

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 124**  
**“Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol?” Part 1**  
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**A BLESSED NEW YEAR to all our subscribers! May the Lord continue to richly bless your life and work with His wisdom and grace during this new year.**

The year 2004 came to an end with the destructive fury of Tsunami, the worst catastrophe in recent history that struck 11 countries, mostly in Southern Asia, on Sunday December 26, 2004. Tsunami dwarfs everything experienced during the past half a century in terms of death and destruction. In a few hours the 9 points richter scale earthquake created jet-speed waves that unleashed their energy upon various shores, leaving a wide arc of devastation extending from Indonesia and Thailand to India and Sri Lanka all the way to Somalia in Africa. Over 150,000 persons are reported dead and the count continues.

Several subscribers have asked me to comment from a biblical perspective on this shocking disaster. I will attempt to share few thoughts by way of introduction to this lengthy newsletter dealing with the origin of the Christian Cross. This study has been for me a time-consuming research project, but I believe that it was urgently needed to clear the prevailing misconception regarding the alleged pagan origin of the Christian Cross.

Initially I intended to post in this newsletters the whole essay on “Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol?” The essay consists of about 50 pages, including several graphics. But, after adding several pages of comments on the biblical significance of Tsunami, I realized that the newsletter had become far too long for some of our subscribers whose servers limit the length of incoming messages. Thus, I decided to post this essay in two installments.

This first installment examines the popular arguments for the pagan origin of the Christian Cross. The second installment (to be posted in about a week) deals with the origin and development of the Cross. We

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shall see how the Cross was perverted from a plain symbol of redemption to an object of idolatrous worship. Some subscribers may rejoice that they do not have to read the whole essay at once. My students were always happy when I reduced the reading assignments.

### **A LOOK AT TSUNAMI FOR A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

From a biblical perspective the Tsunami tragedy is purely an act of God, because there are no human factors to blame. There are no loggers to blame for clearing forests, no engineers to fault for poor design or construction, no government planners to call to account for allowing urban development in risky places. The slipping of the tectonic plates on the ocean-bed off Sumatra, cannot be blamed on global warming or on the lack of adequate precautionary measures. What happened is beyond human capacity to influence or control.

Some Christian wish to blame the Devil for such natural disasters, but nowhere the Bible attributes to Satan power over weather, natural phenomena or disastrous events. Satan is sometimes called the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4, John 12:31, 14:30, Eph 6:12), but his power appears to be limited to tempt and deceive.

For Christians who believe in God as Creator and Controller of this world, there is only the difficult conclusion that the responsibility for the Tsunami disaster rests directly with God. Scripture tells us that God controls the rain (Deut 11:14-17, 28:12, Job 5:10, Matt 5:45, James 5:17-18), lightning (Ps 97:4), thunder, snow, whirlwind, flood, clouds “to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world, whether for correction, or for his land, or for love, he causes it to happen” (Job 37:12-13; cf. Job 28:10-11, Ps 107:25, 29, Nahum 1:3-4).

God causes earthquakes (Job 9:5, 28:9, Ps 18:7, 77:16-18, 97:3-5, Isa 2:19, 24:20, 29:6, Jer 10:10, Nahum 1:5, Heb 12:26), and the mountains to be thrown down and the valleys to fill (Ezek 38:20). The forces of nature never spiral out of God’s control. They are controlled by God who “shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble” (Job 9:6). God “looks on the earth and it trembles, touches the mountains and they smoke!” (Ps 104:32).

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## What Are the Implications of the Tsunami Disaster?

If God is in control, then, what are the implications of the Tsunami disaster? Did God choose to strike Southern Asia because He regarded the Hindus of India, the Muslim of Indonesia and the Buddhists of Thailand as especially *deserving* His divine punishment? But, then, what about the hurricanes that devastated several costal towns in Florida? Are the Floridians *deserving* divine punishment more than the rest of the Americans?

The attempt to explain natural disasters as divine punishment upon deserving sinners, ignores that sometimes many of the victims are innocent children, as in the case of the Tsunami's disaster. And even among the adults there are godly people who live according the moral principles implanted in their consciences. An old woman in a devastated village in southern India's Tamil Nadu state, wailed: "Why did you God do this to us? What have we done to upset you?"

The answer of the Bible is that those who suffer or die because of natural disasters are NOT necessarily singled out by God as deserving special punishment. Jesus refuted this fallacious reasoning by explaining that those eighteen persons who were killed by the collapse of Siloam's tower, were no worse offenders than the rest of the people in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4). That tragedy, however, was to bring home the important lesson that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). "These startling calamities," writes Ellen White, "were designed to lead them to humble their hearts, and repent of their sins." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 213).

The Bible suggests three major reasons for the destructions caused by natural disaster like Tsunami.

### A Call to Repentance

First, disasters serve as a wake up call to repentance for mankind. Disasters can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. When a war breaks out, or an earthquake destroys countless lives and property, or a drought burns the crops and dries up the water supply, or an epidemic disease victimizes millions of persons, many people will call out to God

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either in curse or prayer. C. S. Lewis wrote that “pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world.”

It was an earthquake that caused the jailer at Philippi to exclaim: “Men, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). It was a famine that sent King Ahab searching everywhere for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:10). It was a plague that brought Pharaoh to his knees, confessing before Moses: “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me” (Ex 10:16-17).

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus predicted that certain calamities will occur before His Return. Because of their nature and function, we can call these calamities “signs of divine judgment.” Specifically Jesus said: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8). Luke adds “pestilences” to the listing of calamities (Luke 21:11).

The manifestation of divine judgment through calamities is intended to summon people to repent. The prophet Joel, for example, describes a disastrous drought and fire which destroyed the harvest, the pasture, and the trees and dried up the water brooks (Joel 1:11-12, 19-20). In the context of this calamity, the prophet calls upon the people to repent: “Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, . . . Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God; and cry to the Lord” (Joel 1:5, 14).

