

THE MESSAGE

By D.B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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When a leading Catholic theologian from Germany, Professor Hans Kung, visited Sydney he gave an address at the University at which he emphasised that the Christian message was Jesus, Jesus Himself. A very simple concept, but one which Christians and Christian ministers constantly lose sight of. When we are speaking to our friends about religion let us remember that our message in the end is Jesus, and so too is the message of the preacher.

St. Paul in his letters makes this clear. In his opening sentence in his letter to the Romans he says that the gospel is about God's Son. This reminds us that the message is about the real Jesus, not some false abstraction. There have always been these false views of Jesus and they are still very popular; the musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar" is an illustration of this; and a book about Jesus which down-grades Him from His divine character is always sure of a good sale. We read last week of a protestant minister in New Zealand publishing a book which revived the ancient slander that Jesus was born illegitimately; the slander goes back, of course, to the early opponents of Christianity in the days of the Roman Empire. A pointer to Jesus' deity is the fact that these slanders still appeal, and that Jesus' name is constantly used in cursing and blasphemy. If He were not divine there would be no point in people using His name in strong language.

But let us return to the concept that the Christian message is Jesus. In the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul tells his readers that he handed on to them the message that he himself had received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that He rose again on the third day, according to the scriptures. The name "Christ" means "commissioned by God" and reminds us of the truth that Jesus came from God. Indeed He was God, God who had come into relationship with men, by taking man's nature and living in fellowship with men and women. It is a wonderful truth that God is a humble God who has entered into relationship with us through the incarnation, a relationship which will never come to an end, for Christ, while always God will now

never cease to be our Saviour, never cease to be the one through whom we are related to the Father. St. Paul wrote "Christ died." What an extraordinary juxtaposition of 2 words. That the one who was God in our flesh should have ended His life in so ignominious a way; the one sent from God finished up crucified. There is nothing extraordinary if He had only been a Galilean peasant, who had foul of the Roman Police system, but the one in whom God was present, the Messiah, the anointed by God, that He should finish His course so quickly and so disgracefully on the gallows is extraordinary. No wonder it proved a stumbling block to those who first heard it. Yet it cannot have been accidental. Accidents don't happen to God.

The explanation is in the next phrase, "Christ died for our sins". Our problem is estrangement from God through our self-will and rebellion. This problem Christ nailed when He was nailed to the cross. "He bore our sins"; "with His stripes we are healed". Through Jesus we receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

Our message is Jesus, and it has these two wings. Who Jesus was - the divine incarnate Son of God; and what He did - He died for our sins so that He could bring us to God and restore that fellowship which we destroy by self-willed rebellion. But His death was by no means the end. Paul adds, "on the third day He rose again", so making clear that He had successfully dealt with sin and its consequences, death. He rose to God's presence and we rise with Him. Paul adds that all this was "according to the scriptures", that is to say, foretold by God because it was part of the plan of God. It was no unfortunate accident that Jesus was crucified; no man took His life from Him; He laid it down for us, His friends. His resurrection too was according to God's plan, and Jesus is now Lord, completing the purposes of creation when God said "let us make man in our own image and let them have dominion and lordship".

It is Jesus who is Lord. All dominion has been given to Him. Jesus is Lord and His kingdom will be established over everything, in due course. Jesus

then is not only our message, but He is also our hope, as St. Paul says in the opening verses of his letter to Timothy "Jesus Christ our hope". Christians have a world-view in which God's work in Christ is central and is the explanation of everything. God is working out His purposes which He has already made known in scripture, and these are purposes of blessing for all who put faith in Jesus Christ and who are related to God through the forgiveness of the cross. God is for us, and we should enjoy this truth, for if God is for us, nothing can be against us. If God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not give us everything that we can need and every blessing beyond even what we can conceive. Enjoy this faith by casting your cares on the God who cares for you, and living in the light of His will, day by day, knowing that what we do for Him is never lost, but will be vindicated when we enter on the eternal life which He has prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Our message is Jesus. This message has been entrusted to every Christian to share in spreading. Jesus said "as the Father sent me, so I send you". We are to invite our acquaintances to be reconciled to God. This is the message-reconciliation to God through Jesus whom God has sent. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and He has entrusted to every Christian this message of reconciliation. God through us invites every man, woman and child to be reconciled to Him in Jesus, who though He was without sin, became sin for us that we might become approved of God in Him.

The whole world needs reconciliation to God and each Christian has been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. We exercise this universal Christian ministry according to our gifts and opportunities. Some, like Paul, will be able to give more or less full time to this work. Some will be able to travel as he did, to make Christ known where He is not known before. Some on the other hand will be confined to their own neighbourhood, or home or place of work. Some are more gifted than others, for God gives gifts and opportunities according to His will, but all of us should be in a

position at least to give a reason for our Christian hope to those who ask.

This universal ministry of reconciling men and women and children to God through Jesus Christ, a ministry in which we have all been called to participate, means that we should prepare ourselves for this work. Firstly we must base our lives, our desires, objectives and ambitions consistently on the hope of Christ's coming kingdom. It is there that we must be laying up treasure, putting our trust for the future in God, not in money for example. Secondly, we should all be equipping ourselves by study of the Bible, hearing sermons on the teaching of the Bible, taking correspondence courses perhaps, or even attending College, for a time, is possible. We have all been given the message of reconciliation with God our Creator and Judge. God sends the message through us to those who are living without God, blinded and self centred. For the Scripture teaches clearly that those who continue unreconciled are doomed. Our message is Jesus, the one commissioned by God who died for our sins and rose again. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and has entrusted to each of us the message of reconciliation.

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