

**38 If Jesus died to take away sin why is the world just as sinful today as it was in his day?**

*If Jesus died to take away sin why is the world just as sinful today as it was in his day?* No one can really measure how the world has changed for better or worse over the last 2000 years but it's obvious that sin is still around! Christians see the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus nonetheless as a decisive intervention against sin at the summit of history.

Where's the evidence for this? It lies in changed attitudes, changed lives and changed communities stretching down through history. Every prayer, every act of trust in God's word, every celebration of the sacraments in every age has drawn on what Jesus achieved in that first Christian century.

Life in one Latin American city suburb revolved around the rubbish dump. Poor people made a living there sifting through the garbage but with much infighting. The arrival of nuns helped build Christian community, challenging the useless competition and building trust. A trade union was formed. People got better payment for their labours. Sinful attitudes gave way to trustful collaboration.

This is one story but it speaks of how Jesus takes away our sins today. It's in a succession of stories that make up trade union history, not least the formation of unions in Britain a century ago through the Christian influence of the Methodist movement.

Through prayer and sacrament cleansing and renewal come right into lives and communities. Jesus is seen again and again acting against evil, rescuing people from its destructive power when they seek him within the Christian community.

The spread of evils such as social inequality, unjust trade, wars and so on are linked to the misuse of free will. A loving God is in some way bound to allow evil so as to respect this freedom.

Christians misuse free will just like non-Christians. They get sick and die like anyone else. They also claim to experience a countering of destructive powers such as sin, sickness and death when they seek their Lord. The death and resurrection of Christ are found to counter the powers of evil when the risen Lord is given freedom to do so in lives opened up to him.

Billions of people through the ages have seen their wrong tendencies countered by the power of Christ at work within them. In consequence Christianity has to contest the claim that the world would be no different without Christ.

Furthermore by its exaltation of the individual and his or her potential for changing the world, Christianity has at times provided humankind with campaigners for vital reforms. People like William Wilberforce, who pioneered

the abolition of slavery, and Cicely Saunders, who pioneered the hospice movement in Britain, are just two examples.

*If Jesus died to take away sin why is the world just as sinful today as it was in his day?* We believe history is *his* story but it's hard to prove it conclusively.

People bring up Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Rwanda as places where the misbehaviour of Christians seems to have made things worse for the world in recent years. These places tell terrible stories and give evidence at the very least that the Christianity in these communities hardly got into gear to rise above sectarian hatred. There are though individual stories from those places, like that of Gordon Wilson at Enniskillen, that show the overcoming of sinful hatred through faith in Jesus.

Christians can at least point to other historical developments that tell a better tale about the good news Jesus brings.

Would the apartheid regime in South Africa have fallen without the concerted effort of Christians across denominations and without the Christian generosity of spirit in men like Nelson Mandela? Archbishop Tutu once said apartheid was too strong for a divided church. It was the reconciliation of Christians by Jesus that served to reconcile that land.

Would the thrall of Stalinist communism have been lifted from Eastern Europe a generation ago without the solidarity movement in Poland that owed so much to the Catholic Church and its then leader, Polish Pope John Paul the second?

In 2009 a black President was inaugurated in the United States. Someone who'd have been part of a slave culture centuries ago raised up to lead the whole world! There's no conclusive explanation for such a reversal but surely the Christian witness of Dr. Martin Luther King played a part in it.

There *are* signs that Jesus takes away the sins of the world if only you've got eyes to see them!