

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 16 P. 2

Volume 16 • Number 1 • January 1992

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

of the Spirit through prayer are essential to 'mission in Christ's way'. Without them there can be no sustained witness. p. 5

Enthronement Sermon Canterbury, England Friday, April 19th 1991

George Carey

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'Wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ, there is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it.'

That sentence, from T. S. Eliot's play, is about the death of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, whose manner of dying made this place holy ground. My own enthronement, as successor to Thomas Becket, falls on the anniversary of an earlier martyr bishop, St Alphege, who in 1012 was beaten to death with the bones of an ox. Martyrdom is usually messy, often humiliating, never romantic, whatever we make of it later. So another Archbishop would tell us—William Laud—the only other Bishop of Bath and Wells to move to Canterbury, whose blood was shed on the scaffold. Such predecessors make me wonder—a little uneasily—about what may lie ahead, though it is not the particular circumstances of history which occupy my mind but the very nature of the calling to be Christian and a leader of Christians.

The clue lies in that word 'martyr'. It originates from a word meaning 'witness', a word which Christians use of anyone who tells their story of what God has done for them in Christ. It expresses what we are doing this afternoon, for Christianity is about proclaiming good news and expressing it in joyful worship and service.

Archbishops do not exist for their own sake. They too are witnesses—called to be preachers, pastors, teachers and evangelists. St Paul's words from our first reading are directed at me today—'Necessity is laid upon me; woe to me if I preach not the gospel'.

Necessity is laid upon me—or as another translation puts it; 'I am compelled ... woe to me if I preach not the gospel'. Knowing and loving and living within the grace of Christ, the church must so tell of its Lord and Master that others are brought to his allegiance. Like Paul I see this as central to the role of Christian leadership. The church is duty bound to call people to the Living God; and it is the Archbishop's duty and joy to lead that call.

Let none think that I say this in disregard of the doubt and secularism p. 6 of much of our nation. I know there are many voices raised in disbelief that anyone can still think there is a God who loves, who hears our prayers and whose will is our good. They point to the blood stains of human history, not least in the Church, and ask, in anger, contempt or amusement, for evidence of this good and gracious God. They suspect that faith is simply a shelter for the weak in mind and spirit against the storms of life or nostalgia for a bygone age.

To such sceptics I ask: Is Mother Teresa weak? Is Desmond Tutu weak? Is Terry Waite weak?—he who with all other hostages suffers a living martyrdom and whose release remains a priority of my primacy. Are the Christians of Eastern Europe weak, especially

those who have been persecuted or exiled for their faith? In this Cathedral today are Christians from parts of the world whose courage and tenacity in the face of hatred and hostility compel our admiration. We must remind ourselves that there have been more Christian martyrs this century than any other of the previous nineteen. Ours is an age of martyrs. God has not left himself without witnesses. Nor does he now. Among the witnesses here today are my brother Archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Communion now gathered beside me at St. Augustine's Chair. Many of them bring to our Communion a faith that has matured in terrible adversity and triumphed over suffering.

Others come as representatives from different Christian bodies. It is a privilege to welcome you. Your presence is evidence of that slow but steady movement towards greater unity which has been one of the remarkable gifts of God to us in these times. And yet there remains a sadness at the heart of today's ceremony. As the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury, I stand in a succession which directs us back to the one undivided Church of Christ, a long way away from the 360 member churches of the World Council of Churches. If necessity is laid upon us to preach that God reconciles, then we cannot rest content with our scandalous divisions. 'The love of Christ compels a burning desire for unity' Archbishop Benson declared years ago. Indeed it does, for that love requires of its messengers the love of Christ for each other.

And we must face that sober truth within the Church of England. Over the centuries we have faced many issues that deeply divided us. Each has tested our commitment to the God who reconciles. In our own time there are other challenges that will test us deeply—not only the ordination of women but also the challenge to live with and accept gratefully the diverse traditions that make up the breadth of Anglicanism. From St. Augustine's chair I ask that we set above our divisions the urgency of witnessing to our nation that there is a God who cares and loves all people. We shall only be able to do that if we stand together p. 7 even when decisions are made that cause us terrible pain. Our witness to the God who unites divided humanity is always more important than our pain. That is true witnessing. This helps us to understand why true martyrs, who suffer in order to witness to the God who reconciles, are always a gift and a blessing. For there will be many for whom simply staying and serving within the Church may feel as costly as the service of those martyrs with whom I began.

