

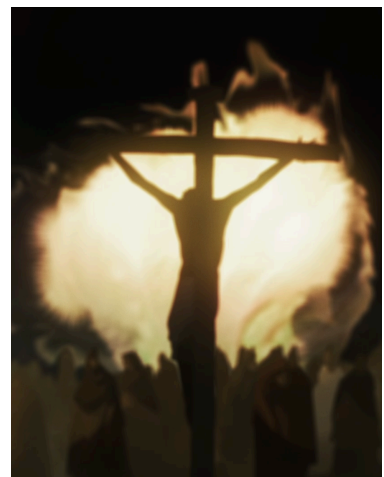


Eight Strange and Beautiful Ways Early Christians Described the Cross

In this dossier, we introduce you to eight strange but beautiful images early Christian theologians used to describe what happens at the Cross – some of which may surprise you.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most extraordinary and scandalous features of the early Christian faith is how it transformed the Roman cross — a terrifying symbol of torture, death, and humiliation — into a sign of healing, hope, and salvation. The incomprehensibility and seemingly incoherence of this reversal were obvious from the earliest Christian writings. They intended to communicate not just the *mechanism* of salvation by the Cross but also the *beauty* of it; they were written not only to touch the mind, but to move the heart and engage the Christian imagination. These eight images do not encapsulate *every* way the early Christians imagined the Cross, nor do they give a fully formed or comprehensive soteriology of the Early Church. However, these images were integral to the transformation of the Cross from a symbol of Roman oppression to a symbol of salvation in the Christian imagination. They are how bloodied planks of wood that signalled the violent, imperial power of Rome became the ‘wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died.’¹



¹ From a hymn by Isaac Watts, ‘[When I Survey the Wondrous Cross](#)’.

IMAGE 1: TREE

This tree is for me a plant of eternal salvation. By it I am nourished, by it I am fed. By its roots, I am firmly planted. By its branches, I am spread out, its perfume is a delight to me, and its spirit refreshes me like a delightful wind. I have pitched my tent in its shadow, and during the heat I find it to be a haven full of fragrance. [...] This tree of heavenly proportions rises up from the earth to heaven.

It is fixed, as an eternal growth, at the midpoint of heaven and earth. It sustains all things as the support of the universe, the base of the whole inhabited world, and the axis of the earth. Established by the invisible pegs of the Spirit, it holds together the various aspects of human nature in such a way that, divinely guided, its nature may never again become separated from God.

By its peak which touches the height of the heavens, by its base which supports the earth, and by its immense arms subduing the many spirits of the air on every side, it exists in its totality in every thing and in every place.²

- St. Hippolytus



This quote is from a sermon attributed to the second-century theologian St. Hippolytus, and we can immediately grasp the creativity and beauty of the image. It is based on parts of the New Testament which refer to the cross as a tree (see Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24) themselves drawing on Deuteronomy 21:22-23, according to which anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. According to this New Testament imagery, Jesus became a curse for us by hanging on the 'tree', and his sacrifice turns it into a source of abundant life and eternal spiritual nourishment.

This image also makes a connection between the cross and the Tree of Life in Genesis 2 and 3.³ Anyone who ate from the fruit of the Tree of Life would become immortal, but the sin of Adam and Eve led to God

blocking access to the tree. For Christians, Jesus' death on the cross reversed the curse of Adam and Eve, meaning that the immortality offered by the Tree of Life is once again available for believers. Even though we still die, just as Jesus died, if we follow in his footsteps, then we will also live again, just as he rose to life. This connection between death and life is conveyed in the image of the cross as the Tree of Life, whose fruit nourishes believers and grants them eternal life. Some theologians even suggested that the cross is the Tree returned from Eden: for example, a hymn by St. Ephraem the Syrian poetically describes the Tree of Life sinking into the ground and re-emerging on Calvary:

*Greatly saddened was the Tree of Life
when it beheld Adam stolen away from it;
it sank down into the virgin ground and was hidden
to burst forth and reappear on Golgotha;
humanity, like birds that are chased,
took refuge in it*

² Hippolytus, *De Pascha Homilia* 6, [Migne PG 59](#) (Chrysostom, Spuria) 743f. English translation: Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 441.

