

## ***THE PREACHING OF THE OFFENSIVE CROSS***

By **Rolfe Barnard**

“It behooves the evangelist so to preach the gospel that the Holy Spirit may own the word, to reveal thereby the mighty mysteries and marvels of redemption; not to lower or humanize it in order to bring it within the reach of the natural man apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.” So wrote **Sir Robert Anderson** years since.

*“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified... For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect”* I Cor. 2: 1-2, 1: 17. So wrote the Apostle Paul.

These two statements, the latter inspired of God, the former the thought of a trophy of the Welsh Revival, may serve to whet our appetites to seek an answer to the question: Where has the offence of the Cross gone? What kind of gospel is being sponsored by Hollywood, Wall Street, the noble and the wise? How is it that all of a sudden the gospel (?) has gotten so popular? What happened to the gospel that was and is *foolishness* to the wise, and scandalous to the religious? What became of the gospel message that is unto the called both the wisdom and power of God? What kind of gospel is it that fails to transform, to change and keep on changing men until they be conformed to the very image of God’s only begotten Son?

Sir Robert Anderson was a product of a message that changed men and a nation. The Apostle Paul saw churches born in such wicked cesspools as Corinth. Neither of the two would be able to recognize the popular “gospel” of today. The New Testament declares that the “cross is a stumbling block and an offence” to the natural mind: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (I Cor. 1:23), that is, “sheer nonsense.” Again: “Behold I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and a rock of offence” (Rom. 9: 33). “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (I Peter 2:8). “The offence of the cross” (Gal. 5:11).

Let it be burned into our souls afresh that because the gospel was a stumbling block and an offence to the unregenerated man, it always created disturbance wherever it was proclaimed. See the book of Acts. By way of contrast, how nice and quiet our services are now! How terribly disturbing is the absence of disturbance in our evangelistic campaigns now! Famous worldly figures in commerce, politics, religion and the entertainment world pay court to the evangelistic efforts without having had the new-birth experience take place in their lives. These famous personalities seem to adore this evangelism and at the same time to adore and worship the things of the world. It would seem there is no scandal, no offence, no stumbling block in the message proclaimed. How tragic and how unlike it all is to New Testament method and message. We may be dead certain that the gospel (?) message that does not cause offence is not the gospel of God concerning His Son.

We must be done with preaching a gospel that can be understood apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. We must be done with preaching a gospel that man can accept with no loss to his

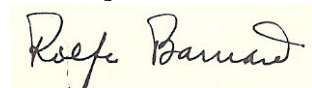
pride or his high self esteem. We must be done with preaching a gospel that man can receive apart from dying.

What supreme foolishness it is to preach that a Babe born in Bethlehem, who lived in Nazareth (from which no good thing ever came), who lived all His days in a small country called Palestine, who wound up on a tree outside the Holy City of Jerusalem, who was buried in another man's grave and whose body is still in that grave as far as this world knows—what a foolishness it is to preach, I repeat, this One as eternal, exalted Lord of all, before whom all must bow! No one but an idiot or a born-again one could possibly so believe! To expect the carnal mind (Rom. 7:8), the seat of hostility to God, to accept this is silly—apart from the work of God the Holy Spirit, it cannot be done.

Again, how downright scandalous it is to preach to nice, religious, Sunday morning worshippers (?) “the word of the cross” (I Cor. 1:18). Not simply the death of Christ—everybody accepts that—but the *word*, the *message* of the cross. The death of Christ in itself brings no offence, neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor even to the Moslem. The modernists preach the death of Christ but not the *message* of the cross. The religious world believes in the historical death of Christ, but few believe the *word* of the cross. No wonder the Jews turned thumbs down on the Saviour. Imagine a crucified Messiah if you can. They could not. No wonder the world accepts the death of Christ and rejects the Christ Who died. Imagine if you can, complete surrender for time and eternity to a Man who died on an accursed tree!

“Redemption, as preached by the many in Paul's day, brought no persecution, because it left man a platform on which to make a fair show in the flesh. Gal. 6: 12. If the death of Christ be preached as the means of salvation, not for the lost sinner but for the pious, where is the offence? But the cross comes in with its mighty power to bring *low* as well as to exalt, for it exalts none save those that first it humbles, and calls upon the pious worshipper, if indeed he would have blessing, to come out from the shrine in which he trusts and take his place in the market square, beside the outcasts and the vile. The gospel tells the earnest seeker, and the anxious inquirer, that by their own efforts they are only struggling out of a pit where alone grace can reach them. It proclaims to the worthy communicant of blameless life, whose ways are a pattern of all good, that he must *come down* and stand beside the harlot and the drunkard, there to receive salvation by the grace of God to the *glory* of God. *The cross sets aside the flesh altogether*. They who do thus preach the cross can testify that its offence has not ceased in our day and in our midst” (Sir R. Anderson).

[ Copied from a paper, *The Redeemer's Witness*, published by Evangelist Barnard in the early 1960s. ]

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rolf Barnard". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.