

BOOK REVIEW

SCENT FROM HEAVEN

By Timothy Cross

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In these days of all-too-plentiful and low-quality cheap Evangelical paper-backs, which stuff the shelves, floor to ceiling in nearly all Evangelical book shops, it comes as a refreshing change to find one that is worth reading, and that, not once, but several times over, indeed, one that is worthy of consultation for reference purposes as well as for instruction, edification, and devotion.

Such a book is this fine little volume by Timothy Cross. It draws attention to little-contemplated, but highly significant, Biblical teaching about the Priestly function of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all the entailments this carries for the Christian life.

"Scent from Heaven" carries in its title a double meaning, "scent" being a homophone of "sent". Our Saviour was indeed "sent" from Heaven, and in His very person He was also "Scent" from Heaven. Dr. Cross builds from this feature to examine the significance of both concepts as they are articulated in the Scriptures, and in so doing uncovers some "nuggets of gold" that will delight the heart, enlighten the mind, encourage the soul, and inspire the Christian in devotion to His God and His Redeemer. He examines the nature, deployment, and significance of the sweet fragrances utilized by the Priests in the Old Testament, and the typological bearing all this has for our understanding of Biblical Priesthood, and the Person and Work of Christ. The book is a veritable mine of information about a host of little-heard-of, but fascinating and important features of Old Testament types and shadows, with technical detail presented, not only in an easy-to-understand manner, but couched in a delightful literary style that inspires interest and devotion. The truth is, that time and again believers read through the intricate details of the Old Testament tabernacle, and gain little out of it, but, as Dr. Cross shows, thereby we miss profundities untold...for instance, did you realize that while Moses spent only **two** chapters of Genesis on the creation (an event of unimaginable proportions), yet he spent **thirteen** chapters on instructions concerning the tabernacle ? There, as Dr. Cross says, is the indication of how important this meeting-place between God and man was....it had to be "just so."

A fascinating chapter on the significance of the sacred anointing oil for the High Priest opens this volume, herein are some amazing, and little known facts !

This fragrant oil was absolutely unique, and its recipe was given by God. An analysis of this is given in an appendix at the end of the book, in so far as that is possible, because by God's Providence, we are now no longer able to positively identify every element that was used in making this sweet-smelling oil. Significantly in this respect Dr. Cross draws attention to the stern warning of Exodus 30 : 32, where it is forbidden for anyone other than Moses to make this oil, upon pain of being "*cut off from His people.*" (v. 33). God has therefore, providentially made it now impossible for unauthorised hands to replicate that original Holy anointing oil. The significance of this ? Well, you must purchase the book. On this and hosts of other fascinating items the author has provided an important contribution to theological study. Most important, I believe, is the light he has shed on the Providential reasons behind, and value of, the suffering of the Saints. Pointing out that such ingredients for these fragrant oils such as olive require to be crushed in order to yield their goodness, he then draws attention to how Christ, in being crushed, as it were, by His sufferings on the cross yielded too that Life-giving fragrance that was a sacrifice sweet-smelling to God. Indeed, the same is observable in the martyrs, it is, as it were, when they were crushed by the torments of the Inquisition, then from within their souls a sacred "scent" was released, well-pleasing to God. One sees this in the event of St. Stephen's martyrdom in Acts ch. 7. It seems as though the 'crushing' actually yields the very best that is in the Christian, and strengthens the individual to endure the suffering.

With there being such a heavy emphasis on the spoken and written word, one tends to forget that we have five senses, and that as such this reflects something not only of our Creator's character, but also of His image. The sense of smell is taken up in the Scriptures as an important feature of man's relations to God, our sins are said to stink, whereas the prayers of the righteous go up as a sweet smelling savour to God. Hence, the important emphasis in the Bible concerning 'smells' and 'scents'. In this age we depend so little on our olfactory organs, civilization having isolated us from the rich and variegated smells of country living and the natural environment, that we barely notice much aromatic except on certain occasions, that we have failed to see the importance of the aromatic in Biblical religion, and the significance of "scent" pertaining to our Lord, and to our own Christian lives.

How this "scent", and its typification in the Holy scent of the Old Testament relates to Christ and His Priestly work, the Christian and his calling in Christ as one of a "*chosen generation, a royal priesthood...*" (1 Peter 2 : 9), how it relates to prayer, what it actually cost Mary when she broke that alabaster box of sweet smelling ointment and poured it over the Lord, all this...and many more fascinating issues are expounded in this, indeed, "fragrant" little book. I could only wish that Dr. Cross had utilised the AV in his quotations, but notwithstanding, here is a book, the value of which is distinctly the magnitudinal opposite of its small size.

Editor.