



MICHAEL CASSIDY

A Passion for Preaching

The Demanding Privilege of Biblical Proclamation
My Struggles and Lessons Along the Way



For John Stott and Billy Graham
With deep gratitude for your inspiration over a lifetime

Also by Michael Cassidy

Decade of Decisions

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*What on Earth are You Thinking
for Heaven's Sake?*

A Passion for Preaching

Making an Impact

To the Ends of the Earth (Introduction)

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A Passion for Preaching

When I was a senior schoolboy it bothered me deeply when people endlessly asked what I was going to do or be and I had to say “I don’t know.” These pressures thrust me into exploring an interesting list of possibilities. First of all, being rather light and spindly I had to abandon the idea of being world heavyweight boxing champion, Joe Louis having been my passionate childhood hero! Then, living in colonial Basutoland¹, I thought the colonial service might be fun, the prospect of someone one day saying “Arise, Sir Michael!” having particular appeal. Then someone quietly alerted me to the fact that the Empire was finished, so I had to think again!

Patrick Duncan, son of Sir Patrick Duncan, Governor General of South Africa under Jan Smuts, who lived next door to us in Maseru, had also filled me with a love of nature. This caused me to think along the lines of being a *National Geographic* photographer or even a Shell oil geologist.

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¹ Now Lesotho, having gained independence from Britain in 1966.

Bill Burnett, my school chaplain at Michaelhouse, and later Archbishop of Cape Town, whispered in my ear that he thought I should think of the ministry. I think my father secretly hoped I'd go for engineering as he had but, seeing me all thumbs with the simplest spanner, he quickly despaired. My mother, bless her, was more inclined to see me in law, politics or teaching. The good Lord, by this time, must have been wondering if He would ever get a word in edgeways about this preaching business.

People-person

In the end, in a fit of absent-mindedness, I settled for law at Cambridge University with a nine-month spell of prep school teaching between leaving Michaelhouse in Natal and the start of university. My brief school-teaching experience, which I found intoxicatingly joyful and satisfying, was a decisive pointer which finally led me into preaching. I found myself basically developing as a "people-person" rather than a "thing-person". Beyond that was the important discovery for me that I actually could teach and loved it. In any event, the teaching experience deflected me from law and by rigorous cajoling of my tutor at St Catherine's College I

got myself enlisted in the elitist-sounding tripos² of Modern and Mediaeval Languages.

Conversion

Then came conversion. The personal discovery of Jesus Christ was the single most important thing which ever happened to me. My friend Robert Footner, an ardent member of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU), whom God used in bringing me to Christ after only three weeks at Cambridge, also brought into my life one massively important connection. You see, he had himself been brought into Christian commitment at a place called Harringay by a man I had never heard of called Billy Graham who was an evangelist, whatever that was.

“He’s coming to Cambridge next term”, said Robert, “and I want you to hear him.” Little did I know that the experience was to be a decisive one for me. All I knew then was that I was already immensely excited about sharing with others the personal discovery of Jesus Christ which I had made. In fact, so zealous was I that I scared the wits out of even my Christian friends. Before a CICCU tea with the college chaplain I was

² A tripos is the term used at Cambridge (and Oxford) to refer to a student’s degree course of study.

requested by an emissary sent by the group that I should not attend lest I upset the chaplain with my enthusiasm. “You *are* a bit of a hot Prot, Mike,” said the emissary with an upper-class potato in his mouth. But something was happening to me. I was finding myself constrained to tell others of Jesus Christ. My call to preach was being birthed midst the panting and often insensitive enthusiasm of a student zealot.

“Theirs is the story of ordinary men . . .”

Inevitably there was confusion. And this for several reasons. First of all, my excitement for teaching, maybe one day even being a Christian headmaster, knew no bounds and had become for me a driving passion. The divine call to me surely was to be a schoolmaster. And if anyone had declared it otherwise, I would have laughed at them. But what was I to make of God’s word to me through John Pollock’s inspiring book, *The Cambridge Seven*, about seven Cambridge students who went to China and made a mighty impact for Christ there? On the penultimate page Pollock had written: “Theirs is a story of ordinary men, and thus may be repeated.”³ The words hit me. For the first time I thought of a team and doing something for Africa in the

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³J.C. Pollock, *The Cambridge Seven* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1955), 111.

way the Cambridge Seven had gone to China to share Christ. But how could that fit in with school-teaching?

