

Violence and the Cross

(Ro 12:11-21 NIV) “11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

On April 24th this year, all the Christian churches will be celebrating Easter Sunday. This will be preceded by Good Friday, which is a reminder of the brutal death of Jesus Christ.

It is timely that we think of the death of Jesus and what it means.

We look at our world through our eyes. What we see is not complete, it is often distorted or out of focus. We live in a world where there are now close to 7 billion of us. Every day, we have over 156,000 births and about 68,000 deaths. The net population growth every day is over 85,000 people. (From <http://www.worldometers.info/>). We don’t see the complexities of our world, what is happening in it, etc... We have but just a little grasp. Since the first human beings, Answers.com says that 106.5 billion had lived on the earth from the beginning to 2002. I don’t know whether this is accurate or not but it plenty of us human beings.

Although we don’t have a full grasp of everything, we often tend to think that we do. For many, many years, the people in the Western hemisphere thought the earth was flat. When humans came to realize the truth that the earth was round and not flat, it caused much anxiety, conflicts and religious questionings.

There are also many myths that caused problems – myths about the superiority of races, myths about the superiority of men over women and the list goes on.

We also have myths about God. As human beings, we see God through our eyes.

As Baxter Kruger indicates in his diagram on the fallen mind (2006),

- 1- **Lie about God** → we doubt the Father’s Heart, Purpose and Wisdom.
- 2- **Believing the lie** → we think we are not safe, not secure, not cared for, not whole, not alive and not free.

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- 3- **Baptism of fear** → causes guilt, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, angst, pain, loss resulting in bitterness, anger, sadness, greed, jealousy, lust, hatred, strife, gossip, slander, enmity, gluttony, drunkenness, dissension, factions
- 4- **Loss of Freedom – Chaos and Death** → Loss of freedom to know and be known, to give and to receive, to care and be cared for, to love and be loved. Loss of freedom to accept and Embrace our humanity and to accept and embrace Creation and to participate in Trinitarian way of being, living.
- 5- **Filling of human existence** → The Anti-trinitarian way of Being Self-Centeredness, self-protection, hiding, pretending, inventing, imposing. Fills human existence in 4-fold way. The River of Toxic Waste.

The final reality is that we don't know who God is by ourselves. **“45 It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life.”** (Joh 6:45-48 NIV)

His list goes on until our view of God is so distorted that God becomes faceless, nameless, judge, indifferent, opposed, new theology and separation from God. We end up in confusion, trapped in our illusions, fear, pride, self-referential judgment, inconceivable. We then get the thought that we cannot know God and become discouraged. (The reality is we can know Him as we accept the revelation of Jesus – the Eternal Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.)

Our default settings about God are not true.

Scripture tell us the following but we have difficulty accepting:

- He died for us → **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Ro 5:8 NIV)
- He died for our sins → **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,”** (1Co 15:3 NIV)
- He died for the many → **“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”** (Ro 5:18 NIV)
- His death covers all men → **“who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.”** (1Ti 2:6 NIV)

The death of Jesus is an event of violence. As human beings we are very good at hiding the violence that affects our lives. We have to feel very safe to share that we have or are suffering

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violence in our workplace, with our spouse, with our children, in our extended families, etc... In fact, sometimes, we may be so accustomed to violence that we don't recognize it for what it is. We think it is normal. The more personal it is, the harder it is to admit to it. Daniel L. Migliore, in his book *Faith Seeking Understanding* on page 188 says it well.

Perhaps the primary reason we have such difficulty in making sense of the death of Jesus as "for us" is that it is an event of violence. We are often experts not only in covering up the violence that pervades our lives and the workings of our world but also in skillfully disguising the violence that was present in Christ's death for us.⁴⁶ In many churches, worshipers have become accustomed to gilded and bejeweled crosses. Emperors have embraced the cross as a symbol of imperial majesty and glory. In hiding the violence of the event that stands at the center of the gospel drama, we turn the message of the costly love of God into a sentimental fairy tale, or a symbol of domination, or some other distortion of its true meaning. Alternatively, we acknowledge the violence of the cross but place the blame on some despicable group (often the Jews) or on God (as in theories of atonement that say the cross was necessary to appease the wrath of God).

The ancient world was a violent world and so is our world. In the 20th century, we had the 1st and second world wars. We had the cold war. In the 21 century, we have terrorism. We have a deadening and distressing fear of nuclear, biological and other types of warfare. To protect ourselves, we have systems of mutually assured destruction.

