

We are a Cross manufacturing people living in a Cross manufacturing World.

What a week! What a tragically sad and terrifyingly disturbing week! A crucifying week!

A crucifying week, where justice, truth, integrity and trust stand pierced – if they stand at all. Virtues that some people gave up their lives to protect are given up to protect some people's lives.

A crucifying week, of abusive power. Polarising power. Self-serving power. Power bent in on itself, rebounding. Ultimately and ironically a self-destructing power leaving its employers weak and vulnerable.

A crucifying week, littered with denials and deceptions. The illegal is named legal and the question: "What is truth?" struggles to breathe among all the false testimonies.

A crucifying week, where principles are ignored to pay homage to public polls and crowds are satisfied at the expense of conscience. The innocent are traded for the guilty. Viva Barabbas viva! "Better for one man to die [or live?] than to have the whole nation destroyed".

A crucifying week, causing those sensitive to shifts in the balance of power to flip flop over themselves. A few bad men do what they do in the name of State Security – the name above all names –while the real threats to security remain both internal and unattended to.

A crucifying week, of doing to others as others have done to you, releasing the stench of political staleness as "Satan tries to cast out Satan". A politics of either arrogance or fear – of acquiring a 2/3rds majority or preventing it. Both abandon hope to fend for itself.

A crucifying week, filling on-lookers with doubt – not knowing who to trust and what to believe anymore, as some of the most respected institutions lie stained. The cornerstones of justice have become stumbling blocks of the same. Cultivating a cynicism that pushes many to believe there is nothing anyone can do to change things. Because of secret hands and "washed hands", others feel life is now out of *their* hands. The world now beyond their reach to mend, a private happiness becomes the goal as the beloved country cries unattended to.

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It is difficult to know for sure what week I am referring to, isn't it? This past week in SA? Or many thousands of weeks ago in Jerusalem? The trial of JC or JZ? Now please do not misunderstand me. I am by no means equating the two but I do suggest that many of the same mechanisms of state and society were and are at play in both.

Reading the newspapers and the Scriptures this past week made we wonder if they weren't covering the same story. Reminding us that we are a Cross manufacturing people living in a Cross manufacturing world, as it was in the beginning, is now and will hopefully not be forever.

In this crucifying week – both then and now – we witness more than a political problem. More than a legal problem. We witness a human problem. Not a Middle East problem or a South African problem but a universal problem. Not a Jewish problem as the Anti-Semites would want us to believe. Not an African problem as the Afro-pessimists would claim. But a human problem. Not a problem of a few bad men but a problem of us all without exception. A human problem, namely: that when left to our own devices, we self-destruct; when we follow our own ways, we get lost and fail to even realise it; when we live life for ourselves, we lose our life and often many others in the process.

In short our problem is sin. Not sins, as in our thoughts words and deeds, but sin as a part of our human make up.

That part of our human condition that addictively places ourselves at the centre. And in the words of William Butler Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming* ...

...Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere.
The ceremony of innocence is drowned...¹

Our human problem is more than what I do, it is who I am. In this crucifying week we are brought to the place where we must declare in unison: I am a Cross manufacturing person.

We are allowed to be angry and sad about this past week – both the recent past and the one long past. We are allowed to judge the deeds to be abusive and wrong. But we are not allowed to judge those involved as any different to ourselves. In our depths we all share the same human problem.

Our human problem was so clearly portrayed in William Golding's book – *Lord of the Flies* that records the deteriorating events of a group of English School boys stranded on an island during WW II. With remarkable speed the boys descend into a spiral of violence that spreads among this once group of friends, leaving two dead and one hunted. Senseless! Our human problem, even from a young age, reaches senseless places with speed.

Listen... [Read pages 208/9] ..."What are you? What are they – O god?" The answer to Ralph's question is: You are, they are, we are, I ama cross manufacturing person. Not because we plan to be. Not because we want to be. In fact it is quite the opposite – we sincerely don't want to be a Cross-manufacturing person...yet we seem unable not to be. Peter did not want to betray Jesus – he promised the opposite – he just didn't have the strength not to. I do not want to betray my dearest values but I don't have the strength to always uphold them.