³ See e.g. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. 86; Ephraim the Syrian, *The Pearl: Seven Hymns on the Faith*, Hymn 4; 'Hymn on Virginity', in St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 60.



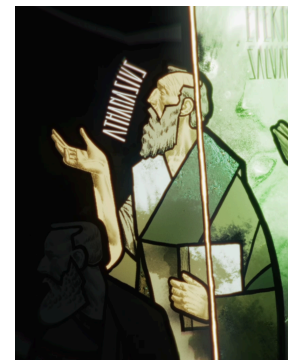
IMAGE 2: PURIFYING INCENSE

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who took upon Him to die for all, stretched forth His hands, not somewhere on the earth beneath, but in the air itself, in order that the Salvation effected by the Cross might be shown to be for all men everywhere: destroying the devil who was working in the air: and that He might consecrate our road up to Heaven, and make it free.⁵

- St. Athanasius

The fourth-century theologian St. Athanasius is one of the most celebrated theologians of the first centuries of Christian history. He wrote some of the most rigorous and beautiful defences of the Nicene Creed, and many of his works remain foundational for Christian theology. Less well known, however, is one of the images he uses to describe the cross.

He asked himself: What difference does it make that Jesus was lifted up into the air to die, instead of dying on the ground or in the water? Athanasius gives us two reasons. First, he suggests that Jesus needed to be lifted up into the air so that everyone could see him and be drawn to him. He bases this on Jesus' own description of his death in the Gospel of John: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).⁶



It is only on the cross that a man dies with his hands spread out. Whence it was fitting for the Lord to bear this also and to spread out His hands, that with the one He might draw the ancient people, and with the other those from the Gentiles, and unite both in Himself. For this is what He Himself has said, signifying by what manner of death He was to ransom all: "I, when I am lifted up," He says, "shall draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32).⁷

Secondly, the New Testament describes Satan as the "ruler of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). This is based on ancient cosmology, which pictures the universe in different levels, with heaven (with the stars and planets) as the highest level, earth as the lowest, and the air in-between. Christianity teaches that Satan was one of the most powerful angels God created who lived in heaven, i.e. at the highest level. But when he rebelled against God, he was thrown out of heaven and fell down to earth. He now roams about in the middle sphere, the air, dominating everything that breathes and stopping anyone from reaching heaven. Athanasius shows how the cross was a fitting way for Jesus to die, because it is one of the only ways anyone can die suspended in the air:

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ St. Athanasius, [Letter 22](#).

⁶ All Bible quotations (except those embedded in another quotation) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

⁷ St. Athanasius, [On the Incarnation 25:3-4](#).

If the devil, the enemy of our race, having fallen from heaven, wanders about our lower atmosphere, and there bearing rule over his fellow-spirits, as his peers in disobedience, not only works illusions by their means in them that are deceived, but tries to hinder them that are going up (and about this the Apostle says: “According to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience” [Ephesians 2:2]); while the Lord came to cast down the devil, and clear the air and prepare the way for us up into heaven, as said the Apostle: “Through the veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:20) — and this must needs be by death — well, by what other kind of death could this have come to pass, than by one which took place in the air, I mean the cross? For only he that is perfected on the cross dies in the air. Whence it was quite fitting that the Lord suffered this death. For thus being lifted up He cleared the air of the malignity both of the devil and of demons of all kinds, as He says: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18); and made a new opening of the way up into heaven.”⁸

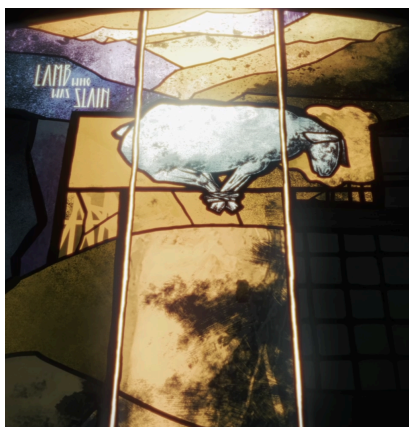
Just as sacrifices purify the temple, Christ’s crucifixion in the open air, like a cosmic incense, purifies the atmosphere from the power of the Devil.