In our neighborhoods, workplace, we glorify competition and advancement at the expense of others. Our families and marriages, which should be places of safety, are too often dangerous for men, women, children and the elderly. They become violent places – places where we find both villains and victims, too often the “victim and the villain” being in the same person. It is very hard for us to admit that we have violence within us, that we have been both “the victim and the villain”. In too many families, women and men are battered physically, emotionally and sexually. In too many families children are not safe but battered.

This violence, as we know, has also invaded religious institutions. We hear stories of “holy wars”, abused children, abuse of ecclesiastical authority, etc....

From You're Included Elmer Colyer: The Practical Theology of T.F. Torrance (From <http://www.gci.org/yi/colyer35>)

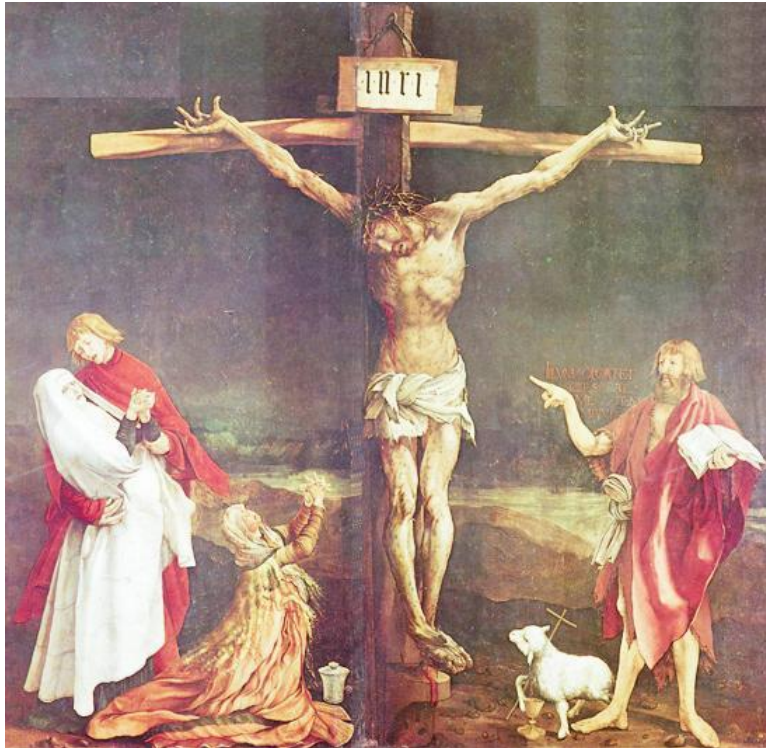
Michael Fezell: What is it that you would most like people to know about God?

Elmer Colyer: You saved the most difficult question for the last, huh? I'm not a particularly visual person, so I'm tempted to point to a book or a passage, but I think if I wanted to leave somebody with kind of an image, and it's too bad we don't have the picture here, but Karl Barth had a famous painting in front of his desk when he wrote his *Church Dogmatics*. It was Grunewald's *Crucifixion*, with John the Baptist with the pointing picture. Crosses because shiny crosses don't capture for us the sheer depth and breadth and extent of the love of God in Christ. But Grunewald's painting, the gruesome pictures with Christ's

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contorted hands nailed, pointing up to heaven, the look of death of absolutely real, you can just stand and stare at that picture for a long time just because it's so powerful.

I think that picture communicates the thing that is at the center of the gospel that we ought to always most remember about God. This is what tells us what the heart of God is really like. You want to know the depth and the extent of the love of God, look up into the face into Grünewald's painting, his Christ hanging on the cross. That's where we really have a window, according to Torrance, into the very heart of the Almighty. And there will never be a dark inscrutable deity behind God's back that will turn out to be different, less loving and compassionate toward us, than the God we see revealed there.



Jesus, God, our Savior, came to this world. The drama of salvation unfolded in our world – in a world saturated with violence – a world where both hidden violence and open barbarism and vicious cruelty exist side by side. We just need to think of the daily news of robberies in our communities, of child protection workers being overwhelmed with work, of what is presently happening in Libya, a country trying to oust their leader, of Haiti, where women are being raped as they live in tents, following a terrible earthquake. The list can go on “ad nauseum”.

