

# OF A RUGGED WONDER

**DEFENDING THE HOLY CROSS**



**Christopher Talmidian Kkt +**

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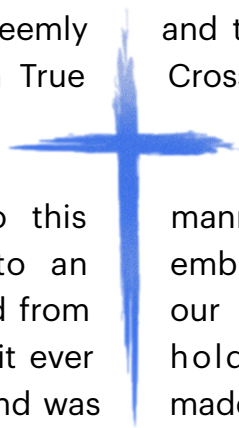
**W**ithin the Christian religion, as our people begin to rediscover our history, and start to study the origins of many of our modern practices and most cherished traditions, the claim has been raised in recent days that we should remove the sign of the cross as the emblem of our faith. The reasons vary but usually involve accusations of paganism or simply irrelevance. It has been charged that the Cross was a symbol of sun worshiped long before the time of the Messiah. They say the Cross itself, even if Christian, is an image, and therefore a violation of the second commandment. And of course the most obvious that the Cross is an effigy of death in contrast with the newness of life provided by “Christ”!.

So, what is the truth of it?

## **+ DEFENDING THE HOLY CROSS +**

While we have to admit that crosses were used in pagan worship, as far back as 1500 years before the crucifixion of our Savior, we may also rest assured that as correlation does not equal causation the standard cross of “Jesus Christ” is not synonymous with these emblems. Even in the early years of our Faith, the false god, Sol-Invictus, Mithra had his own equal, armed cross, and while this has been incorporated by some over the centuries into Christian usage, it is unlike our own emblem in both shape and significance. Mithra’s cross symbolized a sideways view of a flat world with the passage of the sun, which encircled it, and appeared as this: + or sometimes this X. Yet the cross of “Jesus Christ” was shaped like this: † and its purpose was designed to remind every disciple that we serve a crucified King risen from the dead, and we, too, must crucify ourselves to the things of this life.

Sun worship, had many other crosses too, all of which were adopted by well-meaning believers into what evolved into the Christian church, but each of which remains a sign of one sungod or another. However, though all this tempts true disciples of "Jesus" to ditch the cross in favor of some more seemly reminder that there remains still a True Cross, not born from the service of sun gods. The cross we bear began as an icon of horrifying agony, torment, and death of the most sorrowful and shameful sort, but by the submission of our Savior to this manner of suffering on our behalf, the True Cross was transformed into an emblem of everlasting life and amazing grace. The True Cross was changed from our death to our saviors, and his life exchanged for ours, but never did it ever hold any significance to the sun worshipers. It began in weakness and was made strong in Messiah. It began in terror and was made triumphant in "Christ". It began in sorrow, and was made by Yeshua (Him Whom the church has taken to calling "Jesus") into the fullness of joy. Let it never be thought that the pagan signs have anything related to this perfect symbol of salvation.



To say that this icon is somehow an idol though, is nothing short of nonsense. Perhaps it is true, that some believers go overboard in their devotion to the cross itself, even personifying its properties to a perverted degree, yet the existence of the image itself, not it's personal and/or private usage, is the epitome of exemplary faith not its antithesis. A crucifix, bearing the image of a crucified man, however, is indisputably in violation of the second of the 10 Commandments, as is any attempt to depict our Lord or our Almighty Father, with the possible acceptance of theatrical representation. Although it should be noted that the modern idea of our Heavenly Father is a depiction most often wrongly as an old man with a snow white beard looming off the clouds with a lightning bolt in hand. We can thank the renaissance painters for giving us the mental image of Zeus or his Roman counterpart, Jupiter when ever we might imagine what YAHWEH would look like...as if He could even have a likeness that could ever be depicted in this limited physical reality we occupy.

The empty Cross, however, is an icon of all that is embodied by its usage, both as an instrument of torture, and as the means by which our Lord was sacrificed for salvation. It is a symbol not an idol, and any who venerate a cross beyond this point become idolaters. The cross to us is only an emblem of identification, reminding us of our Lord's sacrifice on our behalf, and of the sacrifice we must make on behalf of Him.