IMAGE 3: SACRIFICE

*For who is more a priest of the most high God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered a sacrifice to God the Father, and offered that very same thing which Melchizedek had offered, that is, bread and wine, to wit, His body and blood?*⁹

The idea of Jesus’ death as a sacrifice has been among the most influential for Christianity since its very beginning. This is because of the image’s connection to the Old Testament sacrificial system, in which a priest would kill an animal and sprinkle its blood on the altar to atone for the sins of the people. Many of the sacrificial offerings involved a pure lamb without spot or blemish (Exodus 12:3-9; 29:38-42, Leviticus 3:7; 4:32; 9:3; 12:6-8; 14:10-13).

The New Testament took up this sacrificial imagery and applied it to Jesus, calling him the ‘lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). The Apostle Paul writes that “our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The book of Revelation depicts Jesus as ‘a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered’ (Revelation 5:6).¹⁰ The Apostle Peter says that the ‘precious blood of Christ’ is ‘like that of a lamb without blemish or spot’ (1 Peter 1:19). The spotlessness of the lab was seen as a metaphor for Jesus who was believed to have been sinless, having never done anything wrong in his whole life (see 1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5). Christians believed that Jesus’ sacrifice was once-for-all, making the former animal sacrifices no longer necessary. The author of Hebrews writes that ‘every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God”’ (Hebrews 10:11-12).



Christians everywhere look to the cross because they believe that there, Jesus’ pure and sinless death accomplished the final and perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all humanity.

⁸ St. Athanasius, [On the Incarnation 25.5-6](#).

⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, [Letter 62, ch. 4](#).

¹⁰ See also Acts 8:26-35.



IMAGE 4: RANSOM

The Lord thus has redeemed [or ransomed – Greek λυτρώσασθαι] us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, attaching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God.¹¹

– St Irenaeus of Lyon

The second-century theologian St. Irenaeus called Jesus the *ransom* paid to redeem humanity. He used the same Greek word that Jesus used when he told his disciples that he ‘came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom [λύτρον] for many’ (Mark 10:45, cf. Matthew 20:28). 1 Timothy 2:6 also says that Jesus ‘gave himself a ransom [ἀντίλυτρον] for all’ (both Greek words have the same meaning).

The idea that Jesus’ death is a ransom for humanity immediately raises the question: *to whom* is the ransom being paid? The third-century theologian Origen suggested an answer that became popular: the ransom was paid to the Devil who had taken us hostage by deceiving us to sin. In return, Jesus deceived the Devil into imagining that he could also take Jesus hostage. Origen puts it this way:

So to whom did he give his soul a ransom on behalf of many? Certainly not to God, so would it not then be to the evil one? For he had control over us, until the soul of Jesus was given to him as a ransom for our sakes, he who was deceived quite clearly and imagined that he would be able to lord it over Jesus’ soul and did not see that torture would not suffice to constrain it.¹²

Other theologians imagined it less as a hostage situation and more as a buying-back from the Devil’s legitimate ownership. However, there is a problem with this way of looking at it which was pointed out much later by St. Anselm of Canterbury, one of the most famous eleventh-century theologians. Anselm objected that the Devil cannot possibly have rightful ownership of humanity, since all things, including both the Devil and humanity, belong only to God.¹³ This rationalisation of the ransom metaphor is part of the way theology developed in the medieval period, as theologians became less satisfied with pictures and images, and wanted logically satisfying explanations. However, when these images were employed in early Christianity, they were not intended to be taken literally, but rather as metaphors or analogies that hint at profound and mysterious truths.

¹¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.1. Greek/Latin original from *Sancti Irenæi, Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses*, ed. W. Wigan Harvey, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1857), 315.

¹² Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 16.8. English translation (alongside the Greek) in Justin Gohl, ‘Origen of Alexandria’s Commentary on Matthew, Book 16 – An English Translation’, 2020, 25–26. The Greek text reads: “τίνι δὲ ἔδωκε τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν; οὐ γὰρ διὰ τῷ θεῷ· μή τι οὖν τῷ πονηρῷ; οὗτος γὰρ ἐκράτει ἡμῶν, ἕως δοθῇ τὸ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν αὐτῷ λύτρον ἢ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ψυχὴ, ἀπατηθέντι <δηλονότι καὶ φαντασθέντι> ὡς δυναμένῳ αὐτῆς κυριεῦσαι καὶ οὐχ ὁρῶντι ὅτι οὐ φέρει τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κατέχειν αὐτὴν βάσανον.”

