداء على الصليب؛ ما اختصت به الأنجيل الأربعة في العهد الجديد للكتاب المقدس، حيث كل إنجيل تبني جانباً من هذه الجوانب، وهي: طبيعته الإنسانية، وتقديم ذاته ذبيحة عن البشرية، وكونه السيد المطلق (المسيا المخلص)، وارتفاعه بالجنس البشري إلى السماء بصعوده بجسد القيامة الممجد إلى السماء.

وبذلك، أصبح واضحاً أن هذه الرموز تشير وتؤكد مركزية (الصليب) في الحياة المسيحية، كونه عرش الرب يسوع على الأرض، حيث أنه في المفهوم المسيحي، يربط ويجمع عمل الفداء الذي فيه قدم الرب يسوع ذاته ذبيحة على الصليب، مع الغرض الأساسي للتدبير الإلهي في تجسد كلمة الله لخلاص البشرية.

هذا البحث يعمق مفهومنا المسيحي كمؤمنين للأهمية اللاهوتية للصليب المقدس، ودوره المركزي في الإيمان المسيحي.

French

Les secrets de la Croix

Cet article approfondit le symbolisme profond de la croix dans le Christianisme, explorant la signification multiforme qui se cache derrière la vénération de cet emblème. La croix représente un paradoxe – un symbole de souffrance et de défaite d’un côté, et de triomphe et de salut de l’autre, unissant les croyants de toutes confessions comme identifiant universel de leur foi. En fait, il s’agit de l’un des symboles les plus puissants au monde.

S’appuyant sur des révélations divines trouvées dans la Sainte Bible, cet article révèle le lien profond entre le symbolisme de la croix et l’acte de rédemption et de salut incarné par la crucifixion de Jésus-Christ. En examinant les images présentes dans la vision d’Ézéchiel du trône divin, où quatre symboles significatifs – l’homme, le lion, le bœuf et l’aigle – sont introduits, nous trouvons un parallèle dans le livre de l’Apocalypse de l’apôtre Jean.

L’article explore ensuite la corrélation entre ces quatre symboles et la représentation de Jésus-Christ dans les quatre Évangiles, chacun mettant l’accent sur une facette distincte de Sa nature divine : Son humanité, Son rôle de sacrifice parfait, Sa souveraineté en tant que Sauveur Messianique et son élévation de l’humanité par l’acte de salut. Il devient évident que ces symboles soulignent le caractère central de la croix en tant que trône terrestre du Christ, reliant Son acte sacrificiel au plus ultime du Salut Chrétien. Cette recherche approfondit notre compréhension de la signification théologique de la croix et de son rôle profond dans la foi Chrétienne.

German

Diese Studie taucht ein in die tiefgreifende Symbolik des Kreuzes im Christentum und erforscht die vielschichtige Bedeutung, die der Verehrung dieses Emblems zugrunde liegt. Das Kreuz repräsentiert ein Paradoxon – auf der einen Seite ein Symbol des Leidens und der Niederlage, auf der anderen Seite Triumph und Erlösung, das die Gläubigen unterschiedlicher Konfessionen als universellen Identifikator ihres Glaubens vereint. Tatsächlich gilt es als eines der mächtigsten Symbole der Welt.

Mit Verweis auf göttliche Offenbarungen aus der Heiligen Bibel zeigt diese Arbeit die tief verwurzelte Verbindung zwischen der Symbolik des Kreuzes und der Erlösung und Rettung, die durch die Kreuzigung von Jesus Christus verkörpert wird. Durch die Untersuchung der Bildsprache in der Vision des göttlichen Thrones in Hesekiels Vision, in der vier bedeutende Symbole – der Mensch, der Löwe, der Ochs und der Adler – vorgestellt werden, finden wir eine Parallele in der Offenbarung des Johannes des Apostels.

Des Weiteren, erforscht die Arbeit die Korrelation zwischen diesen vier Symbolen und der Darstellung von Jesus Christus in den vier Evangelien, wobei jedes eine besondere Facette seiner göttlichen Natur betont: seine Menschlichkeit, seine Rolle als vollkommene Opfergabe, seine Souveränität als Messianischer Retter und seine Erhebung der Menschheit durch den Akt der Erlösung. Es wird offensichtlich, dass diese Symbole auf die zentrale Bedeutung des Kreuzes als irdischen Thron Christi hinweisen und seinen opfernden Akt mit dem ultimativen Zweck der christlichen Erlösung verknüpfen. Diese Forschung vertieft unser Verständnis für die theologische Bedeutung des Kreuzes und seine tiefgreifende Rolle im christlichen Glauben.

