

STUDY 1

BRITISH CHURCH AND THE COLONIALISTS

ACTS 17:22-31

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone — an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

INTRODUCTION

In these studies I intend to talk about the history of colonisation as it relates to the Gospel and the Christian Church. I have had to rely on secondary sources and regret not being able to use primary sources for the research however, however, most reputable secondary sources agree on the interpretation of the facts and differ only in the selection of facts on which they focus.

The assumptions that guide these studies are:

- 1) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is all sovereign (whether it be on the nano, micro and macro levels).
- 2) He exercises his sovereignty over individuals and nations through personal loving care in blessing and in judgement.
- 3) His relationship with his creation is an expression of his covenant to which he is always faithful despite the sin and rebellion of humanity.
- 4) The word of God provides the necessary insight into the state of humanity, how God relates to humanity and the future of humanity.

Isaiah reflects on the joy that will grip the people who accept the message of the Messiah;

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7).

Isaiah was writing prophetically of a Messiah who will come but with the birth of Immanuel this reigning Messiah lived among his people and his words, his actions and ultimately his resurrection were clear demonstrations that his reign in his universe was unbroken. His unbroken reign over all creation is good news for all who are willing to submit to his oversight. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom that he proclaimed and it *"will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"* (Matt 24:14). This is the central core of the Apostle Paul's message as he travelled around preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 20:25, 28:23, 31). The reign of Christ over the affairs of the world is not therefore a comforting little addenda to the proclamation of the Gospel but is the very essence of that proclamation as the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev 11:15). The God who has redeemed us is the same God who determines the affairs of the nations and will continue his program in the world until the obedience of the nations is his (Gen 49:10). As the Psalmist says *"the kingdom is the LORD'S, and He rules over the nations"* (Ps 22:8, 47:8). The ministry of the Gospel is all about

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God claiming the nations of the world as his rightful inheritance (Ps 82:8, 86:9). It is evident, and essential, that this process involves judgment on the nations as he brings down one and raises up another (Ps 75:6). But always his purpose is to bring glory to his own name, secure righteousness in his creation and prepare a bride for his Son. And Australian history is part and parcel of this divine program.

Isaiah 8:5-12, and 22 tells us about God's superintendence of the Assyrian invasion of Israel. Then 10:5-13 tell of his judgement on Assyria for overstepping the mandate he gave them. Perhaps we should see Isaiah's record as an insight into His purposes in the invasion of Australia when the colonial authorities thought they found a nest of riches and they gathered these riches for themselves and no one moved a muscle to stopped them (Isa 10:14).

This, then, is where our studies begin. As we consider the historical record we will see that the will of the church has been interwoven; inextricably linked, with the will of the state. Government officials and leading lights of England formulated policies that reflected the dominant philosophy of the day and these philosophies underpinned the racist and ethnocentric attitudes used to justify colonisation of the new world. While it's important that we do not condone these attitudes, we do need to appreciate the social dynamic that enabled them to take root. If we don't learn to recognize this tendency of culture to determine our understanding of the Gospel then we will never come to appreciate the need to have the Gospel confront our culture.

To use Isaiah's metaphor, over the next few weeks, we will consider whether, the message that was communicated by representatives of the Christian Church came with beautiful feet.

FALSE DOCTRINES WITH DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES

The colonisers did not arrive on Australian soil as blank slates. They came loaded with the ideas, ideals and values and philosophies of their home land. Arguably the most dominant of these was the deeply held conviction that the Englishman was at the top of the evolutionary tree and that English culture was the pinnacle of human expression. This ethno-centrism had devastating consequences for Aboriginal Australia. The con-fusing of culture and religion, prevalent in England of the 18th century, resulted in a civil religion used to justify the denunciation of Aboriginal lifestyles as evil and in opposition to the Gospel itself¹.

Hamitic Curse is an heretical interpretation of Gen 9:25. It led to the belief that, because Aboriginal people were dark skinned, they came under the curse God placed on Canaan. It is important to stress that while by far the greatest number of pastors and missionaries rejected this doctrine it was still a doctrine to be reckoned with in Australia by pulpit and print. An Aboriginal variation of this tragic doctrine is quoted by John Harris in "One Blood",

"You know when Noah had three sons, he had Shem, Ham and Japheth...one was a black man, one ...was a white man and one...was a yellow man. And you know, because the black man saw the shame of his father, God gave this command, he said 'from this time on ...for all throughout life on earth, the dark man (will) come under the the white man'. And...men are trying to change this today, they are trying to break the word of God".²

Social Darwinism³, The Aboriginal people were a central focus of the evolutionary anthropology that developed in the nineteenth century. It was believed that they represented the survival of the childhood of man, a living fossil to be examined, measured and tested, the 'primitive' from which

¹ The term civil religion as I am using it here is the marrying of politics, romantic nationalism and religion resulting in an arrogant claim of divine mandate for propagating cultural values and practices.

² John Harris, One Blood, 1990, 658.

³ Henry Reynolds, Nowhere People, 2005, 17, quoting from JC Prichard "The sacred Scriptures declare that it pleased the Almighty Creator to make of one blood all nations of the earth, and that all mankind are the offspring of common parents. Butthis assertion does not comprehend the uncivilized inhabitants of remote regions; and that the Negroes, Hottentots, Esquimaux, and Australians, are not, in fact men in the full sense of the term. or beings endowed with the mental faculties as our selves."

the 'advanced' peoples of the world stemmed.⁴ Herbert Spencer's idea of social darwinism, influential at the time of colonisation, was developed further to apply to social change and the survival of the fittest. It was used to justify colonisation because it taught that natives were weaker and unfit to survive. By all the criteria of social darwinism used by the colonisers, the Aboriginal people did not fare well and the Aboriginal casualties were easy to write off as the natural result of their unfit status. This made the brutality of the colonising process acceptable⁵ and encouraged the belief that the Aboriginal race was doomed to extinction⁶.