As the effigy of agonizing torment and death, the symbol still has value, in spite of the opposition, some hold that bearing the representation of death is valueless, and even some would say that it is vulgar. "If someone dies in a car crash," they ask, "would you memorialize a car wreck for generations to come?"... To which I must answer that, if my Lord and Savior bought my eternal life by dying in a Camaro, I would be wearing the Chevrolet emblem all my days. Yes. Why? Because it's not the symbol of the cross itself that we revere, but the King Who thereon on was killed for us. The cross is a sign of death. Yes, both mine and the Messiah's. It reminds me of my responsibility to Him on account of His sacrifice for me, just as surely, as it reminds me of that sacrifice itself. But it is also just as much a sign of life as it is of death, both mine and Messiah's. The same engine that caused the death of the Righteous One now stands empty for all eternity to advertise Resurrection, both mine and Messiah's. What gave "Jesus" death brought me death, and what brought Him back to life brought me back with Him.

Most of all, however, wearing the Cross, reminds us of "Christ's", commands to take up our cross and follow Him. Not that wearing the symbol is enough to fulfill this order, but it is an outward sign that we have done so inside. It is a promise to all who sees it, that we will continue to do so in the future, and it is a reminder to us to keep that promise, and to make good on our claim. It claims that we are not of this world.

## **+ STRENGTH IN LIFE / COMFORT IN DEATH +**

There is a trend in Christianity (and several of the offsprung cults) of moving away from the prominence, and even the power of the cross. The reasons vary, but include such understandings as: the cross has become an idol, the cross is a symbol of sun-worship not the worship of the 'Son', the cross is a sign of death, not life. But also, the belief among reformers is rising that what our Savior, was nailed to to die, was not a cross at all, as we know it, with an upright beam and an intersecting beam, but simply a pole stuck in the ground, and no more. They come to such a conclusion by reading in the original language of Scripture of what our "Christ" was nailed to yet they read not according to the context, and so wrongly conclude against the cross.

The word "Cross" is not found in Scripture, so it is easy to see how folks would find that it is improper for us, when we attempt to restore the ancient faith. "Cross" is an English word corresponding to the Latin word "crux" which was used in the Latin translation of

the Bible to describe the device on which “Jesus” died. But in the New Testament itself, in the Greek that remains to us, the word is written as “stauros” which means “stake, pole or post.” Elsewhere in the “New Testament”, when described as a “tree” the word is “zulon”, literally, an artificial tree made of deadwood. Yet never is spoken of a cross bar for this post, pole, stake, so many believe our Lord was nailed arms overhead to one upright piece of wood. Though this mistake is understandable, it is a theory established in the ignorance of the process of Roman Crucifixion and the customs of the time.

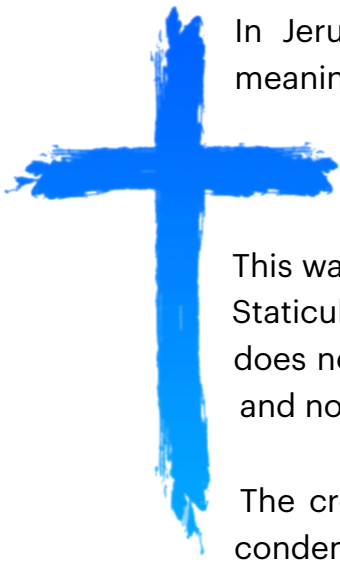
Although there were a myriad of manners utilized by the empire, for accomplishing, the agonizing executions of its undesirables, especially the multiple ways of creating crucifixions, we may be sure from the gospel records that the form imposed against our Lord “Jesus Christ” was the worst of the worst, the death of Verberatio. The Romans would kill people by nailing them to whatever was available if necessary - a wall, a fence, a suspended beam, a saltire (X shaped cross), and many others. However, when they had the time, and the mood of the populace required an embarrassing and excruciating, very painful, very public exemplary execution, the Quaternio was called upon to engineer such an outcome by commencement with Flagellum and conclusion with Crucifixion.

The Flagellum involve stripping the victim, completely naked in front of the crowd, chaining him, or her to a short pillar, arms above the head so that he or she must kneel. Then two of the quaternio soldiers would take up Flagrums, whips consisting of wooden handles from which several leather straps are hung, and into these straps are woven bits of bone, glass, and metal, both pointed and hooked, all of which are called Scorpiones (you can imagine why) and in addition were woven tiny metal dumbbells called Plumbatae. With these whips, they would begin beating the victim, one after the next, so no relief may be offered. All the while a third quaternio soldier carefully counts the lashes of this scourging to ensure the number is not sufficient to kill him or her. The fourth of the quaternio is called the Exactor Mortis. He is the supervisor of the execution, ensuring all is done properly, and ultimately, it is he who shall ensure that the sentence is carried out, and the death extracted.