### **An Announcement of the Final Judgment**

Second, disasters are used by God not only to summon people to repentance, but also to announce His final judgment which is associated with the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament and with the Day of Christ’s Coming in the New Testament. For example, Joel sees the historical famine described above as a sign that “the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes” (Joel 1:15).

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In the prophetic perspective, disasters such as wars, earthquakes, and famines not only reveal God's immediate judgment upon human ungodliness and wickedness (Rom 1:18), but are also harbingers of the final judgment to come. They constantly remind mankind that the Judge is standing at the doors (James 5:9). "Every report of calamity by sea or land," states Ellen White, "is a testimony to the fact that the end of all things is at hand." (*Evangelism*, p. 219).

### **A Pledge of the Certainty of the End**

A third noteworthy aspect of calamities is that they serve to point to the certainty of the approaching End. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as disasters occurring not exclusively at the very end but during the whole time preceding His Return. This point is implied in the admonition not to be alarmed by the occurrence of these signs "for this must take place, but *the end is not yet*" (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). In fact, these signs are said to represent "*but the beginning of the sufferings*" (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8).

The latter expression was used in Judaism in a technical way to describe the period of suffering ("the birth-pangs of the Messiah") that would precede the establishment of the messianic Kingdom. Possibly Jesus made use of this familiar concept to characterize the conditions that will precede His Return. The occurrences of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences do not pinpoint but point to the approaching End. They constitute a pledge that the End will surely come.

By saying that wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences are "but the beginning of the sufferings" (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8), Christ clearly implied that they will intensify as the End approaches. "But the beginning" presupposes that there will be more and worse disasters yet to come. These will cause such a "great tribulation" that, Jesus said, "if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved" (Matt 24:22; cf. Mark 13:20).

Christ's prediction of the intensification of calamities before the End finds support in the prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. These books, as I have shown in *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, predict an intensification of warfare and disasters prior to the Coming of

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the Lord. (If you do not have this timely book, just call us at (269) 471-2915 or email us your request, and we will mail it to you immediately).

Both natural and man-made disasters are increasing today in different parts of the world. Through natural cataclysms and man-made environmental crises, God is announcing His impending judgment upon human rebellion and is calling people to repent before it is too late.

The unprecedented fulfillment in our time of the signs of divine judgment predicted by Christ is a clear harbinger of the impending final judgment that Christ will soon execute upon mankind at His Second Coming. Through natural disasters like Tsunami God is calling upon unbelievers to repent and upon believers to live holy and godly lives while “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12). Let us take to heart the prophetic implications of Tsunami.

ADRA International urgently solicits emergency donations for this response. Only monetary donations are being accepted. Donations can be made to the Asia Tsunami Crisis Fund online at [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org) or by calling 800-424-ADRA (2372).

## **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of January and February 2005. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars.

### **JANUARY 14-15, 2005: CHARLESTON SDA CHURCH**

Location: 2518 Savannah Highway, Charleston, SC 29414.

For information call Pastor Eli Rojas at (843) 766-9556 or 843-345-7950.

### **JANUARY 21-22: ORLANDO SPANISH SDA CHURCHES**

Location: The seminar is sponsored by the Sheeler Oaks Spanish SDA, located at 1822 Sheeler Road, Apopka, Florida 32703. During Sabbath School I will be speaking at the Apopka Spanish SDA Church, located at Apopka, Florida 32704.

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For information call Pastor Joshue Parker at (407) 814-8735 or Pastor Jorge Suarez at (407)886-0385.

**FEBRUARY 4-5: ROLLING HILLS SDA CHURCH, L A, CA**

Location: 28340 Highridge Road, Rolling Hills Estates, California 90274-3405.

For information call Pastor Jeff Rosenthal at (714) 522-5280 or (714) 928-6596.

**FEBRUARY 11-12: VICTORIA SDA CHURCH, BRONX, NY**

Location: 1271 Burke Avenue, Bronx, New York 10469

For information call Pastor Bancroft Daughma at (914) 381-1292

Thank you for informing your friends about the time and place of the seminars.

May I share with you a story that was emailed to me few days ago.

**HOW PASTOR TONY LANGE AND HIS CHURCH  
ACCEPTED THE SABBATH**

Pastor Tony Langue was raised a Roman Catholic and attended the Catholic Church until about the age of 12. At the age of 17 he was baptized into an Evangelical church. For the past 20 years and has defended Sunday as the biblical day of rest and worship.

About four months ago he was looking through some books in a used bookstore and came across Samuel Bacchiocchi's book *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*. Thinking this would be a book that would bolster his beliefs, he purchased it for 25 cents! While reading the book he was very surprised to discover that Dr. Bacchiocchi was in fact defending the Sabbath as the correct biblical day to worship. As he continued reading he became increasingly convicted that in fact Dr. Bacchiocchi was correct. The Sabbath is the day on which we should worship and he had been wrong all these years.

As that conviction grew, he became convinced he should present the Sabbath to his congregation. He decided to present it in a series of four sermons over four consecutive Sundays. After the first Sunday

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he handed out a questionnaire to every member asking them what they thought of the sermon and asking if they would like him to continue the series on this same topic. Recognizing that this had the potential to be a very divisive topic to his congregation, he had put out a fleece and asked God to give him a sign that he was proceeding in the right direction by having a minimum of 80% of the congregation respond positively to his survey. As he counted up the surveys after that first Sunday, God answered his prayers—80% of the congregation indicated they would like him to continue!

The elder from the Quincy Adventist Church and his wife attended that first sermon as a way of supporting Tony. They said it was the best sermon on the Sabbath either of them has ever heard—and both are children of Adventist pastors!

