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**ROMANS 5 AND
THE ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTEBURY**
*A Review of the
presentation made
by the Archbishop of
Canterbury at
Amsterdam 2000*

By

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Jamaica who participated in
Amsterdam 2000.*

Taking a backward glance over the last fifty years or so, it would appear that British scholarship had a particular love affair with Paul's letter to the Romans. A number of the better commentaries on this book, considered by some to be the apostle's magnum opus, have come from the pens of people like Barclay (1957), Bruce (1963), Barrett (1957) Cranfield (1979), and Dunn (1988). An interesting observation is that the last three mentioned scholars are all associated with the same university. But given the impact of Romans on various individuals and movements throughout history one should not be surprised at its enormous attraction for lovers of the New Testament and its theology. I think it is the late Professor F F Bruce (1963: 58-60) who best sums up the influence of the letter:

In the summer of AD 386 Aurelius Augustinus... sat weeping in the garden of his friend...

"Almost persuaded to begin a new life, yet lacking the final resolution to break with the old. As he sat, he heard a child singing..., *Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!* ('Take up and read!...') Taking up the scroll which lay at his friend's side [he read] ... Rom. Xiii. 13b-14... 'instantly, at the end of this... [reading] a clear light flooded my heart and all darkness and doubt vanished away.' What the Church and the world owe to this influx of light... is something beyond our power to compute.

In November 1515, Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and professor of Sacred Theology in the University of Wittenberg, began to expound Paul's Epistle to the Romans to his students...

As he prepared his lectures, he came more and more to appreciate the centrality of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. ... 'Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone

through open doors into paradise.... This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven'....

In the evening of 24 May 1738, John Wesley 'went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. 'About a quarter before nine... while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation.... That critical moment in John Wesley's life was the event above all others which launched the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century.

In August 1918, Karl Barth...published an exposition of the Epistle to the Romans.

'The reader... will detect for himself that it has been written with a joyful sense of discovery. The mighty voice of Paul was new to me.... And yet, now that my work is finished, I perceive that much remains which I have not yet heard....' But what he had heard he wrote down—and that first edition of his *Romerbrief* fell 'like a bombshell on the theologians' playground.' The repercussions are with us still.

There is no telling what may happen when people begin to study the Epistle to the Romans. What happened [to the above individuals]...? has happened much more frequently to very ordinary people as the words of this Epistle came home to them with power.

Data like these pre-dispose one to approach the book of Romans with a sense of excitement and anticipation and that is how I began listening to the Most Reverend, Dr George Carey, head of the Anglican community worldwide. His message was one of 14 plenary sessions at Amsterdam 2000 and it was entitled "Preaching Christ in a Broken World." The following is the outline of his sermon:

1. The World As It Is
 - A. We live in a world that is broken by the weight of human sin.
 - B. Why is that?
 - C. How do we account for the perversity of mankind?
 - D. Where do we see signs of hope in our history?

- E. Who are some of the people who have opened our eyes to a new vision?
- F. What is it about the Christian worldview that feeds our vision of a world transformed?
- 2. Does the Gospel still speak convincingly to the World?
 - A. What is the heart of the Gospel?
 - B. Does it exclude the possibility of human advance?
 - C. Why do we so easily assume that such developments are a threat to the Gospel?
- 3. Preaching Christ Today
 - A. The dynamics of conversion:
 - 1. The fact that the Christian analysis of the human person is accurate and discerning.
 - 2. The Gospel speaks as powerfully not only to human need but supplies an eternal answer.
 - 3. The church must be renewed to be a convincing “apologia” of the Gospel; nothing speaks more powerfully of “good news” than those whose loves have been changed.

Prologue

The Archbishop begins by telling the story of a post-card he received in 1998 addressed to “Jesus Christ, C/O the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, The Heavenly Kingdom.” A postal worker had re-directed it with the words “Try Lambert Palace” (His residence). “I like to believe,” he remarks, “that wherever I’m, the Lord Jesus Christ is there.” He then goes on to thank Dr. Billy Graham for making himself available to God to be used in leading many thousands to Christ, including his wife in 1954.

