

Précis on "Six Propositions of the Cross" (an essay by theologian David S. Yeago, in a collection of essays found in Nicene Christianity, The Future of a New Ecumenism; Brazos Press, 2002)

In his essay, *Six Propositions on the Preaching of the Cross*, David Yeago expostulates the significance of the Nicene creedal affirmation "crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried", in the life of the church today. The penal substitution theory promulgated in "mainline churches", forces disproportionate emphasis on punishment, contrary to the weight of scripture. So that the church may "proclaim the cross of Jesus Christ as the redemption of the world, in fidelity to the apostolic witness", Yeago offers six propositions, each with a unique Christological accent.

First, "God has acted to redeem the world and renew human life". This Yeago sets in contradistinction to the preaching of the cross that reduces Jesus to a means to an end, an end that may otherwise have been obtained absent the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus is universally transformative; attempts to explain it as a means of God validating our struggles and coming along side people in their adversity, or standing in "solidarity with our plight", reduces the gospel to one of affirmation. The paradigm shift whereby God actually makes all things new remains unknown, as Jesus "evanesces" into non-particularity.

Highlighting the particularity of Jesus as divine love in human action, and human action with divine force, is essential to "grasping the force and implication of the gospel story." Yeago therefore establishes his second proposition on the "hypostatic union" of Jesus; his two distinct natures, each confirming the other, culminating in the submission of Jesus to the Father's will, and so bringing about the new creation intended by the Father.

In his third proposition Yeago sets forth Jesus in his primary roles as Messiah and King of Israel, the former inextricably linked to the latter. Israel has a "corporate vocation" given by God in history to pursue righteousness (e.g. Torah Law) and to be a light to the Gentiles. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are those events in the history of Israel that accomplish the redemption of the world that God intended through Israel. The church then, rather than a body

separate from Israel as a result of "Israel's rejection of the Messiah", is "that *part* of Israel that has received the good news" concerning the crucified messiah. The church continues in a missionary role to the Gentiles.

Fourth is an appeal to the role of Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's vocation, particularly "acting for us as God's covenant partner." He expands upon the theme of Jesus submitting to the Father's will as accomplishment of what God had called Israel to; hence "righteousness is a fact, a thing achieved, something actual". A holy nation and priestly people is realized in the crucified Jesus - an "irreducibly particular Jesus". Proclaiming the cross of Jesus as such deconstructs the iconoclastic "symbol of suffering" and "victim identification" of the cross that attends the man-centered Christology.

Fifth, "Jesus is not being punished for our sins." Rather, the abandonment and horror of Jesus on the cross is an "acknowledgement of sin's truth", necessary to what Yeago calls "the cleansing of relational space between God and man", (the consequence of sin) which effects renewed communion with God. The gospels record Jesus offering "amnesty" and welcoming sinners; forgiveness is offered before the cross so the cross addresses something critical - beyond pardon. Sin is exposed in an act that promotes the penitential posture characteristic of those whom the "Messiah Jesus has taken in charge".

The prevailing penal theory that constitutes modern preaching of the cross promotes salvation as a "product acquired" for us by that act, perpetuating the erroneous "Jesus as a means to an end" Christology argued against above. Rather, right preaching of the cross admits of the inseparability of salvation from the crucified Jesus. The believer is joined to the "particular Jesus" and as Martin Luther wrote concerning Jesus, " whatever he is, that you obtain *with him*". "Within the economy of the Holy Spirit", believers are united to Jesus in his death and resurrection, as God actualizes his goal for creation.

The pastor of our congregation once concluded his sermon thus; "understanding the cross of Jesus is the exaltation of the glory of God". David Yeago would smile at that declaration. He

pleads for preaching of the cross that shouts a resounding amen to the prayer of our Lord Jesus in John 17. While pointing out the fallacies in Western contemporary penal theory preaching though, and arguing for a focus which excludes penal realities altogether, Yeago substitutes one imbalance for another. Jesus did not only expose our sin for what it is; he "bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24), "having become a curse for us". (Gal. 3:13).