The Flagellum leaves the condemned, like hamburger and broken to the point of non-resistance, even at times to assisting in his or her own end. Without this part, it is hard to nail a person down without a bit of kicking and such. Once nailed the victim, would ordinarily be left to suffer for days, even weeks, sometimes, depending on the weather,

local, customary requirement, and what point Rome needed to prove to the people. The condemned would slowly cook in the sun, be pecked at by birds, and eaten alive by wild animals (if nailed low enough to the ground), all the long, while, struggling to breathe, urinating, and defecating on him or herself, and all for the world to see. If Rome wanted a prolonged death, they would attach a Sedile to the execution stake so the victim could sit where nailed and better push off to get air in the lungs.

But to the issue of the crossbar, it is correct to think of the original cross has both one piece of wood in here and two. Why? Because we tend to forget the part of the crucifixion that clarifies which kind our Saviour suffered. The form He faced is specified by the Gospels' account that the Quaternio required Him to carry His cross, and midway for Simon, the Cyrene, to do so on His behalf. A Cross was called a Stauros or a Zulon not because it was one piece, but because it was two pieces, but only one was permanent and perpetually, visible to the public.



In Jerusalem, just outside the city on the hill, called Golgotha or Calvaria meaning a place of "a skull", criminals and others Rome wanted dead, were regularly taken to be killed, and then tossed into a mass grave to rot, hence the place being named for bones. They're on that hill was constantly standing, upright wooden posts, set into the ground to stay. This was the cross that was seen by all people passing by every day. This was the Staticula (sharing the same root word, as "static" or "stationary"). It's the part that does not move, and so it is called a Stauros (stake, post, pole). It is both a cross and not a cross.

The crossbar, however, was the part of this device, which was carried by the condemned from the place of the Flagellum to the site where awaited the other part of the cross. This temporal portion was called the Patibullum, and it was thicker than the Staticula with a hollowed out niche in the center. The victim carried this 60 to 80 pound log to the other log where the Quaternio nailed him or her to it through the wrists, or sometimes palms, followed by tying the arms to the cross with ropes. They then lifted him or her up onto the Staticula, sliding it into the niche in the Patibulum, creating a zulon or "tree" made of deadwood, of which, perversely the human corpse to be was the gory fruit.

So you see, the engine of execution, which killed our “Christ” was, in fact a cross after all, and not a single post, as many have imagined it to be and put forth for argument against the sacred symbol. The crucifixion of “Jesus” of Nazareth was not a private affair. Neither was it hasty in the sense of needing the death within a matter of minutes, nor was this event, a part of a mass execution, claiming the lives of thousands as at the Spartacus rebellion or the later destruction of the Temple. Had it been any of these, Rome would have either nailed Him to any nearby wooden structure (a building, fence, or even a living tree) or would have bound him directly to a Staticula with no Patibulum to save on wood and time. Additionally, the scourging would have likely been skipped as well.

Because the Gospel tells us that there was a scourging and that Yeshua did carry His cross (Patibulum) and was nailed to a stauros (Staticula) and that cross was also a zulon, we may know, and be certain, and have every confidence in this fine sign of our salvation, once a symbol that struck fear into every heart, but now that one which brings hope to every soul.

Without worshiping the image itself, we may bear it proudly, knowing our Lord gave His life for us upon such a device as this, and that, in like manner, we owe Him also a similar sacrifice by surrendering our selfish will that wars against His. The cross of “Jesus Christ”, unlike all other emblems, embodies His death, and our own, His life, and our own, and His sacrifice and our own. And it also acts as a promise to all who perceive it, a vow to verity and virtue. We tell all the world when we wear it, that we are otherwise engaged, preoccupied with Paradise, living for another life to come. When we dawn the cross, we are forewarning all creation of our allegiance to the Kingdom and alerting them of our fealty. When we wear it, we are putting them on notice that we are not of this world.

Let us, therefore bear this burden of Calvarian might, and make that bold and beautiful proclamation, so that there can be no doubt about our intentions. And being so adorned, we shall be able to say with the late great C. H. Spurgeon, “The Cross, before my failing eyes, shall be my dying comfort, as it is my living strength.” Knowing it as strength in life and comfort in death, we may yet have happiness in these few mortal days, as surely, as we have eternal hope for the days yet to come, because of the work done by our Saviour upon that cross.