As he proceeded with his introduction he confesses that he finds it ironic and deeply relevant to his theme that he is preaching in Amsterdam—the scene of Albert Camus’ disturbing novel *La Chute*, which so much underlines the hopelessness of the human condition, a motif in which its author passionately believed. But although Camus’ grasp of man’s dilemma was so realistic, he himself had no real solution to the weight of guilt and the burden of despair that characterized Europeans at that time, since in his brand of philosophy there is no redeemer and no

saviour. The archbishop then went on to expound the second part of his bipolar topic.

Dialogue

OUR WORLD

The Archbishop first of all lays stress on the positive elements of our world: its beauty, as well as its relation to and reflection of divinity. No true Christian, he says, ever despises the world. On the contrary, the true believer cherishes it and recognizes that its *Homo sapien* inhabitants are stamped with the *imago Dei*. They are immensely loved by their almighty Creator and must be loved by us as well. But along with this fact, we know the world is broken. Even the most skeptical and irreligious among us know this. But neither Camus nor any other person provides the analytical depth of our brokenness as the apostle does in Romans 5.

Here the apostle describes sin in two graphic pictures: 1) sin kills and 2) reigns. In fact the verb "reigns" (βασιλευω) occurs five times in the passage and three times it is used of sin as a tyrant holding mankind subject. In the next occurrence it is used of God's people reigning in life through the victory of Christ on the cross. But for the most part the Kingdom language that Paul uses depicts a world in which evil is triumphant. Sin reigns as a tyrant in everyplace, except where Christ's victory is received. So as we look at the world around us, we are in no doubt about the destructive power of sin. It is enslaving, reigning and destroying human lives to an alarming degree. Citing the Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton, Dr Carey reminds the audience that of all biblical doctrines the doctrine of original sin is the only one that is directly observable. We can see it all around. It is evident in our literature and songs and our films. For example, in Woody Allen's film, "Hannah and her Sisters", the protagonist (Michael Caine) commits adultery. Under the weight of his own guilt he confesses, "In spite of all my learning and capabilities, I do not know my own heart." "That is the reality of all of us", remarks the archbishop.

Human nature, however, tries to run away from that analysis. But the very tendency to shift the centre of attention somewhere else is evidence of the triumph and reign of sin. "So while the predicament of human nature is

so clearly shown in our powerlessness over wrong doing, we seek solutions elsewhere, we try to shift the blame. But in all this there are no substitutes for Christ. They are false gods.”

The Archbishop then goes on to delineate three alternative “saviours” which dominate Western culture: 1) therapy; 2) education; and 3) wealth. People, he says, are obsessed with these “gods,” although none of them can provide any lasting solution to our broken world.

THERAPY

Western culture is fascinated with the healing of the body and the mind. The unspoken assumption is that if we can but keep in tune with the well-being of our inner-selves, all will be well. “Yet there is nothing virtually wrong with many therapeutic practices. Jesus himself is the supreme example of a whole person, at one with himself. However, therapy easily fails to face up to the reality of in in our lives.” So when therapy and its techniques replace faith and are seen as the total answer to humanity’s needs they become idolatrous at this point and a surrogate of the gospel. This is seen in many sermons today where Christ the Saviour is replaced by Christ the counselor and almost invariably a therapeutic approach is favoured over a theological one. Missing is that true holiness of God underlying Romans 5 and our need for salvation.

EDUCATION

This is the second god preferred by the world. “Again there is a proper focus on education in all our societies. In fact the Church, for example, began to invest in education long before the state woke up to it, and throughout the world today the Christian community continues to provide resources in this area.” But when education is seen as *the* answer to the problems of the human race then there is serious trouble. “Why is it?” asks the Archbishop, “that in spite of universal education in many, many countries today, there is still such crime, such vandalism, such a break down of family life? Why is it that so many terrible atrocities have occurred in advanced societies? Why is it that education does not meet the loneliness of the human heart and the feelings of guilt?”

Like therapy, when education is introduced as an alternative to the Gospel, it introduces a different kind of saviour. Jesus is seen merely as an enlightened teacher who leads us from ignorance to education. But such a posture is not new. The early Christians encountered the same thing under the guise of an incipient Gnosticism. But whether in our century or theirs, this “knowledge” has failed to address the true condition of the human heart.