Jesus came into this world. The values He brought in Himself were totally contrary to the ways of this world. He came to announce the forgiveness of sinners. He welcomed the poor, the strangers and the outcasts and He offered all a future. When Jesus brought this message of love, hope and peace, He clashed with this violent world. Jesus needed to suffer to enter in His glory.

After His resurrection, while walking with disciples on the way to Emmaus, we read: **“25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets**

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have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"
(Lu 24:25-26 NIV)

Jesus threatened our world of violence and He died. He threatened our world by His statement that He was God, by preaching the Kingdom of God which is based on love, justice, and peace – a kingdom that clashed with the kingdom of this world.

Jesus became sin for all of us. The perfect man took our fallen nature, given to sin and death, and He did for us what we could never do ourselves or for ourselves. He submitted in perfection to the Father. Jesus the Man, being God also in the one person, obeyed the Father for us!

As we think about this, when we look at Jesus, we also see the Father's heart for us. **"44 ¶ Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. 45 When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me."** (Joh 12:44-45 NIV). This is important to remember. The fullness of God was in Jesus Christ when he walked the earth.

It is in a world captive to the way of violence that Jesus lived and died for us all. But God raised the crucified Jesus and made him the chief cornerstone of a new humanity that no longer espouses the way of violence, that no longer needs scapegoats, that no longer wills to live at the expense of victims, that no longer imagines or worships a bloodthirsty God, that is no longer interested in legitimations of violence, but that follows Jesus in the power of a new Spirit. (Daniel L. Migliore Faith Seeking Understanding p. 190)

The following 3 headings are from this same book:

- 1- Christ died for us in order to expose our world of violence for what it is —a world that stands under God's judgment, a world that is in deadly bondage and that leads to universal destruction.**
 - In the death of Jesus, we see the non-violent love of God. The Kingdom of God is totally different from the kingdoms of this world that so readily resort to violence of all sort to fix everything.

- 2- Christ died for us in order to extend the healing love of God to all the violated and to mediate the forgiving love of God to all the violators.**
 - *"The life and death of Christ are more than the revelation of God's judgment on our world of violence. They are supremely the gift of God's own costly love, mediating God's forgiveness and friendship in the midst of our violent world",* as Migliore says so well.
 - In Jesus, God takes all our sins, our hatred, our violence, our resentments, our bitterness, our envy, our greed, our quarreling, our pride, our idolatries, everything, and He brings them to an end. While becoming sin for us, with its entire load, He never sways or swerves away from the Father's love and will. He stays faithful to the Father to the end. He did it for all of us because He is God and Man.

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- Jesus Christ exposes the lie that violence is the only way. He refuses to give into it! He doesn't offer counter-violence.
 - Remember the scripture reading in Romans 12:17 — **Do not repay anyone evil for evil?** This is what Jesus did.
 - This is the very costly gift of the love of God for us! The Father gave us His Son to rescue the world and to take away the sin of the world as John the Baptist said.
 - In Jesus, the Father was reconciling the world to Himself.
 - All men will be drawn to Jesus. **“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”** (Joh 12:32 NIV)

 - Remember the word of Jesus at the last supper - **“25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”** (1Co 11:25-26 NIV), Every time we come to the Lord’s table to remember and to celebrate the life of Jesus and His name, we offer and receive forgiveness by the power of the Holy Spirit, the cycle of violence and counter-violence begins to give way to the order of the new world!
- 3- Christ died for in sin order to open, in the midst of our violent world, a new future of reconciliation and peace for a new humanity and a new creation.**
- Christ is now alive. Christ has conquered evil in his death and resurrection.
 - He has shown that he the life of God shines in the worst of human savagery and barbarism.
 - His compassion is greater than the inane passion of this world in violence and counter-violence.
 - His way of life is greater than our way of death. As Ro 3:10-17 (NIV) tells us **“10 As it is written: “There is no-one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one.” 13 “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practise deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” 14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways, 17 and the way of peace they do not know.”**
 - Christ has come to show us the way of peace. He is the way. He is our peace. All is found in Him.

As we remember the cross, as we remember that Jesus is now alive, as we look at our world filled which has so much violence, unrest and unsettledness, the love of God that we see at the cross gives us hope. Violence will be no more, one day. The world will be at peace! (Isa. 11, Rev. 21-22)

God has stooped to our lowest denominator. He has descended into our hell to bring us out of it. He submitted to violence. He overcame evil with good!