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Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper

Bearing Witness to the Love of Christ with People of Other Faiths

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Benjamin A. Kwashi as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Morning Plenary session on "Bearing Witness to the Love of Christ with People of Other Faiths." Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the author and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

INTRODUCTION

Romans 1: 16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

In these two verses Paul encapsulates the central core of his theology and of his way of life. Remember that this remarkable man had been not just a non-Christian, but also a fanatical, militant activist, committed to the extermination of Christians and to the total eradication of their faith. After his encounter with

Christ on the Damascus road, however, he was totally changed and his whole life was thereafter given not to eradicating, but to proclaiming the gospel. He became eager to preach to as many people as he could reach – including the Romans, the colonial overlords, despised and hated by many of his people. This was for Paul, as it is for many today, a task that needed courage. Paul, however, emphasises that he is not ashamed of the gospel (cf. Romans 10:11); rather, it is this gospel which has the power to change lives, and even to change prevailing circumstances. Paul speaks from personal experience: he knows how a person of another faith can be totally changed and transformed. The gospel is power – dynamite (the root of the word).

This power is the power of God working towards the salvation of everyone who believes. It is more than just preaching, more than just talking. It is not merely an announcement of the fact that salvation will take place one day. The gospel is itself a divine power leading to salvation; it leads to faith and action, to the restoration of lives, of communities, of the environment.

This salvation is available for all, of whatever tribe, race, nation or faith. Those who accept it are brought into a right relationship with God, and seek to uphold God's standards, God's way of living, and God's righteousness in the world. This is the righteousness that produces holiness, truth and justice. Such righteousness, however, cannot be attained by keeping the law, but only by faith.

God created the heavens and the earth and all the people in it, and this means that peoples of all faiths and practices were also created by God. Still today, some have not had the chance to hear the gospel, some have heard but turned away, some do not even care. We, however, have heard the gospel and have committed ourselves to follow Christ. One of the many implications of this is that we must live together with all other brothers and sisters whom God has created – whether or not they believe in Him. As we recognise the fact that many do not believe in Jesus Christ, or hold to only a nominal or partial faith in him, so we must, in obedience to Christ, try to bring them to know, love and serve the One whom we are privileged to know as Lord and Master, Saviour and Redeemer. The power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ must be seen in our lives so that, even if we say nothing in words, peoples of other faiths will be challenged by our lives, and surprised by our perseverance.

There are three vital factors here of which we need to take note:

- 1.The gospel for the whole world
- 2.The power of the gospel

3.The eternal effect of the gospel

A. THE GOSPEL FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

At the foot of the cross there is no favouritism. Living for Christ is living for others, for all others. It is service delivery; it is missionary; it is a total dedication and commitment to Christ and to obeying him. If as Christians we desire to bring others to Christ, to establish the reign of truth and righteousness in society and finally to attain everlasting life, then the only way to live is to surrender to Christ, to die to self and live to serve others. This kind of life will spark revival in the family, bring transformation in the community, and renewal wherever such a servant of Jesus Christ is found. The missionaries of old are great examples of this. No matter what the opposition, no matter how fearsome the juju (1) looked, no matter how entrenched the tradition, no matter what the cost might be, they continued undeterred, living and teaching in such a way that people of all faiths or none might see the transforming effect of the gospel. The gospel was lived before the eyes of the entire world, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, people of any and every race and tongue, tribe and nation. The gospel is for all and we must dare to reach out to all.

B. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel is powerful, as is demonstrated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By that single event we see the final defeat of Satan and all the powers of hell, of sin, of death and of evil. It is therefore no use at any point in life or time to submit or surrender to the devil because the devil and all his powers have been defeated by Jesus Christ. This is why the gospel is very powerful. However, we must note three things:

1.It takes a determined, cumulative effort to keep teaching the word of God until the truth of how to live and obey God's word is learned, accepted and obeyed. We are to be channels through which the power of God can work, and such channels must not become blocked by laziness, selfishness, unfaithfulness or any other kind of sin.

2.Secondly, the gospel must be lived out with undiminishing consistency in service to God, to the community and to all people. We must show people by example in small and in big things everywhere and every time what it means to carry and to live out the gospel.

3.Thirdly, we must be diligent, faithfully seeking to live as Christians who truly believe the gospel. We must bring our faith to bear in all that we do, in order to bring glory to God in everything, and to bring blessings to the people around us.

Here is the privilege and here is the cost of living in the power of the gospel.

C. THE ETERNAL EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel calls for a decision that each person must make and such a decision will determine the eternal destination of that person. Such a decision, when made, must bring the believer's life into conformity with the eternal truths of God, of his Son Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. God's word is truth, and every one of his righteous ordinances endures forever (Psalm 119:160).

Therefore anyone who receives and believes the gospel must speak the truth at all times, to all people, and must do so in love. To live in truth is also to insist on standing for justice for the oppressed and on giving justice to all people regardless of their race, religion, nationality or gender. It is significant that it is the gospel's power that manifests God's righteousness in us, and also empowers us to live righteous lives in such a manner that even unbelievers will acknowledge that righteousness is being practised by believers of the gospel. Those who do not believe the gospel understand very well when they see people practise righteousness and live in holiness.

To bear witness to the gospel in this way means dying to self and living for Christ. To live in this way is rewarding both here on earth and also eternally in heaven, whereas refusing to die to self has no reward on earth and no reward in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Those who carry the message of the gospel will not always be welcomed; there may be intimidation, humiliation and suffering. St. Paul knew all of these, but he refused to give up. He searched out people of all faiths: Jews, worshippers of pagan idols, and those who served an "unknown god". Always, under all circumstances, his concern, his aim, his reason for living was to "press on" with this gospel (Philippians 3:12), the gospel which had so caught and transformed him, that he knew that no-one was beyond its power.

This is the power which has been given into our hands and into our hearts today.
To bear witness

to the love of Christ with people of other faiths is not primarily a matter of academic debate, of round table discussion or even of media bombardment. It is simply living the gospel of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, day in and day

out, in such a way that others see, are challenged, and are surprised.

This is so because whenever and wherever the gospel is truly lived, it MUST bring change in behaviour, etiquette and character; it must bring change in health, in the environment, in education and in the economy; it must bring progress and development to people and take the lead in community life and conduct for peace and justice. The Gospel alone has the capacity to draw people of every race, tribe and nationality to live in peace and to work together in harmony for the good of all. The gospel – if it truly is the gospel that is being proclaimed – will assuredly bring life, light and growth; because of the gospel, structures will be developed for the building of life together in communities and for the care of the environment; and at the same time, the power of the gospel will militate against all forms of dehumanization or degradation.

This is not something in which bishops and priests alone are to be involved! It is God's call to all Christians, young and old, educated and illiterate, rich and poor – all are called to live transformed and transforming lives, captivated, enabled, and constantly spurred on by the power of the gospel. The road may seem rough, the results may sometimes seem small, but one day, maybe years later, a new day will dawn and someone will say: Yes, Christ was here! Let us too rise and follow!

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