Tony preached on the Sabbath for the next two weeks (making a total of three consecutive Sundays on that topic. After his sermon on the third Sunday he announced to the church that, beginning Friday evening December 3, and continuing from then on, the church doors will be open Friday evening and Sabbath but will be closed on Sundays. The Quincy Community Church officially started keeping the Sabbath Friday evening, December 3, and continued Sabbath, December 4,

One thing that is difficult for him is that his brother-in-law was one of his elders and unfortunately, to date, his brother-in-law does not share his conviction. As a result his brother-in-law has resigned as an elder in his church. However, his brother-in-law continues to attend and Pastor Lang is praying that, over time, his brother-in-law will also be convicted.

Pastor Lang placed an ad in the Quincy newspaper to notify people that from now on the Quincy Community Church will meet on Saturdays, rather than Sundays. The church answering machine also indicates this.

Pastor Lang has received cards from some pastors telling him they are praying for him and he has really appreciated these encouraging messages. He continues to be in contact with Dr. Samuel Bacchiocchi and now has most of Dr. Bacchiocchi's books. Please continue to keep these folk in your prayers.



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If you would like to also send him a note or card of encouragement, his address is:

Pastor Tony Lange  
Community Church of Quincy.  
P O Box 1715  
Quincy, CA 95971

## A REPORT OF THE 3ABN INTERVIEW

On December 9, 2004, I was invited by 3ABN to share the highlights of my latest book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History* during a two hours interview conducted by Dennis Shelton. I looked forward to this experience with anticipation and apprehension. What made me apprehensive was the notion of being interrogated for two solid hours in an unfamiliar setting.

The apprehension dissipated as soon as I met the staff of the studio, especially Danny Shelton. I found Danny to be very congenial and informal. The friendly setting facilitated a most pleasant dialogue. Danny wisely decided to spend the first 45 minutes to clear the air of some allegations about my relationship to the Vatican, and my position on the authority of the Bible and Ellen White's writings.

The fact that I received a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of *summa cum laude* on my school work and research on the change of the Sabbath, has made some fellow believers suspicious about me. In the interview I was able to clarify that the reason for receiving the gold medal is not because I renegaded my faith, but simply because my research proves the validity of the historical Catholic claim to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday. In the interview I mentioned the recent attempts of the Pontifical Gregorian University to discredit my academic achievements, because of the controversy sparked by *From Sabbath to Sunday* in Catholic circles.

The major part of the interview dealt with some of the fundamental Catholic heresies that are embedded in Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*. (Incidentally, last week an acquaintance of Mel Gibson, ordered an autographed copy of my book to deliver in person to him). Unfortu-

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nately millions of sincere people have accepted the Gibson's version of the Passion as biblical truth. The reality is that 95 percent of the movie is based on Catholic legends and myths that grossly distort the meaning of the Cross. The interview, as well as the book, provide the information necessary to help the viewing public to distinguish between what is biblical and what is unbiblical about Gibson's portrayal of Christ's Passion.

The two hours interview went so fast that only few minutes were left at the end to discuss a major part of the book dealing with the centrality, necessity, and achievements of the Cross. This section offers valuable insights into the study of our new Sabbath School Quarterly entitled is HIS WONDROUS CROSS. THE STORY OF OUR REDEMPTION (January, February, March 2005). You will find the book to be a valuable resource for the study or teaching of the current Sabbath School lessons.

The response from the worldwide viewing audience surpassed my fondest expectation. Thousand of people called or emailed messages to express their appreciation for the interview. So far 3ABN has passed on to me only ONE negative message received from a brother who felt that my reference to the existence of some inaccuracies in the Bible and the Writings of Ellen White, undermines the authority of both. This is totally untrue. In view of the importance of this subject, in the next newsletter, I will submit a brief study on "The Seventh-day Adventist Understanding of the Nature of the Bible and of Ellen White's Writings."

Even before the interview was over, our home telephone started ringing and it continued non-stop for several days. Calls kept coming in so fast that our voice mail box got filled faster than we could empty. Viewers have been calling us from such far away countries as Australia, Singapore, South Africa, Germany, England, Fuji, Jamaica, Malaysia, Sweden, and across the USA.

The many messages of appreciation have been of great encouragement to us. It is evident that among the viewers of 3ABN there are persons with an inquiring mind who appreciate the opportunity to understand more fully biblical truths. This experience may encourage 3ABN to feature from time to time Bible scholars capable of addressing current issues from a biblical perspective. The legitimate concern of 3ABN is that often Bible scholars are too deep for the average viewer of their programs.

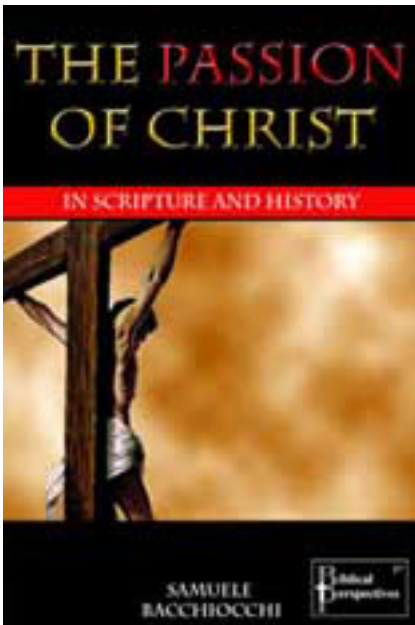
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In few days we shipped over 4000 copies of *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. None of my previous 16 books ever sold so fast. To facilitate a massive distribution of this timely book, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$5.00 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.

This special offer makes it possible to donate a copy of this timely book to neighbors and friends who have seen Gibson's movie. You will find that the book helps people to understand not only the Catholic heresies embedded in the movie, but also the unique Adventist understanding of the necessity and achievements of the Cross.