## **+ A SIGN TO ALL WHO SEE US +**

Among protestant denominations, it is typically considered improper to form in gesture, the sign of the cross over an object or one's own body. It is with little exception, thought by protestants everywhere to be a Catholic superstition, but most of us have not bothered to study the sign for true judgment. So let's look into it now, while we are telling the rest of the myths about the cross.

The modern gesture stems from a noble tradition of the earliest days of the faith, and one which was begun by the martyrs. When what became the Christian faith could no longer be counted a sect of the Jewish religion, which conceived it, our early brothers and sisters came under fire by Rome as being a new religion and thus illegal. Persecution, which arose from time to time under various, villainous, governors and vicious, verminous emperors, brought the faithful before the mob, dragged into the arena to face the lions and limb tearing and the like. Our ancient brethren were cast to cruel deaths within the throngs of common criminals. Their deaths accounted by the spectators, no different than the hundreds of criminals (as they perceived) justly punished - thieves, rapists, murderers, and more. Therefore, necessity, being mother of invention, the early believers, condemned to death in front of the crowd, developed the device of signing the cross upon their bodies before execution. This was begun as a means of distinction, which set them apart as martyrs for cause, and not criminals and miscreants.

This, beheld by all, became a generally recognized symbol of Christians even ones not heading for death. It was a sign of identification, a way Christians could recognize each other in a world, not open to the relative freedom we hold in our modern world. Later, it evolved further into a form of blessing for ourselves and others, and eventually became an invocation of divine protection, and a means of warding off attacks by personal demons. Today it serves as a sign of profession of Christian faith (though not one recognized by most protestants... And most often in its current form, a deviation from the original).

It is the position of this humble writer that signing the cross, was and will ever be a positive proclamation, provided its purpose remains in line with those of its origins. And also that the gesture remain, as it was in the beginning, which it has not in most circles. When started, the martyrs made the sign with their right hand, touched to the forehead,



followed by the groin, then the left breast, and the right, completing by motion, a full and true cross. However, this motion began to be altered in later centuries, as what evolved into the church moved north, into the spaces of the pagans, and encountered the Viking religions. While we had the sign of the cross, the Norseman traditionally possessed their own gesture, and shaped over themselves the sign of Mjolnir, the hammer sigil of their thundergod, Thor. This was formed by moving a closed fist, first from the forehead to the bottom of the breast bone then to the left shoulder and the right. With this motion they would recite their gods' names, "Odin, Baldur, Frey, and Thor." In an effort to convert the populace, the Catholic priests took the same gesture, with only an open fist, and two extended fingers in difference, and they Christianized, the recitation with, "In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," replacing the other. And so it remains on to this day, the gesture among the Papists.

But going back to the beginning, there is much to be gained by remembering and restoring this gesture to all Christendom with its original form and usage. As is so of all who dawn the cross, as a patch on the clothing, or as an emblem, hanging from a chain, or otherwise rendered in physical form, making the full sign of the true cross in gesture, not the absurdity assumed from the Norseman of old, should serve as a reminder of our Christian position when offered the chance to partake of evil before the watching world, or when tempted in private to engage in our devilish tendencies.

Signing the cross is drawing up battle lines. In front of all, we show ourselves not of this world. We show all who have eyes to see, that we have chosen to side with the Kingdom of Heaven. And in light of this declaration, we are also demanding of our observers, that they become responsible for our righteous actions thereafter. By signing the cross, in sight of the lost, we are inviting their scrutiny and skepticism, for we have set the standard as the very highest. We have put ourselves out there, told the globe what to expect of us, and now we dare not draw back.

And in our lonely moments, when tempted and tried beyond the eyes of our critics, or our fellow Christians, the cross may serve in the moment as a personal reminder of our righteous cause, and our reasons for constancy in the face of our worst weakness. The cross may not ward off actual evil, like some talisman or totem, but when the darkness of our hearts arises to take hold of us, and make all of us hypocrites and heathens behind

closed doors, then signing the cross may perhaps save us by calling to mind who we are and what we stand for and whom we serve.

In this manner, also, signing the cross, can serve as a blessing for ourselves, and others, when we thereafter walk worthy of this holy and righteous standard. If seen, this becomes the spark in the watcher, which may grow to a fire for the gospel message and maybe a blazing faith in our Messiah, and if unseen, it may make us grow into greater representations of that glorious gospel and more holy agents of Heaven. But above all, putting the sign of the cross upon ourselves, should always represent the deeper reality of Calvarian sacrifice inherent in the sign of the cross hanging round our necks. Let it ever be, that we signed the cross on ourselves, strictly as a sign that we have, do, and will put ourselves on the cross.