WEALTH

The other pseudo-saviour is money. Although the American dollar bears the laudable adage, “In God We Trust,” observes the archbishop, he heard an American businessman retort “but in City Bank we invest.” As with the other two gods, money has a proper place, because without wealth creation societies cannot prosper and the endeavor to help the poorer countries would flounder. But the power of money to corrupt along with its insidious temptation should never be underestimated. When wealth and riches becomes the ultimate aim of life, an idol is erected. In church circles “think of the number of tele-evangelists for whom the lure of money has become for them an inescapable part of the Gospel. Think of the rise of prosperity gospels which have lured poor people to a false faith based on the promise of riches,” which may sound like good-news but in fact is a false gospel. This is called the “cargo” gospel in some parts of the world; “If you believe in Jesus you too will be prosperous and will succeed.” In contrast, the good-news we preach, declares the archbishop, is one in which a cross is central. So despite the attraction of riches, it cannot solve the problem of humanity and the impoverishment of the human heart.

These three gods – therapy, education and wealth – are but three of the powerful defenses that human nature sets up to avoid the reality of brokenness which the Bible identifies as sin — that which enslaves, that which kills, that which now reigns. What is really sad is that even in the church we shy away from that analysis. “If we consider our world at the beginning of the 21st century, particularly the Western world, it seems out of tune with the Christian analysis of the human condition, though it will agree with you that no one is perfect and that we all fall short of our ideals.” Yet the world is not prepared to accept the radical diagnosis that

the apostle offers, much less the wonderful solution he, through Jesus Christ, proffers. "Man has put his trust in man, and, seemly, has not been disappointed. Trusting in health and wealth and universal education, he believes that all our problems will be eradicated." However, that is a road that leads nowhere but despair, says Dr Carey.

The task, then, of the Christian community is to address this world with the true analysis of its condition and to enable our fellow human beings to discover the true solution to be found in Jesus Christ. But if we are to do so effectively we need to ask two pertinent questions: 1) What kind of Saviour does this world need? and 2) What kind of church can bring this Saviour to our world?

"As we think about this first question, it could be so easily deduced that the only saviour that Christians can bring to our multicultural and religiously pluralistic world is our contribution to the market place of religions — an understandable Christ, a tolerant Christ, a cheerful chappy of a Christ, who doesn't make too many demands on people, a Christ who simply came to make a contribution to the religious storehouse of mankind." That is not the kind of Christ described in Romans 5. Using some strong terms, the apostle Paul describes Christ as the universal Saviour from sin, as God's gift to mankind, and the one through whom a new reign has begun. So the relevance of the Christian Gospel "lies not simply in the experience of renewal (because you know many other philosophies offer that) but in the incomparable person of Jesus Christ, and there must be no apology for preaching what the theologian Hans Frei refers to as the unique identify of Jesus Christ. And churches fail and preachers fail when we cease speaking of what the theologians call the singularity of Christ or the scandal of particularity, that in this man Jesus Christ, God has appeared for all mankind."

"When Christians and churches depart from a committed faith in Christ, who was not only an incomparable teacher [and] visionary leader, but the one whom God raised from the dead, the only Lord and only Saviour — when we depart from that we depart from the throbbing heart-beat of authentic Christian faith [that is] grounded in the New Testament and anchored in the creeds of the church. This is the Saviour that came to our world some 2000 years ago and this is the Saviour that our world needs to hear a fresh today. But this begs the question, 'Does it work?' It certainly does." Every evangelist, every dedicated pastor and teacher,

declares the archbishop, can testify of the very many lives that have been touched by the amazing grace of God revealed in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "I come as a person born and bred in the working class district of East London; my parents had nothing to do with the Christian faith, but God broke into our family in a most remarkable way," he testifies. He continues, "And as archbishop I am privileged to see God at work in so many different parts of the world as well as in my own country, and a week scarcely fails to go by without some one writing to me to tell me of how God has come in their lives." One, therefore, is humbled at such testimonies of God love, which points to the Saviour our world so desperately needs. "But it would be wrong to conclude from this that this emphasis on the particularity of Jesus and the Gospel leads to a fundamentalist, bigoted, narrow and dogmatic message that we thrust down people's throat. Of course not! The Christ we follow, I follow, you follow, is one who allows people to think, argue, dispute and doubt." In line with this, authentic Christianity is not afraid of scholarship, including the critical study of the Bible. Therefore the true evangelist/pastor has everything to gain in helping people explore the haunting questions thrown up by the human condition. In so doing people will be helped to embrace a strong faith with deep foundation. So the pastor or evangelist who follows in the footsteps of the compassionate and tolerant Master, will approach his/her task with equal compassion, tolerance and humility, because we all stand under the cross. "In the words of Max Warren:

If the cross stands at the center of history as Christians believe.