If you were unable to watch the interview, we will be glad to air-mail you immediately a copy of the recording in either a DVD disk or a VIDEO tape. To receive your DVD disk or VIDEO tape, simply calls us at (269) 471-2915 or (269) 978-6878. If the line is busy, leave your phone number and we will call you back within few moments. You may also email us your request at <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)> We want to make it possible for all our subscribers who do not have access to the 3ABN to benefit from this timely interview.

### **SPECIAL OFFER ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY**



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The long-awaited book **THE PASSION OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY** (208 pages), came off the press just in time for the December 9, 2004, 3ABN interview. The demand for this timely book has surpassed my fondest expectations.

You will be proud to have copies of this timely book for your personal study of the Sabbath School and to give with confidence to your friends. The book is factual, not confrontational. It is designed to help many people to recognize the fundamental Catholic heresies embedded in Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. More important still, the book present in a clear and compelling way the unique Adventist understanding of the redemptive accomplishments of the Cross, within the context of Protestant and Catholic teachings.

To make it possible for many to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book by the case of 30 copies at the special offer of only \$5.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. You can order a single copy or a case of 30 copies online at <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/passionoffer.htm>, or by emailing us your order at <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com)>, or by calling us at (269) 471-2915, (269) 978-6878.

## **NEW OFFER ON HITACHI LCD PROJECTORS**

Because of the large volume of HITACHI projectors sold to Adventist churches and schools during 2004, HITACHI has reduced the price even more on most of their HITACHI projectors. For example, the new price for the award winning HITACHI CP-X328 High Resolution 2000 lumens, is now only \$1,695.00, including 3 years of 24/7 warranty, instead of the factory suggested retail price of \$7,495.00.

Read the rest of the story about the new offer on HITACHI projectors at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/projector.html>. If you have a problem accessing my website, just email us your enquiry or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to give you all the information about the special HITACHI offer.

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**THE BEST SDA COMMENTARY ON REVELATION**

Much of the prophetic message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church derives from the Book of Revelation. Yet until now our church did not have an authoritative commentary. Finally, Andrews University Press has published a thorough *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, authored by an outstanding Adventist scholar. This new commentary provides a wealth of information needed to unlock the meaning of the prophetic message of Revelation for our times.

Read the full story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/RevelationofJesusChrist.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the book through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and mail you the book immediately.

**SPECIAL ONETIME OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL MY CD-ROM AND DVD RECORDINGS**

For the first time we are offering the complete package of all my recordings for only \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$490.00. The package includes the latest 3ABN two hours interview on a DVD disk, ONE CD-ROM with all my research (over 7000 pages), ONE CD-ROM with all my PowerPoint lectures, TWO MP3 AUDIO disks with 22 popular lectures, and the FIVE DVD DISKS or FIVE VIDEO TAPES with 10 live PowerPoint lectures of my SABBATH/ADVENT seminars, taped few months ago by a TV crew at Andrews University.

The special offer is ONLY \$100.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$490.00. Read the details at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/SPECIALPACKAGEOFFER.htm>. If you have a problem ordering the package through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order by phone and mail you the package immediately.

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## **BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND**

If you are planning to travel to London, England in the near future, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best bed and breakfast service you can find in London for only £20.00 a day. I stayed with this couple numerous times and they have always treated me so well that I promised to announce their services in this newsletter. They have three nice guest rooms, a lovely garden, and a modern bathroom. The home is close to Heathrow airport and at a walking distance from the Subway. You will be treated royally at a bargain price. You can see the pictures and read the details at my website <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

## **AN INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA CD-ROM OF THE GREAT CONTROVERSY**

Have you ever wished that you could see the unfolding of the Great Controversy during the history of Christianity? This has been the dream of Gerard Damsteegt, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at our Andrews University Theological Seminary. With the help of competent people who worked with him during the past 8 years and the generous contribution of supporters who believed in this project, Damsteegt has produced an incredible interactive multimedia CD-ROM that will thrill your soul and enrich your mind.

Read the rest of the story at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/TheGreatControversyExp.htm>. If you have a problem ordering this marvellous CD-ROM through my website, just email us your order or call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915. We will be glad to take your order and AIRMAIL you immediately this fantastic multimedia interactive CD-ROM.

**“Is the Christian Cross a Pagan Symbol?”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**

**Retired Professor of Theology and Church History,**

**Andrews University**

The Cross is the oldest, dearest, and most abused symbol of the Christian faith. During the history of Christianity, the Cross has been

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used in contradictory ways from the sign of redemption, to an ornament to decorate tombs, monuments, churches, or bodies, to an object of worship, to a magical relic to protect people from sickness and temptation, and to a sword to slaughter the infidels. During the Crusades, the Cross emblazoned on the tunic of each crusader, became a clarion call to murder the Jews at home and the Moslem in the Holy Land.

### **Should the Cross Be Reclaimed?**

It is not surprising that Christians are divided over the use of the Cross. Some venerate the Cross as an object of worship or magic relic, while others (especially Sabbatarian and some Calvinistic churches) reject it as a sign of idolatry and past atrocities. In her insightful article “The Cross: Should a Symbol Betrayed Be Reclaimed?” Mary Boys briefly traces the paradoxical history of the Cross. She argues that the Cross is a symbol that has been betrayed and needs to be reclaimed. During the Crusades the Cross was used as a weapon to kill infidels, rather than as an anchor to bring hope to lost sinners. She proposes that “It is now time to ask whether the cross itself can be redeemed.”