## **+ THE HIGH STANDARD OF THE HOLY CROSS +**

There must be continuity between who we are, and what we do, because at the end of it, all, we are simply the sum of our actions. Calling allowed for the world to hear that we are Christians amounts only to the annoyance of the whole human race that this group of people is so noisome. It makes us a nuisance and no more. It takes a high standard of living to rise above the noise, and there is no higher standard than that of the holy cross of "Christ". When we can all sing in tune with this high quality, then maybe the world will here and be amazed, but until then, it is up to us, the few brave little believers, to raise the standard of high-quality in our lives, in every motion of our being, in the hope one day that the cross will be raised in the lives of others.

And what is this benchmark exactly? What is this standard which the cross of Calvary embodies? As it is written, "No greater love has any man than this, that he lay down his life for his fellows." If love like this is not a standard of the cross then I don't know what it is or would be. Did not our Lord "Jesus Christ" inform us that the greatest commandment in all the Law was to love, first our Father Above and second our fellow below? And Scripture, moreover informs us that to do the one is to do the other, for the way of loving the unseen Elohim is loving, everyone visible upon the Earth. Love, after all, is the sum of all the Law of our Lord, since if there is any other commandment, to honor the NAME of our Maker, to honor our parents, to avoid murder, thievery, jealousy, covetousness, lying, and sexual deviancy, to abhor idols, to keep the Sabbath, or to have no other deity

besides YHWH, as the 10 Words have told us, one, and all answer the question of, "How do you love?" Therefore, the Scripture says, "Love does no wrong to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law."

Sadly, in this day and age, to those of the world and the church, love is seen as the same standard, and only the word remains the same as of old. In practice, love is not the fulfillment of all divine instruction, teaching, and principal, but instead, the fulfillment of all human feelings, emotion, and opinion. In this post-modern world, love is being nice, not hurting anyone's feelings, and never being offensive to other peoples delicate sensibilities. Although it is never our Christian disposition to offend anyone for its own sake, all too often in our mere raising of the cross, will prove so offensive to one and all around us. Dare we desire to keep our Heavenly Father's commands, and suddenly all the world and half the church die on the altar of self righteous martyrdom, claiming that we do not act in love. They have changed the meaning of love to "acceptance" and moreover "approval" of the contrary or even times the deviant ideas prevailing among the people of this world, then claim we are unloving, because we can't condone such behavior, as it is unbecoming of our lofty standard of love. The problem will always be that while the cross is always kind to all comers, never, is it nice to anyone at all.



Sight of this cruciform standard is supposed to involved in the observer three principal ideas... Firstly, that YHWH, the living Elohim, sent His Word into this world to die upon that ensign, because of all the ill behavior of men, which we call love, and He calls evil. Secondly, we should see in this symbol, the daily feat of everyone who would dare by faith to be the disciple of Yahshua, the Word of the Most High, Whom many have come to know by the latest version of His name, "Jesus". And thirdly, this symbol is designed to be the dividing line between worlds - this one, and the one to come.

The cross of "Jesus Christ" is so high and mighty a standard of faith and practice, because it reminds us moment by moment that our Heavenly Father is both gracious, and just. He gave us His holy Law to help us live, but we broke it bringing death. So our Heavenly Father sent His "Son" to satisfy that death for us, so we could stay alive....and bring life to the world. Every time we see this sign, that's what it should say to us. The Law is love, but

we chose evil and called our evil, love. For that, perfect righteousness had to die for us, so that love could remain, and so that we could remain alive.

Therefore, the apostle tells us, that the cross is our only source of boasting, and our only source of blessing. Why? Because “Christ” taught us that if we do not daily take up the cross ourselves and follow Him, we cannot be His disciples at all. Thus this symbol serves as a reminder of our own identity and of our own duty; whatever I desire to call love, if it is not ordering my life around the Word of the Almighty Elohim, it must be crucified in favor of doing His Commandments... That which He calls love.