Italian

Questo studio indaga il profondo simbolismo che la croce ha nella cristianità, esplorando le diverse sfaccettature del significato alla base della venerazione di questo emblema.

La croce rappresenta un paradosso – un simbolo di sofferenza e sconfitta da un lato, di trionfo e salvezza dall'altro, unendo i credenti tra le diverse denominazioni come identificativo universale della loro fede.

Di fatto, si erge come uno dei simboli più potenti al mondo.

Attingendo dalle divine rivelazioni contenute nella Sacra Bibbia, questo documento rivela la connessione radicata tra il simbolismo della croce e l'atto di redenzione e salvezza culminato nella crocifissione di Gesù Cristo. Esaminando l'immaginario illustrato nella visione di Ezechiele del Trono Divino, dove quattro simboli significativi – l'uomo, il leone, il bue e l'aquila – vengono introdotti, osserviamo un parallelismo con il libro dell'Apocalisse scritto da Giovanni l'Apostolo.

Lo studio procede esplorando la correlazione tra i quattro simboli e il ritratto di Gesù Cristo restituito dai quattro Vangeli, ognuno dei quali ricalca un tratto distintivo della Sua natura divina: la Sua umanità, il Suo ruolo come sacrificio perfetto, la Sua signoria in quanto salvatore messianico e l'elevazione della Sua umanità attraverso l'atto della salvezza. È evidente che questi simboli indicano la centralità della croce come il trono terrestre di Cristo, collegando il suo atto di sacrificio allo scopo ultimo della salvezza cristiana. Questa ricerca approfondisce la nostra comprensione del significato teologico della croce, e del suo profondo ruolo nella fede cristiana.

Introduction

Christians respect the cross to a great extent. Paradoxically, it is a symbol of suffering and defeat on one side and of triumph and salvation on the other. The cross is the universal Christian symbol, acknowledged by all denominations as the single visual identifier of their faith, actually the cross is one of the most powerful symbols in the world.

Many symbols and secrets were given by the divine revelation in the Holy Bible, and they were shown and became clear to us only when our Lord Jesus Christ was lifted on the Cross through the act of redemption and salvation of the human kind. Theophany means the appearance of God to man, and Ezekiel was commissioned as a prophet by such an inaugural manifestation of God in the Bible. He was in exile in Babylon when he was called to be a prophet in about 592 BC, through a series of visions at the age of 30. He had visionary experiences of rich and symbolic meanings and adopted different methods to convey God's messages.

Discussion

We read about Ezekiel's vision of the throne of God in the first chapter of his book, where he described God's chariot – resembling a throne (referred to as the Chariot of Ezekiel by Bible scholars). Within the fire of the throne of God, four living creatures came into view. In appearance, they resembled a man, each with four faces: a man's face, a lion's face on the right side, an ox's face on the left and an eagle's face at the back (Ezekiel 1:10).

In this vision of the throne of God in Heaven, we encounter having four important symbols: the man, the lion, the ox and the eagle. These four symbols are also mentioned in the chapter 4 of the book of Revelation of John the Apostle. Whilst he was in internment in Patmos, John had a vision of God's throne, and surrounding it,

there were four living creatures. The first was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man and the fourth was like a flying eagle. These creatures continually proclaimed: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come (Revelation 4:6–8).

Scholars of the Holy Bible have understood these four living creatures – represented by the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle – as references to the distinctive portrayals of our Lord Jesus Christ in the four Gospels of the New Testament. These representations encompass His dimensional divinity and his act of salvation of mankind on the cross. The four Gospels viewed an account of the Son of God telling the divine plan to save mankind, and revealing God the Father to His people, as it is written: No one has ever seen God, The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18). In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:1 & 2).

Jesus Almighty is God, He is the living, perfectly divine Son of God, the Word of God, the Creator who breathed life into the world and who still works amongst us through the Holy Spirit.