Boys concludes her article saying: “Like all symbols, the Cross evokes more than one can explain. It condenses death and life into one symbol. It enfolds some of the deepest fears of humanity—vulnerability, betrayal, pain, forsakenness—and transfigures them into expressions of hope. When Christians proclaim the power of the cross, they are voicing their confidence that death is not the end, that the grip of evil has been broken, and that the powers and principalities who seem to control this world will be banished. When Christians proclaim the power of the cross, they are declaring, albeit often with tremulous voice, that at times one must simply endure suffering, that certain things in life must be borne. And they are declaring that in the passion of Jesus we find a model for our fidelity.”

But, she continues noting that because the Cross has been abused, “it is not a symbol that can be reappropriated without repentance. The story I have traced serves to remind Christians of their betrayal of Jesus, the Jew from Nazareth, and their defilement of the symbol of His suffering. Too often have Christians become, in Paul’s words, ‘enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Phil 3:18).

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She closes, saying: “Just as a church building that has been profaned by a violent or blasphemous deed needs rededication, so too, the symbol the church carries must be purified by its people’s repentance. Only then can the cross embody the power of reconciliation for which Jesus lived and died.”

Boyd’s appeal to reclaim the Cross, by repenting for its abuse, is a timely message for all Christians to heed, including Seventh-day Adventists. The many critical comments to my newsletter “Should Adventists Object to the Use of the Cross? (no. 122), suggest that even our Seventh-day Adventist church needs to reclaim the legitimate meaning and use of the Cross.

### **Some Adventists Strongly Object to the Use of the Cross**

Some subscribers expressed strong disagreement to my comment that the Christian Cross is not a pagan symbol. I welcome disagreement when it is motivated by the desire to deepen the understanding of the subject. Unfortunately, some critics express their disagreement by asking to have their names removed from the subscribers’ list. This is not the first time that readers have unsubscribed after I posted a controversial essay. The inability to consider a differing view point, reveals the unwillingness to expose oneself to the possibility of new light.

Some critics of my comments emailed me lengthy quotes from two major books that argue for the pagan origin of the Christian Cross. The two books are *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop and *Babylon Mystery Religion* by Ralph Woodrow. One subscriber wrote: “Alexander Hislop’s, *The Two Babylons*, clearly proves that the cross was the sign of the false messiah, Tamuz. I was surprised that your scholarship on this subject did not extend that far back into history.”

The truth is that my scholarship extends beyond the Babylonian Tamuz into the dawn of civilization. Crosses of all sizes and shapes have been used during human history as ornaments, religious symbols, representations of the four points of the compass, the four winds, the cross-like corona of the sun during an eclipse, and even the unity between the male phallus (vertical bar) and the female vagina (horizontal bar).



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What my critics ignore is that none of the pagan crosses relate to the meaning and message of the Christian Cross. Building an argument from external similarities while ignoring the internal differences of meaning and function, is an unsound method of research. The fact that Italian spaghetti look like Chinese noodles, hardly proves that spaghetti are of Chinese origin.

The critical comments received have made me aware of my failure to clarify in what sense the Christian Cross is not a pagan symbol. What I meant is not that the cross was never used as a symbol by ancient pagan nations. It is a wellknown and established fact that crosses of all sizes and shapes have been used since the dawn of civilization. Instead, what I meant is that the origin and meaning of the Christian Cross, derives, not from its pagan usages, but from the Christian's desire to find an appropriate visible symbol to represent their faith.

My research shows that the early Christians chose the symbol of the Cross to express their faith in redemption through Christ's sacrificial death, not because of pagan influences, but in spite of the scorn and taunt of the pagans for using such a shameful sign.

Unfortunately, what began as a legitimate symbol, it was gradually prostituted into a pagan idolatrous object. The perversion of the Cross, as well as of other Christian institutions such as the Sabbath, the Lord's Supper, the Passover, and Baptism, does not negate their legitimate beginnings. The reasons for this conclusion are submitted in this study.

### **Evolution of the Adventist Attitude Toward the Cross**

Historically our Adventist church has viewed the Cross as a pagan symbol, especially in view of its idolatrous use in the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The same position has been help by Calvinistic oriented churches, like the Christian Reformed Church. Consequently, as a general rule the Cross has not been displayed in Adventist churches and schools. The situation is gradually changing, especially in non-Catholic countries, where an increasing number of Adventist churches are displaying the Cross.

For example, in the outdoor Garden of Prayer of Andrews University Pioneer Memorial Church—the flagship church of our denomina-

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tion—there is an impressive 10 feet Cross placed in front of a recessed black granite wall. Also on the facade of the brand new Andrews University Theological Seminary building, there is a massive stone Cross about 40 feet tall inset in the facade. To my knowledge nobody has complained about these impressive Crosses, or about the other Passion Play Crosses which have become a permanent fixture of our beautiful campus.

The gradual introduction and acceptance of the Cross in Adventist churches, has been influenced, more by conformity to religious trends, than by a fresh reexamination of its historical origin and of its biblical legitimacy. The awareness of the importance of the subject, has compelled me to undertake this research, which I hope will provide the starting point for a reexamination of our Adventist church position on the use of the Cross. Most likely other churches facing the same controversy over the use of the Cross, will benefit from this study.

### **Objective of this Essay**

This essay looks at the historical origin of the use of the Cross in early Christianity. The aim of this investigation is to determine what role, if any, the pagan use of the cross in the Roman world, played into the Christian adoption of the Cross as the symbol of their faith. Simply stated, our objective is to determine if the origin of the Christian Cross was influenced by its use in the pagan Roman world, or by Christian's desire to portray visually the essence of their faith—salvation through Christ's sacrificial death.

This study is divided in two parts. The first part—posted in this newsletter—responds to the popular arguments for the alleged pagan origin of the Christian Cross. The second part—to be published in the next newsletter—traces the origin and evolution of the Christian Cross from a sign of redemption to a perverted idolatrous object of worship.

