

Is The Cross A Christian Symbol?

The cross is recognised as one of the most important symbols of Christianity, especially in the Roman Catholic Church. It is displayed on tops of roofs and towers. It is seen on altars, furnishings and ecclesiastical garments. The floor plan of the majority of Catholic churches is laid out in the shape of a cross.

All Catholic homes, hospitals and schools have the cross adorning the walls. Everywhere the cross is outwardly honoured and adored in hundreds of ways.

When an infant is sprinkled, the priest makes the sign of the cross upon its forehead. When Catholics enter a church building they touch the forehead, the chest, the left and right shoulder, thus tracing the figure of the cross. During Mass, the priest makes the sign of the cross 16 times and blesses the altar with the cross sign 30 times.

Protestant churches, for the most part, do not believe in making the sign of the cross with their fingers. Neither do they bow down before crosses or use them as objects of worship. They have recognised that these things are unscriptural and also superstitious. But the use of the cross has been commonly retained on steeples, on pulpits and in other ways as a form of decoration.

The early Christians did **not** consider the cross as a virtuous symbol, but rather as “*the accursed tree*” [Galatians 3:13] a device of death and shame. [Hebrews 12:2]

Instead their faith was in what was accomplished on the cross by Jesus Christ, and through this faith, they knew the full and complete forgiveness.

It was in this sense alone that the apostles preached about the cross and glorified in it.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18 [King James] “*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*”

It was not until later that the cross became like a protector or charm to be carried around our neck or in our hand.

It was not until Christianity began to be paganised, that the pagan cross image came to be thought of as a Christian symbol.

It was not until 431AD that crosses in churches and homes were introduced, while the use of crosses on steeples did **not** come until about 586AD. [Harper’s ‘*Book of Facts*’]

In the sixth century, the crucifix image was sanctioned by the church of Rome. [Fausset’s ‘*Bible Encyclopaedia*’, page 145]

It was not until the second Council at Ephesus that private homes were required to possess a cross. [‘*The Cross in Tradition, History and Art*’ by Seymour, page 157]

If the cross is a Christian symbol, it cannot be correctly said that its origin was within Christianity, for in one form or another it was a sacred symbol long before the Christian era and among many non-Christian people.

According to An Expository Diction of New Testament Words the cross originated among the Babylonians of ancient Chaldea.

“The ecclesiastical form of two beams crossed ... had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz [being in the shape of the Mystic Tau, the initial of his name] in that country and in ancient lands, including Egypt ... In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system, pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was accepted to stand for the cross of Jesus Christ.” [‘An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words’ by Vine, page 256]

In any book on Egypt that shows old monuments and walls of ancient temples, one can see the use of the Tau cross.

“Here unchanged for thousands of years we find among her [Egypt’s] most sacred hieroglyphics the cross in various forms ... but the one known specially as the ‘Cross of Egypt’ or the Tau cross, is shaped like the letter ‘T’ often with a circle or ovoid above it. Yet this mystical symbol was not peculiar to this country, but was revered among the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Mexicans and every ancient people in both hemispheres.”

“As the cross symbol spread to various nations, its use developed in different ways. Among the Chinese the cross is acknowledged to be one of the most ancient devices ... It is portrayed upon the walls of their pagodas, it is painted upon the lanterns used to illuminate the most sacred recesses of their temples.”

“The cross has been a sacred symbol in India for centuries among non-Christian people. It has been used to mark the jars of holy water taken from the Ganges, also as an emblem of the disembodied Jaina saints. In the central part of India, two crude crosses of stone have been discovered which date back to a time centuries before the Christian era.”

“The Buddhists and numerous other sects of India marked their followers on the head with the sign of the cross.”