If it is the central key in understanding the nature of God, the dilemma of man, the mystery of life and death, then we have to expand its meaning as the way in which all men are meant to live and die.

"And so what kind of Saviour does our world need? The same kind of Saviour yesterday and forever. The one that the apostles wondered about, the one the church has taught down the centuries, the Christ who saves us, liberates us, and reigns in us. If the church today does not preach this kind of Saviour, it has no good news to share with our broken world."

This leads to a second question: What kind of Church can bring such a Saviour to our world? First of all, a truly ecumenical church; a church that is willing to work together like it did just after World War II with a

meeting in Amsterdam. "Perhaps one of the most distinctive things about this conference is not only have we brought together representatives from over 200 countries, and over 10, 000 delegates but I would guess that this is a very unusual conference in that most of us here tonight are prepared to recognize Christ in one another and to affirm that all trinitarian churches are authentic expressions of Christ' body here on earth."

What kind of a church can bring such a Saviour to our world? Second, a truly energetic church. "How we long to see our churches transformed into authentic bodies reaching out to our needy and broken world in love and service," opines the Archbishop. "There is a very sad truth in the doggerel attributed to an English bishop, who on his death bed, said these words:

Tell my priest when I'm gone o'er me
To shed no tears
For I shall be no deader then
Than they have been for years.

"We may think of congregations that appear to be stuck as well, and for whom at best the routine of church life appears to be the only object of the game and at worst, survival is the name of the game."

In a situation like this it is no surprise that the communication of the gospel becomes ineffective. But what a difference it makes when churches like this work in unison with the Holy Spirit to revitalize themselves. When they do, declares the archbishop, at least four changes are effected. (1) Based on a common faith, new ecumenical partnerships will emerge; (2) rooted in the culture of those to whom we minister, an effective evangelistic strategy will be forged; (3) with a focus on human needs, the gospel will be related to the whole of life, and (4) genuine worship will be practiced-- worship which is vibrant, enthusiastic and joyful.

"Those of us like me who come from a tradition where liturgy has a central place, we must pay particular attention that liturgy doesn't become a straight-jacket that confines our worship or a framework that stops the Holy Spirit from working in his people. Let me add another health warning: non-liturgical churches have their problems in a different kind of repetition that may lead to a different kind of deadness."

Epilogue

The Archbishop then concludes by saying that through passionate preaching, powerful testimony and wonderful singing we will be enabled to win others in our broken world. Though we live in uncertain times, he believes that they are also thrilling times for any Christian to serve, for the Christian message is as relevant as it has ever been, and the need for a Saviour is more urgent than ever.

REFLECTION

Although this message did not get the kind of response that was given to an Anne Graham-Lotz or a Gerry Gallimore, there can be little doubt about its effectiveness in terms of addressing the assigned theme. Neither can it be doubted that it was based upon a faithful exposition of the mind of the apostle expressed in Romans 5. If it is correct that “an exposition without application is an abortion,” then Dr Carey has also done well from that perspective and in this regard one wishes that the full transcript of his sermon would be made available to a wider audience.

There are at least two points that are worth highlighting. The first has to do with the archbishop’s diagnosis of the human condition. He is to be commended first of all for underscoring the fact that man was originally created in the *imago divinitas* and still bears that resemblance. More often than not in our anxiety to zero in on the spiritual bankruptcy of human beings we neglect to point out their value in the sight of their Maker. In a recent combined graduation exercise of the Jamaica Theological Seminary and the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology, the guest speaker, Dr Faith Linton, also made this positive affirmation¹. This is what University of Technology sociology professor, the Rev Martin Schade, calls “original grace.” But it appears that the trend nowadays is toward a denial of the other side of the coin: humanity’s brokenness. Thus Gleaner columnist, Peter Espeut can write “Man is good by nature (When God made man he looked and saw that he was very good!). His good nature, however, has a

¹ The most balanced approach so far is from Dr. Linton. She counsels, “We need a theology which embraces both the strength and the weakness, the dignity and the depravity of humans; a theology that gives priority to what the Bible puts first, ‘The Dignity and Depravity of Humanity,’ February 19, 2001.

flaw, which causes man not to perceive the whole good. And so when man sins he does not reach for evil *per se* but for an imperfect good” (“The Value of Humanity,” December 20, 2000).² The archbishop skillfully avoided this imbalance (Fig. 1).