This essay is submitted with the intent to offer the starting point for a fresh discussion on the use of the Cross in our Adventist churches or institutions. This study is by no means the final word. Time and space limitations allow only for preliminary observations. Much more research and discussion is needed, especially today, when, as reported in a previous newsletter (No. 122), some Adventists are leaving the church over the use of the Cross.

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## The Influence of *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop

The traditional thinking of Adventists and non-Adventists against the use of the Cross, has been influenced by authors who argue for the pagan origin of the Cross, which finds correspondence in its idolatrous use in Roman Catholic church. The most influential book has been *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop. Though the book was first printed in 1856, it still enjoys considerable popularity. The book is listed 8110 times in Google and is widely sold today, even at our ABC bookstores.

*The Two Babylons* has impacted the thinking of many people, including many Adventists because its impressive documentation gives the impression of sound scholarship. Its basic premise is that the pagan religious system of ancient Babylon has continued to our days within the Roman Catholic religious system. The latter is the modern counterpart of ancient Babylon. Revelation's reference to the "Mystery of Babylon the Great," is used to support this comparison.

There is no question that the false worship promoted by ancient Babylon, finds its counterpart today in the endtime false worship promoted, especially by the Catholic religious system. The problem arises when detailed correspondence is established by fabricating arbitrary connections. Unaware of this problem, most respondents to my last newsletter quote extensively *The Two Babylons* as if it were the "Webster" authority on the definition of paganism in Christianity.

### An Evaluation of Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons*

When I first read *The Two Babylons*, I was impressed by the immense documentation used by Hislop to prove the influence of Babylonian paganism in Roman Catholicism. In fact, initially I was so impressed by the book that I called the publisher to discuss the possibility of promoting and distributing this book.

But, after a more attentive reading, my initial enthusiasm subsided. I soon became aware of the faulty methodology used by Hislop to defend his thesis. The man had a real genius for pulling together isolated myths and re-translating names in order to prove that all forms of paganism have a common origin in ancient Babylon and an ultimate manifestation

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in Roman Catholicism. His premise is that any accidental resemblance in religious matters, no matter how far fetched, proves a common descent and identity.

Hislop attempts to prove that all kinds of pagan practices started in Babylon by using examples from other nations that existed centuries apart. His rationale seems to be that since all forms of paganism derive from Babylon, then all pagan beliefs and practices scattered throughout the world can ultimately be traced back to ancient Babylon. The result is that ultimately Hislop tries to prove too much, by finding in the Babylonian religious system, not only the corruptions of Roman Catholicism, but even of legitimate Christian symbols like the Cross.

Hislop ignores two major points. The first is that even pagan symbols and practices can be purified and used to express biblical truths. For example, the circumcision, discussed at length by Hislop in chapter 4 of his book, was a common pagan rite long before God adopted it and purified to serve as a sign of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It is evident that the pagan use of circumcision does not make the biblical circumcision a pagan practice.

The second and more important point, is that during the first three centuries Christians sought creative ways to disguise the Cross through such symbols like the anchor, the trident, and the Chi Rho, in order to avoid the Roman scorn and sarcasm for the Cross. Had Hislop taken time to study the process that led Christians to adopt the emblem of the Cross, he would have been surprised to discover that the worship of the Babylonian Tamus was practically unknown to the Christians in particular and to the Romans in general. Consequently, Christians could hardly have been influenced by the “T” of the Babylonian Tamus, when it was largely unknown at their time.

### **The Experience of Ralph Woodrow**

The experience of Ralph Woodrow, an evangelist and an author of 13 books, illustrates how an ardent admirer of *The Two Babylons* eventually became one of its foremost critics. In his article “The Two Babylons: A Case Study in Poor Research Methodology,” Ralph Woodrow explains how *The Two Babylons* initially impacted upon his thinking. “Its basic premise is that the pagan religion of ancient Babylon has continued

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to our day disguised as the Roman Catholic Church, prophesied in the Book of Revelation as ‘Mystery Babylon the Great’ (thus, the idea of two Babylons—one ancient and one modern). Because this book is detailed and has a multitude of notes and references, I assumed, as did many others, it was factual. We quoted ‘Hislop’ as an authority on paganism just as ‘Webster’ might be quoted on word definitions.

“As a young evangelist, I began to preach on the mixture of paganism with Christianity, and eventually I wrote a book based on Hislop, titled *Babylon Mystery Religion* (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Assn., 1966). In time, my book became quite popular, went through many printings, and was translated into Korean, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and several other languages. Hundreds quoted from it. Some regarded me as an authority on the subject of ‘pagan mixture.’ Even the noted Roman Catholic writer Karl Keating said, ‘Its best-known proponent is Ralph Woodrow, author of *Babylon Mystery Religion*’ (*Christian Research Journal*, Volume 22, Issue 2 2000, Book Reviews p. 54).

“Many preferred my book over *The Two Babylons* because it was easier to read and understand. Sometimes the two books were confused with each other, and once I even had the experience of being greeted as ‘Reverend Hislop!’ As time went on, however, I began to hear rumblings that Hislop was not a reliable historian . . .”

Eventually Woodrow decided to take time to examine the sources cited by Hislop. As he did this, it became clear to him that Hislop’s ‘history’ is often only an arbitrary piecing together of ancient myths, which do not support his arguments.

Woodrow writes: “The subtitle for Hislop’s book is *The Papal Worship Proved to Be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*. Yet when I went to reference works such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *The Americana*, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *The Worldbook Encyclopedia* – carefully reading their articles on ‘Nimrod’ and ‘Semiramis’ – not one said anything about Nimrod and Semiramis being husband and wife. They did not even live in the same century. Nor is there any basis for Semiramis being the mother of Tammuz. I realized these ideas were all Hislop’s inventions. . . .”

