

HOLY HELPS

CROSSED UP OVER THE CROSS

On a mountaintop visible from my home, is a cross silhouetted boldly against the sky. It can be seen by thousands of people. It is an ongoing subject of controversy. The opponents of the cross say that it is on government land and is, therefore, a violation of the Separation of the Church and State Act; some proponents say, among other things, that this is a Christian nation and the cross is the Christian symbol. It is rather easy to get cross with those who are all crossed up over the cross up on the mountain!

Bret Baer reported on Fox News: "In what is bound to be a controversial move, the British government is set to argue at the European Court of Human Rights that Christians do not have the right to wear a cross or crucifix openly at work." The Toronto Star newspaper said, "Critics are already calling it another blow to Christianity for restricting its symbols of faith while granting special status to symbols of other religions such as the Sikh turban and kara (bracelet), or the Muslim hijab. The London Telegraph has revealed that members of Parliament "will argue that because it is not a "requirement" of the Christian faith, employers can ban the wearing of the cross and sack workers who insist on doing so." The cross is still controversial after over 2,000 years.

In the earliest days of the Church, the cross was not only perceived by society in general as an instrument of torture and death, but as a symbol of shame. Controversy about the cross is nothing new. In writing to the church in the city of Galatia, Paul speaks of "the offence of the cross" (Galatians 5:11). The word translated "offence" is from the Greek word "skandalon" from which is derived the word "scandal." It means anything that offends; a stumbling-block or snare; that which puts to shame. The writer of the book of Hebrews said that Jesus "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Hebrews 12:2).

Sensitive people today would not wear, as a piece of jewelry, an electric chair or a hangman's noose around their necks. Why? They are considered to be "skandalon" – an offense; that which is distained by society in general. Just so, in the ancient mind the cross was regarded as we regard those instruments of death. The cross was the most repugnant instrument of death known in Jesus' day.

However, Jesus beautified the most common things that He touched and He glorified the most hideous symbol known in His lifetime when He was impaled to a cross. It is just like God to take a horrible thing like the cross, and turn it into a symbol in which we can glory. The cross is God's plus sign – the cross plus Christ is glory, for the cross without the Christ offers no cure!

The cross on the mountain top visible from my home, is only a symbol and not all that important in itself. The important thing is that "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross" – and it was there that our blessed Savior allowed Himself to be viciously and vicariously nailed to that old rugged cross, "the emblem of suffering and shame." Only God could bring glory from such a hideous thing. Kneel at the cross - Christ will meet you there!