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## 'Speaking the Truth in Love IV'

(We conclude our series by Archbishop Peter Jensen)

"Speaking the Truth in Love." These striking words occur in Ephesians 4: 15. The Apostle Paul is telling us about the unity of the church which is the body of Christ. He sees the ministry of the word of God as being that which when working properly will help the whole body to grow into maturity, namely, into its likeness to Christ. Immaturity will be marked by the body being "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine"; to counteract this, the members of the body must be involved in "speaking the truth in love," with the result that, "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ..." That we are constantly being "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine" can scarcely be denied. We desperately need the antidote: "speaking the truth in love".

"Speaking the truth in love", notice. The Bible knows nothing of the various divisions that the modern world is afflicted with; the division between facts and values, for example; or the division between the pastor and the teacher. Truth and love are held together here, without embarrassment. Truth is absolutely vital if the body of Christ is to grow and prosper; and yet the way of speech must be that which builds up, which blesses, which edifies.

It is here that we have so often failed. Some of us want to be so kind, so loving that we will not speak the truth. The therapeutic model of pastoral care has been perverted into mere affirmations of human behavior. Our love is no love, for it refuses this great test: will it speak boldly, frankly, truthfully? "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." (1 Cor 13:4-6).

Let me apply this very directly. We all know that one of the great failings of the church has been sectarianism, the ugly rivalry and jealousy which has soured relations and borne such a bad witness to the world. And yet we also ought to know that there remain profound differences between us, differences which cannot be overlooked. It is all too easy for those who do not care about truth to criticize those who do; and yet the truth is vital for the salvation of men and women and the good health of the churches. Thus in my view the differences between Catholic and Anglican remain of enormous significance, and I am in duty bound to point them out and try to convince my Catholic

brothers of "my" truth. The clue is not in ceasing from this responsibility, which doubtless they share with me in reverse, but in fulfilling it in love. It is not truth which marks sectarianism and renders it so ugly; it is lack of love. If I differ, let me do so in such a way that all involved can see the love with which I speak.

#### ON BEING CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

At the very beginning of this lecture I acknowledged that there would be many in the churches who would be dismayed and even horrified at my thesis: that the role of the churches in Australia today is to speak the truth in love. One reason for that dismay is that they will see in it a re-assertion of a failed pietism, and a declaration of no intent to have anything to do at a meaningful level with Australian society. It is the fulfillment of "little flock theology", the withdrawal of the church from its human responsibilities to speak against injustice, to suffer with the poor, to visit the prisoner, to care for the refugee.

It is perfectly true that I regard the main locus of the church as the local congregation rather than the denomination. It is perfectly true, therefore, that I regard the real fulfillment of the topic to be worked out in the suburban churches of our nation rather than in denominational head offices. It is perfectly true, furthermore, that I have my doubts and hesitations about the usefulness and the truthfulness of much that passes for political, social and economic commentary by ecclesiastics. But I hope it is clear by now that my priority lies with the word of God as our chief and enduring obligation for two main reasons: first, because that is in fact the perennial duty of the churches and not one that we can pass on to anyone else; second, because it is in fact the indispensable source of all the good that we may do in the community. It is the gospel of Jesus which makes the Christians who will do the good works that will glorify God and prove to be a blessing to this nation. But to promote the gospel of Jesus requires that we speak the truth in love. And here we come to a final secret of God's kingdom.

To speak the truth, even in love, is to court crucifixion. It may not be literal, though Christian martyrdom is a frequent occurrence in some parts of the world. One of the chief reasons why we have ceased to speak the truth is that we are fearful of the reaction of those around us. We have courted popularity; we have not been prepared to suffer the scorn of those who can use the pages of the newspaper to pillory us. Even when we have adopted a profoundly Christian stance on some issue, we have not explained how it is an application of the teachings of the word of God. We have even fallen into the trap of justifying our moral stances by a secularist theory of ethics. We have contributed towards the gagging of God, perhaps because we are frightened of suffering.

It is time for us to learn again the meaning of St Paul's words, that we shall be the heirs of God, "provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17). Time and time again, it is the church which suffers which is the church which does good. For this reason I say once more that there is one fundamental task to which we must be committed come whatever may: "Speak the truth in love."

**Archbishop Peter Jensen**

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