“May I never boast,” Paul says in Galatians 6:14, “except in the Cross of our Lord, ‘Jesus Christ’, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I unto the world.” Many of us don’t want this anymore now. Not in this so-called modern world. “Jesus” said, “I am not of this world, and My people are not of this world.” NOtW. But 21 centuries removed from those words being uttered and this world has grown very comfortable for those who would lay claim to “Christ”. Talk of crucifixion is just some ancient thing He did back then so that now we can kick back and do all that stuff we called love, that “love” that He called “evil”, that “love” that killed Him. What hypocrites we are to deny the standard for ourselves in our time, when the ancient believers died to bring it to us. And what is more, we demand standards of everyone else of lesser importance, but deny requirements for ourselves. We demand standards for books and movies, and music. We demand more of a Ferrari, or a Bentley than a Honda or a Ford. We demand a certain standard for baseball, basketball, football, and their players. Not just anyone can become an EMT, fire, fighter, or doctor. Do you really want a Doctor who walked in off the street with no training? And how about the military? Do you have any idea what manner of hell it takes to become a Navy SEAL? In all this we expect excellence, but we just except anybody when it comes to ourselves. The standard of the cross is the measure of a Christian. Do we love? Not what you call it? But what He called it...and calls it still. It is high time we raise this standard once again before the end.

## **+ THE BANNER OF THE BUTCHERS +**

In any honest talk of the cross, one would be doing a great disservice not to mention the Holocaust, and not just THE HOLOCAUST either, but the long, sad, evil history of the so-called Christian people persecuting the Jewish people and others seen as pagan,

peasant, or otherwise putrid in the eyes of the established Church...and always under the "butcher's banner" - the cross of "Christ". A long standing enmity that led directly to the Holocaust and leads still to hatred and rage in many hearts who see the cross raised before them, has existed in Christendom practically from the beginning. To us who are being redeemed in the blood of the Righteous One shed on such a device, we who bare this emblem as a beautiful reminder of eternal life, need never forget also what evil has been done to others generationally under this same exact emblem. What is to us a sign of life and hope is a symbol to others of death and destruction, a harbinger of doom and horror.

From pogroms to propaganda, from crusades to forced conversions, from inquisitions to expulsions, the centuries long agenda against Judaism and all adjacent faiths is no work of fiction and is a reality the most well written horror film could not portray. The harsh reality is that Christianity has carried the cross before her always in both her charity and her carnage. She has raised high the symbol of hope and crushed the helpless innocents under it. Though this may not be it's natural meaning, yet it can not be ignored that this is it's meaning to many the world over. And we who Take the Cross must recognize that, and be gentle toward those who hate what we hold so dear, giving much grace to those who see in that thing we love so much only an emblem of hate and fear.

In his book "The Four Loves", C.S. Lewis, putting it perfectly said, "If ever the book which I am not going to write is written, it must be the full confession by Christendom of Christendom's specific contribution to the sum of human cruelty and treachery. Large areas of the World will refuse to hear us till we have publicly disowned much of our past. Why should they? We have shouted the name of Christ and enacted the service of Moloch." And indeed he was in no way wrong. Though this small article will not be a book nor will it serve as an apology of any sort, still we will note the villainy of Christianity done under the cover of this wonder, the glorious cross from which our Savior forgave all Man their ills against Him. How sorrowful so many of His acclamations could not in His Name and in His sign so do the same.

Contrariwise, we who are Calvinian and far from imitating the average Christian, scourge those savages who did and do harm innocents of any kind at all let alone under our Saviour's symbol. Yet for all their mistreatment of it and malapropos against others by it, still we will retain it. Though mean men and monsters have reeked havoc in our name, and under our banner, breaking faith with our neighbors and becoming their butchers, their actions are not reflective of the name they claim, nor the sign they swear by and so boldly bear before all the

watching world. Therefore, we will not relinquish to recreants this most righteous symbol. As revanchists however, we stand against them, and all their heritage of hate. We reclaim the cross from the butchers, making it again a banner of the awesomeness of the Almighty. As has always been the way, “No one cares what you know until they know that you care,” and so so many do not know what we know, because of those who did not care. Because of those who were only cruel to the helpless and hopeless, most will not know the hope in the sign of the cross... Yet because of us, they yet may one day. We may not wear it before them, since it still holds for them much fear. But taking the cross is more than just wearing it physically around our neck or on our chest, or carrying it above us or before us as we go. To carry the cross means to sacrifice ourselves for the well-being of our fellows. Therefore, if taking up the cross requires avoiding bearing the physical symbol before certain people for whom the history of cruelty to their people in that sign would prove a snare to their hearing the Word of the Most High, then, before them, we will bear other signs...Until such time as they know the cross bearers will bring them hope and never harm.