¹³ St Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2020), chap. 7.



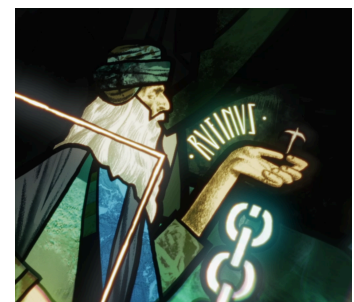
IMAGE 5: FISH-HOOK

This next image might be the *most* unfamiliar to many people. Some early theologians imagined the cross as a cosmic fish-hook to catch the Devil, conceived as a giant sea-dragon, with Jesus as the bait. Jesus was sinless but took the form of a sinful human. His humanity is therefore the bait, and his divinity is the hook. As the sea monster Devil snatches the bait, he realises too late that there is a hook which catches and drags him out of the deep waters.

The New Testament depicts the Devil (or Satan) as a great dragon waging war on both angels and Christians (Revelation 12:9). This image was linked with other places the Bible speaks about sea-dragons. For example, Psalm 74:13 celebrates that God “broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.” Likewise, a prophetic oracle against the Egyptian Pharaoh that describes him as a water dragon was seen as a type or foreshadowing of God’s judgment on Satan:

Thus says the LORD God
 ‘I am against you,
 Pharaoh king of Egypt,
 the great dragon sprawling
 in the midst of its channels,
 saying, “My Nile is my own;
 I made it for myself.”
 I will put hooks in your jaws,
 and make the fish of your channels stick to your scales.
 I will draw you up from your channels,
 with all the fish of your channels
 sticking to your scales.’ (Ezekiel 29:3-4)

The fourth-century theologian Rufinus of Aquileia gathered all these Bible passages up and applied them to the accomplishment of Jesus on the cross. Jesus cannot be swallowed by the Devil because he is sinless, hence when the Devil tries to take hold of Jesus, he is unable to do so, and is instead taken hold of and pulled out of the water, making him harmless and no longer a threat. Rufinus speaks of Jesus’ sinlessness as his “divine virtue,” and says that it is like a “hook concealed beneath the form and fashion of human flesh (He being, as the Apostle Paul says, found in fashion as a man).” He says that this bait was in order to



¹⁴ For a fuller treatment of this metaphor, see Ky Heinze, ‘The Devil’s Ransom and Christology in Origen and the Cappadocians’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 74, no. 2 (1 October 2023): 636–72.

lure on the Prince of this world to a conflict, to whom offering His flesh as a bait, His divinity underneath might catch him and hold him fast with its hook, through the shedding of His immaculate blood. For He alone Who knows no stain of sin has destroyed the sins of all, of those, at least, who have marked the door-posts of their faith with His blood. As, therefore, if a fish seizes a baited hook, it not only does not take the bait off the hook, but is drawn out of the water to be itself food for others, so He Who had the power of death seized the body of Jesus in death, not being aware of the hook of Divinity inclosed within it, but having swallowed it he was caught immediately, and the bars of hell being burst asunder, he was drawn forth as it were from the abyss to become food for others. Which result the Prophet Ezekiel long ago foretold under this same figure, saying, I will draw you out with My hook, and stretch you out upon the earth: the plains shall be filled with you, and I will set all the fowls of the air over you, and I will satiate all the beasts of the earth with you. The Prophet David also says, 'You have broken the heads of the great dragon, You have given him to be meat to the people of Ethiopia' [Psalm 74]. And Job in like manner witnesses of the same mystery, for he says in the person of the Lord speaking to him, Will you draw forth the dragon with a hook, and will you put your bit in his nostrils?¹⁵

- Rufinus of Aquileia

Similarly, the fourth-century theologian St. Gregory of Nyssa explains that the Devil could not consume Jesus, as God, any more than darkness can consume light. He based this partly on the apostle Peter's speech at Pentecost, saying that God "freed him [Jesus] from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:24).