“I saw that a more direct and valid argument against errors in the Roman Catholic Church (or any other group) is the Bible itself, not an-

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cient mythology. For example, the Bible speaks of a minister being ‘the husband of but one wife’ and that ‘forbidding people to marry’ is a doctrine of devils (1 Tim 3:2; 4:3). This provides a stronger argument against priestly celibacy than trying to show that ancient priests of Semiramis castrated themselves.”

### ***Babylon Mystery Religion Was Taken out of Circulation***

Woodrow continues explaining that “For these and many other reasons, I pulled my own book, *Babylon Mystery Religion*, out of print despite its popularity. This was not done because I was being threatened in any way or persecuted. This decision was made because of conviction, not compromise. While my original book did contain some valid information. I could not in good conscience continue to publish a book against pagan mixture knowing that it contained a mixture itself of misinformation about Babylonian origins.

“I have since replace this book with *The Babylon Connection?*—a 128-page book with 60 illustration and 400 footnote references. It is an appeal to all my brothers and sisters in Christ who feel that finding Babylonian origins for present-day customs or beliefs is of great importance. My advice, based on my own experience, is to move cautiously in this area, lest we major on minors. If there are things in our lives or churches that are indeed pagan or displeasing to the Lord they should be dealt with, of course. But in attempting to defuse the confusion of Babylon, we must guard against creating a new ‘Babylon’ (confusion) of our own making.” (*Christian Research Journal*, Volume 22, Issue 2 2000, Book Reviews p. 55-56).

Woodrow’s warning against creating a new Babylon (confusion) by making legitimate Christian symbols and rites, allegedly pagan, is relevant to our investigation of the origin of the Christian Cross. We need to be aware of the danger of deciding on the pagan nature of the Christian Cross solely on the basis of its use among pagan nations.

### **The Alleged Pagan Nature of the Christian Cross**

Hislop attempts to prove that “the Christian cross was originally no Christian emblem at all, but was the mystic Tau of the Chaldeans and

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Egyptians—the true original form of the letter T—the initial of the name of Tammuz. . . . The Babylonian cross was the recognized emblem of Tammuz. . . . That mystic Tau was marked in baptism on the foreheads of those initiated in the Mysteries, and was used in every variety of ways as a most sacred symbol.”

To strengthen his case for the pagan origin and nature of the Christians cross, Hislop appeals also to the fact that “there is hardly a pagan tribe where the cross has not been found. The cross was worshipped by the Pagan Celts long before the incarnation and death of Christ. . . . It was worshipped in Mexico for ages before the Roman Catholic missionaries set foot there, large stone crosses being erected, probably to the ‘god of rain.’”

The widespread use of the cross in the ancient world leads Hislop to conclude that the current symbol of the Cross was brought into the church after the conversion of Constantine, by the pagan multitudes, who “flocked into the church . . . they brought along with them their predilection for the old symbol . . . Thus, by the ‘sign of the cross,’ Christ has been crucified anew by those who profess to be His disciples. Now, if these things be matter of historic fact, who can wonder that, in the Romish Church, ‘the sign of the cross’ has always and everywhere been seen to be such an instrument of rank superstition and delusion?”

Summing up, Hislop contends that the Christian Cross is a pagan symbol because it derives from the mystic Tau, which was the first letter “T” and emblem of the Babylonian false messiah “Tammuz,” the husband of Ishtar. Pagans allegedly brought into the Christian church the Tau “T” cross of Tammus, the false Babylonian messiah, when they flocked into the church during the fourth century after the conversion of Constantine.

### **The Worship of Tammus Was Hardly Known in Rome**

Hislop’s arguments for the pagan origin of the Christian Cross, are discredited by three major historical facts. First, the mystic Tau “T” of the Babylonian worship of Tammus was hardly known in the Roman world when Christianity arose. The major pagan religions that competed with Christianity for the conversion of the Roman people, were the East-

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ern mystery religions. But the Babylonian worship of Tammus and of his wife Ishtar was not one of them.

The mystery religions paved the way for the presentation of the Gospel by teaching people how to live the present life in order to be resurrected to a future blessed life. The most influential mystery religions were Cybele, the Great Mother and her beloved shepherd named Attis, from Asia Minor; Isis and Osiris from Egypt; Adonis from Syrian and Palestine; and the Persian Mithras who became a great savior in the Roman empire.

The emperors Commodus (180-192), Aurelian, Diocletian, and Julian the Apostate strongly promoted Mithraism as the religion of the Roman empire. Ernest Renan, the French philosopher and Orientalist, expressed the opinion that had the growth of Christianity been halted in the early centuries, Mithraism would have become the religion of the modern world. In the latter part of the fourth century, the new Christian Roman empire succeeded to suppress Mithraism, but, as we shall see, many of its doctrines and practices have been adopted by the Catholic church.

Though the mystery religions were popular in the Roman empire and in time influenced certain Catholic beliefs and practices, there are no indications that they ever used the cross as the symbol of redemption through the sacrificial death of their god. Thus, no legitimate connection can be established between the symbolic meaning of the Christian Cross and its religious use by pagan religions in the Roman empire.

### **The Sign of the Cross Was Used by Christians Before Constantine**

Second, contrary to Hislop's contention, the sign of the Cross was used by Christians to express their faith long before the influx of the pagans into the church in the fourth century. The funerary inscriptions of the Catacombs provide examples of the timid use of the Cross by Christians who dared to scribble a Cross sign next to the name of a deceased loved one.

An good example is the equilateral Cross, known as Greek Cross, that is found in the Crypts of Lucina, in the Catacomb of St. Callistus.