This is our main challenge; to be the kind of Church that puts God first, the people we serve next and ourselves last. It will be woe to us if we preach religion instead of the gospel; woe to us if we seek to live off the inheritance of the past and fail to build on those foundations for the future; woe to us if we preach a message that looks only towards inner piety and does not relate our faith to the world around.

And that earthed gospel takes us directly into the market place of the world. No church can or should avoid political comment when freedom, dignity and worth are threatened. The cross of Jesus Christ firmly roots us in human concerns and needs—and places us alongside the oppressed, the dispossessed, the homeless, the poor and the starving millions of our planet. And at this time we particularly think of the plight of the Kurds.

And all this must be held together within a church in which worship and service go hand in hand! Yet we hear from time to time the cry that the church is irrelevant. But how can that be when the life and traditions of our church are woven into the fabric of English life and community in many unseen ways? We are there with thousands and thousands of children in church schools and youth organizations; we are there with the sick at home and in hospital; we are there amongst prisoners; we are there in universities, the forces, in industry and commerce; we are there in the struggles of farming communities and in needy inner city areas.

And all this is applicable to another group of people who are with us today; people of good will who are unable to accept all or most of the doctrines of the church and especially those who belong to other faith communities. You are also welcome today and by being here address an important question to those of us who follow Christ. You might put it to us in this form: 'We recognise that we live in a land that is Christian by heritage and predominant culture. But do we have a place with you?' Part of the answer lies in that shared texture of life I have just described. But deeper than that is the issue of integrity as persons and believers. I would want to put it this way: 'The faith that I have in Christ and his good news is so important that I am compelled—necessity is laid upon me—to share it with all people. But I trust I can listen to your [p.8](#) story and respect your integrity even though having listened I may still want to offer to you, as to all, the claims of my Lord'. Through such listening, sensitive dialogue and mutual sharing I believe that our Church may express its faith, whilst always learning from the very breadth of the nation we serve more of its full meaning.

So today my new ministry begins. I enter into an office graced by many distinguished men—Robert Runcie, Donald Coggan and the hundred other faithful servants of Christ going back to the nervous Augustine who nearly fourteen hundred years ago landed on a wild Kentish shore. He came with the desire to make Christ known as the light of the world. I too enter into that mission with my hopes and vision; a vision for a Church, renewed and invigorated, growing in faith and increasing in number; a church united in its ambition to draw out a living faith in the young as well as in others and to involve lay people fully in its mission; a church eager to join other churches in maintaining and deepening the Christian heritage which is at the heart of our nation's traditions, culture and morality.

And we can be confident in our mission. In spite of what we sometimes hear, the Church of Jesus Christ will never die. But the local manifestation of it has no guarantee of success. We depend on the grace and power of God and our faithfulness to his call.

Such faithfulness will take many different forms. For the majority of us death by ox bones, the sword or scaffold will not be part of our pilgrimage. Our journey of faith will involve most probably sharing the love of God in many ordinary ways in our homes, communities and churches. And that way may be just as hard. It will require commitment if you and I are to fulfil our ministries. I hope that you will feel that as well as marking the beginning of my ministry as Archbishop, today might mark a fresh step in your journey too. Perhaps it might be a step of commitment to a more authentic profession as a Christian; a greater confidence in the claims of the one who calls us to follow; it may simply be a willingness to explore the claims of the Christian faith once more.

And commitment is the word. As someone who has an undisguised affection for football I love the words of Bill Shankly of Liverpool who on one occasion said to his players: 'Football is not a matter of life and death—it's far more important than that!' So is our Christian faith; far more important than life and even death, as our martyrs have witnessed. And woe to us if we fail to hand on to future generations the unsearchable riches of Christ which are the very heart beat of the church and its mission.

Alphege and other martyred Archbishops of Canterbury were [p.9](#) burning and faithful witnesses in their day. Our time is now. Will you join me not only in sharing the pageantry of this day but also the mission and ministry of our Church? And may I invite you also to join me in a joyful witness to our world that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and there is life, hope and peace in him. A hymn we shall sing later puts it in memorable words:

'Lord, for ourselves in living power remake us,
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us for the future take us,

Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.'

Dr George Carey is the Archbishop of Canterbury, England. p. 10