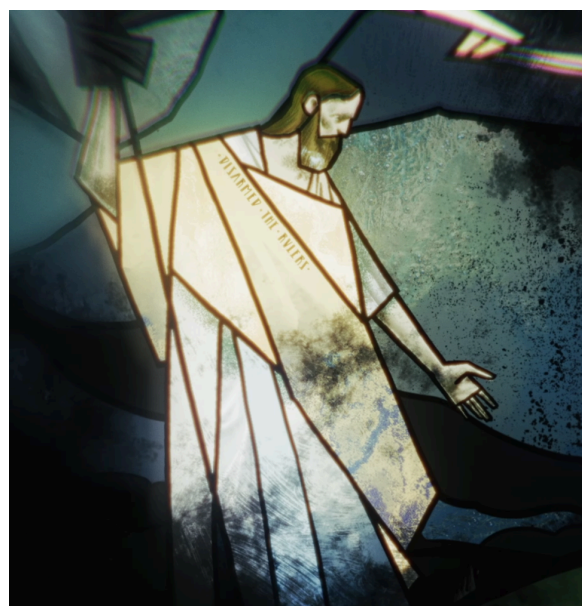
For since, as has been said before, it was not in the nature of the opposing power [i.e. the Devil] to come in contact with the undiluted presence of God, and to undergo His unclouded manifestation, therefore, in order to secure that the ransom in our behalf might be easily accepted by him who required it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus, life being introduced into the house of death, and light shining in darkness, that which is diametrically opposed to light and life might vanish.¹⁶

- St. Gregory of Nyssa

IMAGE 6: BATTLEFIELD

Early Christians also saw the Cross as a battlefield between God and the Devil. Jesus' death on the cross is the way in which God achieves final and permanent victory over the forces of evil, stripping them of their power and seizing back all the human souls that they had held captive.

The New Testament says that through the cross, Jesus 'disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it' (Colossians 2:15). Similarly the author of Hebrews writes that Jesus shared a nature with humanity 'so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.' (Hebrews 2:14-15).



¹⁵ Rufinus of Aquileia, [Commentary on the Apostles' Creed 16](#).

¹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, [Greater Catechism 24](#).

This way of construing the Atonement was made popular in the twentieth century by a Swedish theologian named Gustaf Aulen (1879 - 1977), who gave it the name *Christus Victor* and argued that it was more suitable and prevalent in the early Church than some of the other images we have looked at.¹⁷ This image had been neglected for a few centuries before Aulen wrote about it, and he was right to revive it and to point to all the early Christians who used it. But the early Christians did not feel compelled to prefer one image over another and were happy to use all of them at different times.

The idea of Jesus conquering Satan on the cross was deployed in a graphic way by the teaching that, after Jesus died on the cross, he descended into hell and engaged in a cosmic battle with Satan. He stormed the gates of hell, seized the keys, and set free all the prisoners who Satan had kept locked up. The apostle Paul writes that Christ 'descended into the lower parts of the earth' (Ephesians 4:9), and the apostle Peter writes that Jesus 'suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey' (1 Peter 3:18-20).

This idea came to be called 'The Harrowing of Hell' and it is depicted graphically in a text called *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, although it was probably not written by Nicodemus but produced by several authors in the early fifth century. While Satan is boasting that he has managed to get Jesus crucified, suddenly:

The brazen gates were shattered, and the iron bars broken, and all the dead who had been bound came out of the prisons, and we with them. And the King of glory came in, in the form of a man, and all the dark places of Hades were lighted up.

Immediately Hades cried out: We have been conquered: woe to us! But who art thou, that hast such power and might? and what art thou, who comest here without sin who art seen to be small and yet of great power, lowly and exalted, the slave and the master, the soldier and the king, who hast power over the dead and the living? Thou wast nailed on the cross, and placed in the tomb; and now thou art free, and hast destroyed all our power. Art thou then the Jesus about whom the chief satrap Satan told us, that through cross and death thou art to inherit the whole world?

Then the King of glory seized the chief satrap Satan by the head, and delivered him to His angels, and said: With iron chains bind his hands and his feet, and his neck, and his mouth. Then He delivered him to Hades, and said: Take him, and keep him secure till my second appearing.¹⁸

- The Gospel of Nicodemus



This motif became a scene that Christian artists loved to depict over the centuries. One of the most famous pieces of art to show this scene was this fifteenth-century painting by Fra Angelico at the San Marco Monastery in Florence. In it, we see Jesus breaking through the metal door of hell crushing the devil underneath it, and reaching out his hand to Adam to lift him out of hell. In his hand, Jesus is holding a flag with a Cross representing his crucifixion.