“On the continent of Africa, at Susa, natives plunge a cross into the River Gitché. The Katsyle women, although Mohammedans, tattoo a cross between their eyes. In Wanyahwizi walls are decorated with crosses. The Yaricks, who established a line of kingdoms from Niger to the Nile, had an image of a cross painted on their shields.” [‘The Cross in Traditional History and Art’ by Seymour, pages 9-10, 12-13, 22 and 26]

“In Palenque, Mexico, founded by Votan in the ninth century before the Christian era, is a heathen temple known as ‘The Temple of the Cross.’ There inscribed on an altar slab is a central cross six and a half by eleven feet in size. The Catholic Encyclopaedia includes a photograph of this cross, beneath which are the words ‘Pre-Christian Cross of Palenque’.” [volume 10, page 253; Article ‘Mexico’]

“When the Spaniards first landed in Mexico, they could not suppress their wonder as they beheld the cross, the sacred emblem of their own faith, raised as an object of worship in the Temples Anahuac, by pagan nations on whom the light of Christianity had never shone.” [‘Conquest of Mexico’ by Prescott, volume 1, page 242]

In olden times, the Mexicans worshipped a cross as Tota [our father]. This practice of addressing a piece of wood with the title “father” is also mentioned in the Christian Bible.

When the Israelites mixed idolatry with their religion, they said to a stock, “*Thou art my father.*”

Jeremiah 2:27-30 [King James] *“Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. Wherefore will ye plead with me? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the*

LORD. In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.”

But it is contrary to the scriptures to call a piece of wood or a human priest by the title of “father.”
[**Matthew 23:9**]

“Ages ago in Italy, before the people knew anything of the arts of civilisation, they believed in the cross as a religious symbol. It was regarded as a protector and was placed upon tombs. In 46BC, Roman coins showed Jupiter holding a long sceptre terminating in a cross.” [‘*The Cross in Tradition, History and Art*’ by Seymour, pages 22, 26]

“The Vestal Virgins of pagan Rome wore a cross suspended from their necklaces, as the nuns of the Roman Catholic church do now.” [‘*The Two Babylons*’ by Hislop, page 198]

“The Greeks depicted crosses on the headband of their god, corresponding to Tammuz of the Babylonians. Porcelli mentions that Isis was shown with a cross on her forehead. Her priests carried professional crosses in their worship of her. The Temple of Serapis in Alexandria was surmounted by a cross. The Temple of the Sphinx when it was unearthed was found to be crucified in shape.”

“Ensigns in the form of a cross were carried by the Persians during their battles with Alexander the Great [BC 335]. The cross was used as a religious symbol by the Aborigines of South America in ancient times. Newborn children were placed under its protection against evil spirits. The Patagonians tattooed their foreheads with crosses. Ancient pottery in Peru has been found that is marked a cross as a religious symbol. Monuments show that Assyrian kings wore crosses suspended on their necklaces, as did some of the foreigners that battled against the Egyptians.” [‘*Encyclopaedia of Religions*’ volume 1, pages 386, 494]

“Crosses were also figured on the rot-n-no as early as the fifteenth century before the Christian era.”
[‘*The Two Babylons*’ by Hislop, page 198]

The Catholic Encyclopaedia acknowledges that the sign of the cross, represented in its simplest form by a crossing of two lines at right-angles, greatly ante-dates, in both the East and the West, the introduction of Christianity. It goes back to a very remote period of human civilisation. [Volume 4, page 517; Article ‘*Cross*’]

All that has been mentioned comes down to one thing that is of real importance. Jesus Christ the Son of the only One God the Father died on a cross, whatever shape, as the only perfect substitute for the death that all humanity, good as well as bad people, have earned.

Romans 3:23 [King James] *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”*

All humanity in every generation.

Romans 6:23 [King James] *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Death is all that all our efforts to be sin-free can earn.

1 John 1:8-10 [NIV] *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*

Only by confession of our sins to our Creator God can we be freed from eternal death.

Worship the One on the cross, **not** the cross.

Jesus Christ our only Saviour is the only “*symbol*” of true Christianity.

John 14:6 [King James] *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*