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The inscription was placed over a double grave in the early part of the third century. Beneath the names of ROUPHINA [&] EIRENE is placed an equilateral Cross, as shown in this picture:



De Rossi, who is rightly regarded as the authority on the iconography and epigraphy of the Catacombs, investigated the evolution of the symbol of the Cross. He found that initially the Cross was concealed in the form of an anchor or trident and only later was shown as a plain Cross. He explains that it was introduced “as the result of studied choice rather than as a primitive symbol linking the beginnings of Christianity with Asiatic traditions. Its genesis is reflex and studied, not primitive and spontaneous. It is well known how anxiously the early Christians sought out means whereby they could at once portray and conceal the Cross of Christ” (Rom. Sott. Crist., II, 318).

According to De Rossi, then, the Christian Cross derives, not from pagan Asiatic traditions as Hislop contends, but from a “studied choice” of Christians to devise creative ways to portray and yet conceal the Cross of Christ.

The reason the early Christians were reluctant to openly display the Cross is simply because among the Romans the cross never had the symbolic meaning of the ancient Orient. For the Romans the cross was simply the brutal, material instrument used for the execution of slaves and the worse criminals. For them, the notion of salvation through a crucified Savior, was, as Paul puts it “foolishness” (1 Cor 1:18, 23). Apologists, like Tertulian (about 200) found it necessary to defend the Christians from the Roman charge of *staurolatría*, that is, cross-worshippers.

Ironically the Romans added, “id colunt quod merentur,” that is, “they worship that which they deserve” (*Apology* 17).

In his *Apology* Justin Martyr (died 165) responds to the Roman criticism of the Christian use of the Cross, by arguing that the cross is providentially found in such objects as the sails of a ship, a plough, tools, and even in the human body with outstretched arms (*Apology* I, 55). The Apologists defence of the Christian Cross, presupposes that the Christian use of the Cross was the object of sarcasm and scorn by the Romans. In fact, some pagans taunted Christians for worshipping a crucified donkey-god, as the following graffiti from the Palatine building in Rome (about 200) shows:

"Alexamenos  
worships his god."  
- graffiti,  
end of 2nd C.



The fact that pagan Romans scorned both the message of the Cross and the sign of the Cross long before Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire, discredits Hislop's contention that the Cross is a pagan symbol brought into the church by the pagan multitudes who flocked into the church after the conversion of Constantine. The truth is that the sign of the Cross was used by Christians and was ridiculed by pagans, long before the conversion of Constantine. How could the Roman pagans have influenced Christians to adopt the sign of the Cross, when they despised it as the shameful instrument for the

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execution of the worst criminals? It is unfortunate that Hislop was so obsessed with Babylonian paganism, that he failed to examine the rejection of the symbol of the Cross by the Romans.

### **The Church of the Catacombs is Not the Catholic Church**

A third consideration that discredits the alleged role of the Roman Catholic Church in the adoption of the pagan symbol of the cross, is the fact that there was no official Roman Catholic Church during the first three centuries. The Church of the Catacombs, can hardly be labeled as Roman Catholic Church. The catacomb art of this period is distinctively Christian, reflecting the efforts of persecuted Christians to express their faith in a crucified, resurrected, and interceding Savior, in the midst of a hostile society.

It is true that Roman Catholicism is another form of paganism, but there was no official Roman Catholic Church during the first three centuries. What we have during this period, is the gradual emergence of the Bishop of Rome as the leader of Christian churches. His authority was consolidated when Constantine in 331 moved the capital of the Roman empire from Rome to Constantinople, leaving the Bishop of Rome as the virtual leader of the Christian churches and of the Western territories.

At this time multitudes of pagans flocked into the church, accelerating the paganization process of the Roman Catholic Church. An example to be considered in the next newsletter, is the influence of Mithraism in the Catholic adoption of Mithraic holy days and rituals. But the Christian adoption of the Cross precedes the paganization process of the Roman Catholic church.

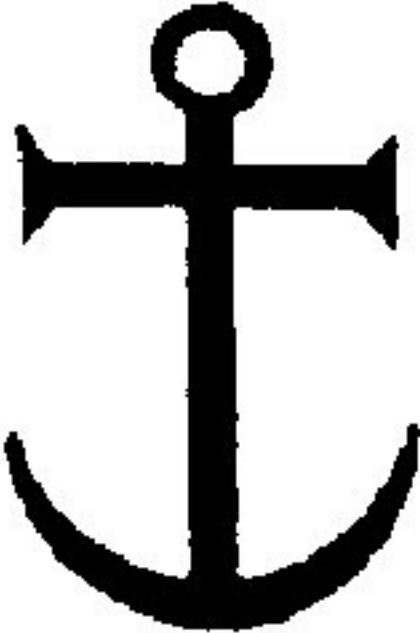
In the light of the foregoing considerations, we conclude that the pagan view of the origin of the Christian Cross, promoted by Hislop and embraced by many uninformed Christians, is based on gratuitous assumptions, amply discredited by the documentary evidences.

To appreciate more fully the story of the Christian Cross, in the next newsletter we will examine its gradual development in Christian art. We will see that Christians devised creative ways to disguise the symbol of the Cross through such popular pagan symbols as the anchor.

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The anchor appears in the catacombs in different forms, the most common being the one with the top extremity terminating in a ring joined to a cross-bar while at the other end there are two curved branches. Here is an example:



In this picture the cruciform nature of the anchor is creatively disguised. The intent was to portray the core of their faith in a discreet way, without exposing themselves unduly to the scorn and sarcasm of the Romans. In the next newsletter we will continue the fascinating study of the origin and evolution of the Christian Cross.

**GIVE ME YOUR OPINION, PLEASE!**

Do you think it would be a worthwhile to write a booklet of about 70 pages on *THE STORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CROSS*? Since I have already spent over 200 hours researching this subject, it would only take another 100 hours or so to prepare a small manuscript for publication. Do you think that there is sufficient interest for this subject? Let me know what you think. Your feed back will help me decide on this matter.