¹⁷ Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

¹⁸ *Gospel of Nicodemus II.5-6*, Roberts-Donaldson translation.



IMAGE 7: BRIDGE

Finally, we turn to two creative images for the cross that don't have an explicit basis in the New Testament, yet are no less evocative and captivating for that.

The fourth-century theologian and mystic, St. Ephraem the Syrian, made a connection between the wood the cross was made of, and the fact that Jesus was raised by Joseph, a carpenter, i.e. an expert on making things out of wood. He then imagined Jesus bringing the cross into hell with him and turning it into a bridge from death to life. In another hymn, he describes Jesus as

*the Son of the carpenter, Who skilfully made His cross a bridge over Sheol that swallows up all, and brought over mankind into the dwelling of life.... Glory be to You, Who laid Your cross as a bridge over death, that souls might pass over upon it from the dwelling of the dead to the dwelling of life!*¹⁹

St. Ephraem the Syrian

One particularly striking aspect of this image is that St. Ephraem connects the human life of Jesus with the divine work of Jesus. The way that Jesus lived as a human being was not unrelated or incidental to the way that Jesus saved humanity as the Son of God.

IMAGE 8: SHIP'S MAST

Early Christians were also interested in communicating their faith in ways that non-Christians could understand. They sometimes did this by referencing famous ancient Greek literature that everybody would have known. One beautiful example comes from the second-century theologian St Clement of Alexandria who evoked the story of Homer's *Odyssey*. This would have appealed to the many sea-faring people across the Mediterranean world. In the story, Ulysses and his men are on a great journey across the Mediterranean sea sailing across troubled waters, escaping monsters, and battling storms. In one of the episodes, the crew hears sirens - half-bird, half-human creatures - beautifully singing and tempting them into the water to drown them. To fight this temptation, Ulysses and his men tie themselves to the mast of the ship to avoid throwing themselves into the water to follow the siren songs. St. Clement transformed this story by making Jesus the main



¹⁹ St. Ephraim the Syrian, [Homily on Our Lord 4](#).

character, whose ship carries us past many dangerous snares and temptations to the eternal shores of heaven. Clement exhorts us to tie ourselves to the mast, which is the cross on which Jesus died, in order not to be swept away by the storms of life or beguiled into jumping overboard by the siren's song. Quoting from the *Odyssey*, he interweaves the Christian story into that well-known ancient tale:

Let us then avoid custom as we would a dangerous headland, or the threatening Charybdis, or the mythic sirens. It chokes man, turns him away from truth, leads him away from life: custom is a snare, a gulf, a pit, a mischievous winnowing fan.

'Urge the ship beyond that smoke and billow.' Let us shun, fellow-mariners, let us shun this billow; it vomits forth fire: it is a wicked island, heaped with bones and corpses, and in it sings a fair courtesan, Pleasure, delighting with music for the common ear.

'Hie you hither, far-famed [Odysseus], great glory of the Achæans; Moor the ship, that you may hear a diviner voice.' She praises you, O mariner, and calls you illustrious; and the courtesan tries to win to herself the glory of the Greeks. Leave her to prey on the dead; a heavenly spirit comes to your help: pass by Pleasure, she beguiles.

*'... Sail past the song; it works death. Exert your will only, and you have overcome ruin; bound to the wood of the cross, you shall be freed from destruction: the word of God will be your pilot, and the Holy Spirit will bring you to anchor in the haven of heaven.'*²⁰