Through the four Gospels, we realise four different main portraits of our Lord Jesus Christ, each revealing a unique perspective of Him:

I – He is a Man, Jesus's humanity repeatedly stressed in the Gospels, with a very clear humanness in instances such as His nativity, as well as references to Jesus' genealogy and other everyday human behaviours he practiced like eating, sleeping and crying. Even when Humans were in harsh captivity, ruled by an invisible and bitter death, the Son of God was not ashamed to humble Himself, and to take upon Himself our human nature and became a man, He became like us in everything except that He was without sin, condemned by divine judgement and subjected to the passions of the cross. All the penalties imposed by divine judgement upon man for the sin of the first transgression (death, toil, hunger, thirst, etc.) He took upon Himself. The eternal Son, the Word of God and the second person of the Holy Trinity, became a man so that human nature might be restored and mankind would attain the deification for which it was originally created. The Word of God lived on earth a truly human life, living in obedience to the Father as a man.

Our Lord Jesus loved the term (Son of Man), He used it a lot and the term was mentioned more than 80 times in the four Gospels and highlights the mystery of Incarnation. The long-awaited Messiah, the Word of God, became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us (John 1:14). As the God – man, Jesus became a glorious sign for all sinful humans (Luke 2:34). The title 'the Son of man' to our Lord was also alluded to in the prophet Daniel's vision of the Heavenly being who is like the Son of Man, coming with the cloud of heaven, He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence (Daniel 7:13). All this remind us of the symbol of Man in the Chariot of Ezekiel.

II – Jesus is a Servant as portrayed in the gospels in two key roles:

1-**The High Priest:** The Old Testament priesthood, dating back to Moses, was concluded when Caiaphas, the high priest, tore his garments during the trial of Jesus in the Sanhedrin before His crucifixion. A new priesthood of the New Testament (The Christian one) then started with Jesus Christ as mentioned by Divine

revelation: The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, You are a priest forever, in order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4), This is what St. Paul explained in the letter to Hebrews, as He said ‘the former regulations is set aside because it was weak and useless, and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God and it was not without an oath’. Others became priests without any oath, but He became a priest with an oath when God said to Him: The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a priest forever and because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood; therefore, He was able to save those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:18–25).

2-The Sacrifice: Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices to God, Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of mankind, and to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him, as said in the letter to Hebrews (chapter 9).

Jesus Christ was sent by God to serve His people and to submit Himself to the Father’s will, as mankind was enslaved to death and to the devil, He, our Lord, assumed all the consequences of the fall, willing to suffer even to the death of the cross, lifted on the Cross, being a sacrifice on the cross, and that was what St. John the Baptist meant when he pointed at Jesus and said: behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); and that also was what St. Paul insists, saying that Christ was not only obedient to the Father, but obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8); For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7); and as St. Peter said ‘He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree (the cross), so that we might die of sin and live for righteousness, by his wounds you have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24). In fact, Jesus is the only perfect person born of a woman and identified compassionately with the plight of suffering sinful people, and He alone is qualified to carry our sorrow, bear our sin, and offer us a priceless gift of salvation. He was a Sacrifice to all human kind.

This reminds us with the symbol of ox in the chariot of Ezekiel, as the ox was the main sacrifice in the Old Testament, a symbol of priesthood and sacrifices.

III – Jesus is Sovereign King and the Messianic Saviour of all mankind as portrayed in the four Gospels. He who came to earth to extend the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth, and to lead humanity to His Kingdom.

The victory of Christ over the power of devil and death became true through His suffering and death on the Cross, followed by His triumphant defeat of death in His resurrection. On the Cross, Lord Jesus is vested as a king. His descent into Hades in the lower parts of the earth allowed Him to destroy the power of death. Serving as a ransom to death, in which humans were held captive and sold under sin, that he might fill all things with Himself. He loosened the pangs of death, he brought out those died in hopes of the coming Messiah, who were bound into prosperity in Hades (from Adam to the criminal on the right) and lifted them up to Paradise, as he said to the criminal on the cross: assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43). This reminds us of what was written by the divine revelation in the Psalm: He leads forth the prisoners with singing (Psalm 68:6) and The Lord reign, let the nations tremble, He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake (Psalm 99:1).