Another emphasis of the archbishop, which seems outmoded today, is the insistence on the exclusivity of Jesus. This is fittingly dubbed the “scandal of particularity,” as we have already seen. But is this kind of emphasis sustainable in our global religious village? The answer has to be a resounding “yes,” unless of course we are prepared to radically revise the New Testament, as members of the so-called Jesus seminar and others have done.

Genesis 1:26, 27

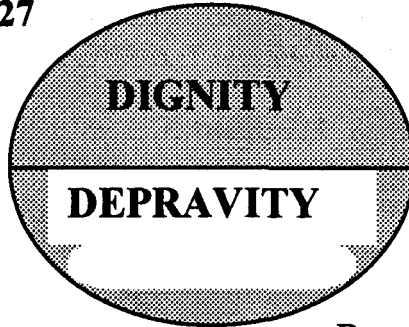


Fig 1

Romans 5:12

¹ This is followed by another article (“Capital Punishment and the intrinsic goodness of Man,” *The Daily Gleaner*, January 10, 2001, p. A4). Responses in the same medium contradicting Espeut’s position include the following:

Dennis McKoy, “Man’s Depravity and Capital Punishment,” Martin Henry, “Is Humanity Intrinsically Good?” both on January 16, 2001. Coming out in support of Roman Catholic deacon, Peter Espeut is Anglican Rector, Rev Ernie Gordon, “Humankind is intrinsically Good,” January 27, 2001. In his rejoinder, Espeut writes “The idea that humanity is intrinsically evil is fundamentally anti-Christian, for how then could the Word have become flesh and dwelt amongst us?” January 31, 2001.

At Amsterdam 86, Bishop E V Hill concluded a stirring message to an appreciative audience by declaring “Jesus is still preachable.” He was referring of course to the Jesus that John (3:16), Peter (2 Peter 1: 16ff), Luke (Acts 4:12) and Paul (1 Tim 2:5) proclaimed. Here the archbishop is in agreement with the bishop: Jesus is forever “preachable.”

There is one important question that the Dr Carey did not ask, though. It is this: What kind of communicator should proclaim this Jesus? I suppose that this concern was subsumed under the question about what kind of church should bring this Saviour to our world (and a similar question was addressed by Dr. Gerry Gallimore). However, to focus attention on the individual evangelist would not have been inappropriate.

An answer that I think would be in keeping with the general tenor of the archbishop’s sermon is graphically displayed below (figure 2). The wo/man who seeks to proclaim the Messiah must be in some real sense messianic — or “anointed”, if you please.

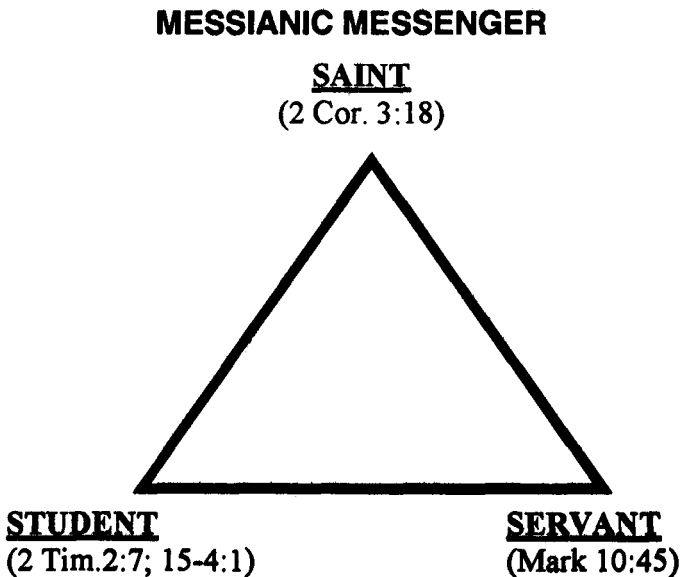


Fig. 2



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