- St. Clement of Alexandria

CONCLUSION

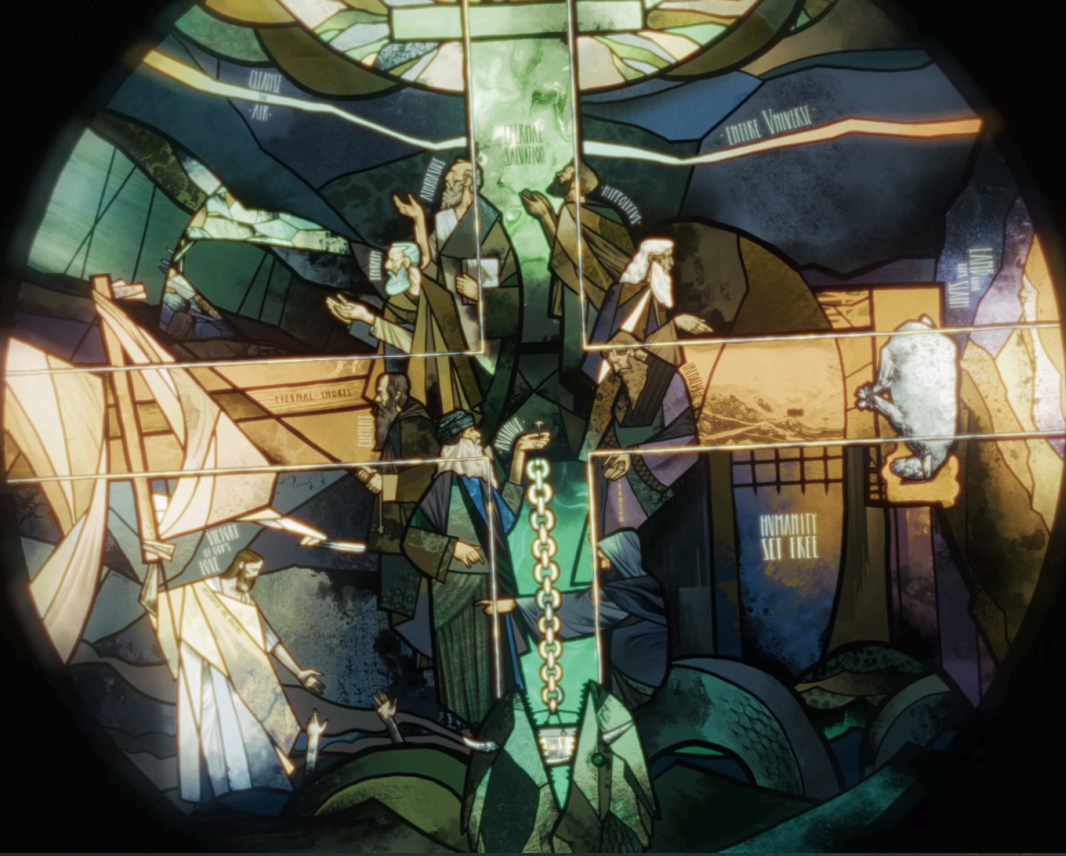
How does Jesus' death on the cross save human beings from sin, death, and hell? The early Church does not give us one neat explanation. Instead, it gave us numerous strange but beautiful metaphors, like a stained-glass window catching the light from different angles.

As time went on, theologians began seeking out more systematic and logical explanations, which we call 'theories of the Atonement'. Yet even these theories were not completely free of metaphor and analogy in the minds of their creators. Perhaps it is impossible to penetrate through the imagery and get at what 'really happened' at the cross, and perhaps even if we could, it wouldn't do us any good. In one of the most celebrated Christian books of the twentieth century, C.S. Lewis warns us not to confuse the theories about *how* Jesus saves us with the belief *that* he saves us: "neither this theory nor any other is Christianity. The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter. A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work."²¹ For Christians, this Roman instrument of death and torture, is the place where true life and healing begin — and no single image can fully do justice to that.

*Created by ChristianStory
Authored by Daniel Kim and Barnabas Aspray
Edited by Oliver Dürr and Daniel Kim*

²⁰ St Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch. 12.

²¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 33.



Recommended reading:

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Athanasius, *Letters*, Letter 22.
- Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*.
- Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*.
- Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter 62*.
- Ephraim the Syrian, *Homily of our Lord*.
- Ephraim the Syrian, *The Pearl: Seven Hymns of Faith*, Hymn 4.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *Greater Catechism*.
- Hippolytus, *De Pascha Homilia 6*.
- Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*.
- Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*.
- Rufinus of Aquileia, *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*.
- Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*.

SECONDARY READING

- Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).
- Ky Heinze, 'The Devil's Ransom and Christology in Origen and the Cappadocians', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 74, no. 2 (1 October 2023): 636–72.



Christian Story