When we are at the centre – things fall apart – the centre doesn't hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

And that is not where it ends. Our human problem runs even deeper. For not only is our problem the problem, but that which we turn to as a solution deepens the problem even further. Let us return to the *Lord of the Flies*...

In the final scene of the novel, Ralph, the boys former leader flees the others who are trying to hunt him down and kill him. Ralph scrambles onto the beach in his desperate effort to avoid his attackers when suddenly there before him stands a British naval officerand he is saved.

But as WH Auden points out:

The whole book is symbolic in nature except the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island. The officer, having interrupted a man-hunt, prepares to take the children off the island in a cruiser which will presently be hunting its enemy in the implacable way. And who will rescue the adult and his cruiser?²

To paraphrase Gil Bailie ...[who I am indebted to for revealing this insight to me through *Lord of the Flies*]... The medicine we swallow to address our human problem becomes the poison. We end up being saved by that which will extend the very thing we need to be saved from – in the first place. The way we resist evil causes evil to spread. We perpetuate it in the way we try to eradicate it. And so our human problem is deepened by our choice of solution.

We use official violence – State sponsored violence to eradicate or suppress all other forms of violence. But as Gil Bailie insightfully asks ...[again I paraphrase]...: "What happens if the boys chasing Ralph realise the underlying moral similarity between their chase and that of the naval

¹ M. L. Rosenthal, ed., *Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Collier, 1966), 91.

² Sited in Gil Bailie: *Violence Unveiled*, (The Crossroad Publishing House, 1995), 65.

Officer?" Would they still oblige obedience? When the moral difference between the boys and the naval officer shrinks – then what?"³

...then things fall apart; the centre cannot hold, mere anarchy is loosed in the world...that's what.

We are a Cross manufacturing people, living in a Cross manufacturing world unable to rescue ourselves from ourselves.

And on this day we see the extent of our Cross manufacturing crime. Not only do we cause ourselves and others to suffer – but we cause God to suffer. More than anyone it is the Christ who we have crucified.

The Christ who could have called down legions of angels to obliterate his attackers, but then (with W H Auden we would have to ask) and who would rescue him and his angelic warriors?

So instead of choosing a solution that only deepens the problem, Jesus chooses a Godly path of foolishness – that is wiser than our wisdom. A way of strength that is revealed in weakness. He volunteers vulnerability – a loving fearless vulnerability. He is not a victim. He gives his life willingly and mercifully.

Like the Tibetan monk who refused to flee the Chinese invasion and in doing so angered the commanding officer, who when questioning him on why he didn't run away like the others he shouted: "Do you know who I am? I am he who can run you through with a sword without batting an eyelash". To which the monk replied: "And do you know who I am? I am he who will allow you to run me through with that sword without batting an eyelash."

Jesus was like that monk. Jesus was not a victim. Instead of resisting evil by imitating it – Jesus enters into it. In a way he surrenders to it – but on his terms. He decides to love it or at least love through it. It doesn't mean he condones it – he doesn't. It doesn't mean he wants it to take place – he doesn't. It doesn't mean God has planned it – God hasn't. But Jesus does decide to love the situation he is in – to love in it and to love through it – realising that if he is faithful in loving even in this loveless situation he can and he will glorify God – keeping God as the centre – the centre that holds. The centre that holds anarchy back. The centre that stems the blood and restores innocence.

In so doing Jesus takes the crucifixion that we have done to him and he transforms it into something he does for us. So Christ is no longer merely crucified *by* us, but he is crucified *for* us. And herein rests our salvation, to be received as our gift and to be lived as our task.

Herein rests our salvation – our rescue – to be received as a gift – a gift by one who goes on loving us when there is no more love within us.

A gift by one who goes on loving us when there is no more love within us.

Receive this gift today from the one we have nailed to the Cross.

Amen.

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Good Friday 2009
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³ Ibid., 65.