Jesus Christ on the cross reigned and enthroned as a king on earth as He is in Heaven; at the moment of His death on the cross, darkness came over all the land,

the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life (Matt. 27:45, 51, 52). Let the earth shake, since the Son of God reign on the cross, He is the King that the stability of the earth depends on and He is the King and the authority of the whole universe as He spoke to His disciples after resurrection: All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18), and here again, we remember the vision of Daniel: The one like the Son of Man was given authority, glory and sovereign power, all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him, His domination is an everlasting domination that will not pass away and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:14). Jesus Christ was a king on the cross, as written also in the notice on the cross: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews (Luke 23:38), and here we remember the Lion in the chariot of Ezekiel, as the lion is the king of the animal kingdom, a symbol of power and authority as referred to the divine king Jesus Christ; (The Lord reigns upon the Cross. Psalm 96) (For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the Power of God. 1 Cor 1:18).

IV – Jesus Christ the Risen and the Triumph: When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, He achieved a profound victory over death and the devil. He delivered the faithful's soul from with Hades and raised them to the splendours of 1 Paradise St. Paul expounded On this divine act in saying: He, who descended, is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all thing (Psalm 68:6 and Ephesians 4:8–10).

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ followed by His ascension to Heaven paved the way for resurrection from the dead, and the return to Heaven. In His ascension to His father, Jesus Christ placed the human nature (that He had assumed) at the right hand of the throne of glory. Consequently, through Christ, human nature has not only been healed but also divinely united eternally with God in Heaven.

On the Cross through the act of Salvation, Jesus reconciled us with God (2 Cor. 5:18). His selfless sacrifice brought about peace through the shedding of His blood on the Cross (Col 1:20). This Reconciliation of the Earth with Heaven took place by the act of redeeming and saving accomplished by our Lord on the Cross, having made peace through the blood of His Cross (Colossians 1:20). He forgave our sins, by nullifying the written code with its regulations that stood in opposition to us, symbolically nailing it to the Cross (Colossians 2:13, 14). Hence, the Cross serves as the instrument of saving, and the stairway to Heaven through Jesus Christ. The door to Heaven opened to the mankind through the act of salvation on the cross, to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

In line with His teachings, Jesus identified Himself as 'the way, the truth, and the life'. He promised that those who embrace Him in this capacity will find themselves on a journey towards eternal life alongside Him.

Furthermore, we can draw parallels between Lord Jesus and the Eagle, who is the king of all known birds, flying and ascending high in the sky (Prov. 23:5) with the greatest speed (Jer 49:40), spreading its wings and hovering over its young to protect them (De. 32:11). Just as the eagle, Jesus too stretched His arms to be nailed on the Cross. This act symbolises His nurturing of mankind and His gathering of nations into His flock in the kingdom of Heaven, as God said to the house of Jacob: I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4). So the

Eagle in the chariot of Ezekiel is the symbol of Jesus Christ, lifting the human kind high to heaven through the Cross. Reflecting on the Biblical analogies using eagles should inspire us to live righteously and strengthen our spiritual journey towards God.

Conclusion

Through the four gospels, we realise four different main portraits of our Lord Jesus Christ, each revealing a unique perspective of Him: Jesus's humanity repeatedly stressed in the Gospels (Man), He had a permanent priesthood who offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to take away the sins of mankind (Ox), He was the Sovereign King, the Messianic Saviour of all mankind, who has come to earth to extend the Kingdom of Heaven onto the earth, and to lead His Kingdom (lion) and lift human kind high to heaven through the act of salvation (Eagle). The vision of the four figures seen by the prophet Ezekiel was pointing to our Lord Jesus Christ whilst he was on the Cross:

The man: (The Son of God who became the Son of Man through Carnation to save us),

The Lion: (The King = Strength and Power).

The Ox: (The Servant = Priest, and the Sacrifice).

The Eagle: (The Divinity of Christ, who lifted the human being to Heaven again).

Thus, the Chariot of Ezekiel, the vision of the throne of God in Heaven, through the four living creatures was a symbol to our Lord Jesus Christ, whilst He was on the cross in the act of salvation of the mankind, i.e. the cross is the throne of God on earth, and that is the secret of the Cross.

The cross marked a turning point in the relationship of God to humankind, symbolising our belief, representing the greatest sacrifice ever made and the assurance of salvation to us. Accordingly, we are proud to be worshippers of Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). The Cross is an incredible gift to ponder.