Great Chain of Being: a theory of an heirarchical order of humanity which locates Aboriginals at the bottom and Europeans at the top with part-Aboriginals somewhere in the lower middle range.⁷

Eugenics⁸. This is an extreme form of social darwinism. It taught the necessity of controlling interracial unions so that the gene pool of the 'higher' race was not sullied by that of the lower race. Eugenists advocated rigorist supervision of breeding so as to guarantee the best possible future for the dominant race. In the colonial context these theories were given concrete expression when mission stations determined 'appropriate' marriage partners for their charges⁹. John W. Bleakley, SA Chief Protector of Aborigines, advocated was one of biological as well as cultural assimilation. His policy depended on the control of the breeding habits of those who were ostensibly in the process of becoming 'more European'¹⁰. He stated that every endeavour should be made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to the white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population¹¹. With proper management each successive generation could become fairer. It was for this purpose that Bleakley determined to involve the predominantly Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran missions in his eugenic vision. One politically active and astute Christian Aboriginal leader wrote to the minister of Native Affairs in Perth in 1938 that, "*The Western Australian Labour Party was 'Out-Hitlering Hitler'.... Dividing people genetically...*"¹². However, it must be stated in relation to marriages, that while to an outsider the mission's actions in directing the choice of marriage partners for their charges may look like they shared Bleakley's eugenic ambitions, in fact, their concern was always to assist the development of the faith and strengthen Christian homes and had nothing to do with safe guarding a gene pool.

Polygenesis and Monogenesis. Polygenesis is the idea that because homo sapiens are so diverse in appearance they could not have descended from one ancestor, ie., Adam. It was an easy jump therefore, that since homo-sapiens are from different origins therefore cross breeding is similar to bestiality. For those who advocated the polygenesis position it was as justifiable to eradicate

⁴ Robert Kenny, The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper & the Ruptured World, 2007, 151f.

⁵ Oracle, Thinkquest Online.

⁶ John Harris, One Blood, 1990, 27.

⁷ The Governor of SA, Sir George Grey, and the missionaries, Schurmann and Teichleemann, accepted the existence of a hierarchical scale of human societies with Australian Aboriginal people at or near the bottom, and European or British civilization at the top. The idea that human progress was a process involving the development of human societies from nomadic, heathen 'savagery' to settled, Christian 'civilization' was axiomatic. However, for missionaries and civilizers such as those involved in the civilizing project in South Australia, this was a hierarchy of cultural and moral development, rather than a hierarchy of biological development that was to become a widely accepted explanation of human difference during the second half of the century. Although the missionaries ranked Aboriginal people 'the lowest stage of mankind', it was on a moral scale that they were so ranked. Schurmann described the Aborigines as '*people mentally endowed by their Creator with the same capabilities as the finest races on the face of the earth, but morally sunk into a bottomless pit*'. source unknown.

⁸ Henry Reynolds, Nowhere People, 2005, 51-66.

⁹ J Harris, One Blood, 1990, 47.

¹⁰ Barbara Cummings, Take This Child...., Barbara Cummings, 1990, 13.

¹¹ Barbara Cummings, Take This Child...., Barbara Cummings, 1990, 14..

¹² Cited in John Harris, One Blood, 1990, 632.

Aboriginals as it was to shoot rabbits. Monogenesis is based on a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis and Acts 17:22. It argues that humanity has descended from one set of parents. However, while monogenesis was the dominant theory in the new colony and certainly among Church leaders they did not necessarily see cross-racial marriages as acceptable.¹³ Miscegenation and the resultant hybridism¹⁴ was almost universally rejected as being detrimental to the blood line of the white race. These ideas surfaced in colonial Australia more by what did not happen than by what happened. In other words, church and mission workers were never allowed to develop close personal relationships with Aboriginal men or women of the opposite sex.

However, miscegenation was not always seen as detrimental as an official report shows;

*the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value — intelligence, stamina, resource, high resistance to the influences of the tropical environment and the character of pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European*¹⁵

phrenology¹⁶. Phrenology is now recognized as pseudoscience at best. It argues that the character of individuals and racial groups could be understood from the shape, thickness and size of the skull. The phrenologist operated on the assumption that the Anglo-saxon physical characteristics were undeniable evidence of the European's place at the head of the 'Great Chain of Being' and that the position of all other races on that chain could be determined by comparisons with European skulls.

Assimilation; First appeared on the Australian political landscape in the 1930s when AO Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in WA, advocated assimilation within a frame work of eugenics. He encouraged the genetic absorption of Aboriginality by successive generations of inter-breeding with caucasians. This idea is based on the understanding that Aborigines are not negroid but give evidence of Caucasian origin.¹⁷ This understanding of assimilation was an extreme form of an idea that found later expression in the form of the Federal Government Assimilation policy of the 1950s. the intention of which was primarily social and cultural assimilation within the broader Australian society. The Federal Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, actively pursued this interpretation of assimilation.

¹³ For further comments on this see Henry Reynolds, Nowhere People, 2005, 16.

¹⁴ Henry Reynolds, Nowhere People, 2005, 15-50. Quote from CD Rowley, Outcasts in White Australia, 1971, 14. Bleakley wrote that the government policy was "to check as far as possible the breeding of half-castes, by firmly discouraging miscegenation....as what they inherit of the superior intelligence and tastes of the whites is generally nullified by the retarding instincts of the blacks.

¹⁵ Cecil Cook's arranged marriages. online.

¹⁶ Henry Reynolds, Nowhere People, 2005, 72f and p98f.

¹⁷ Take This Child...., Barbara Cummings, 1990, 29.