Struggling with inadequacy

The third area of confusion was more serious. I was plagued with a sense of inadequacy and with a terrible and traumatic fear of doing anything in public. It is true that my friend Michael Nuttall (a former Bishop of Natal, now retired) and I were teaching at a little Sunday School in nearby Grantchester. But handling children was all I felt up to. Although I could witness boldly on a one-to-one basis, I was so paralysed with nerves about speaking in front of others that in three years of CICCUC Bible studies and discussions in college, I don't believe I uttered a sentence.

The cause of this lay in certain social struggles experienced in my middle school years. Although my post-matric year as head of house had been blissful, the two preceding years of nightmarish trauma had taken their toll. And when I left school my tender little psyche felt on the inside as if it had collapsed totally. Thus did I oscillate between grand resolutions and painful struggles with self-doubt. How could I ever preach, let alone mount any sort of Cambridge Seven enterprise for Africa?

A new hero

When Billy Graham came to Cambridge I saw and heard evangelism in action in a new way. I basked in joy and admiration at the preacher and the effect of his word. I longed to be able to preach like that. But I knew it would not be for me – I was for prep-school teaching and for little people only. All the same, I had a new hero. So when in 1957 I was in New York with relatives and heard Billy Graham was preaching at Madison Square Garden, I went along eagerly. Night after night I was transfixed by the message and its power. One night in the basement of Madison Square Garden, with counsellors and counselees dotted all over the place in pairs, I seemed to hear a voice saying: “I want you to do city evangelism in Africa.”

Called to preach

I left the arena deeply pensive, but called. I had been called to preach.

Of course I was still unable to see how school-teaching and preaching fitted together. Maybe I would be a school chaplain, or perhaps it would mean doing evangelistic missions in school holidays. God could work that out. In the meantime after Cambridge I would pursue God’s miraculous leading which had

pointed me to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. Term began in October 1959. California was a new world for me – “something else” as I quickly learned to say. Crew-cuts, loud voices, flashy shirts, wild accents and casual students who called lecturers “Prof” nearly finished me! I suffered severe culture shock.

Terror in control

There was no time for self-pity. The new student retreat was upon us a week before term opened and we were all up at Forest Home, a Christian conference centre in the nearby San Bernardino mountains. I felt terribly insecure. The worst shock to my already agitated system was to learn that on the last night of the retreat students would be called on to “share their testimonies” – especially as to how God had led them to Fuller. More appalling still was the profound sense that God wanted me to tell mine. Indeed I knew my story of guidance and financial provision was a marvellous one. Yet I couldn’t tell it. Terror was in control. All afternoon I paced up and down the forest paths in a cold sweat – the fear mounting, the conviction deepening. I wanted to, but couldn’t.

Almost preaching

All evening I resisted as student after student told their stories with confidence, joy and often laughter. Finally and desperately, towards the very end, I heaved myself to my feet, as if I weighed twenty tons, only to fall back weak with anti-climax as the master of ceremonies, Dr Carlton Booth, spotted another student on his feet ahead of me. I wanted to run. But the Lord would not let me go: He wanted me to speak publicly and share my story. At last I was back on my feet. The blood rushed to my head. I blushed puce-red. My hands sweated. My throat constricted. I wanted to die. Then something took me over. The story flowed. The words came. I was speaking in public. Almost preaching! And blessing fell on the meeting. My testimony complete, Dr Booth said: "I don't believe it is right to have anything else after that. We must be quiet before the Lord. Let us pray." I was dumbfounded and mind-boggled! God had made His strength, some of it at least, perfect in desperate weakness.

The next week one other new student and I were selected from the incoming class to speak in chapel to the entire faculty and student body. Again the pain. The fear. The dying. Then again the pulling it off,

seemingly by the skin of one's teeth! And the blessing. And the sense of God doing it. Against all odds.

I pressed on, responding as best I could to the now constant calls to talk on Africa, "share my testimony" or tell of the vision God was slowly putting in my heart for a Cambridge Seven-type ministry in Africa. Perhaps my school-teaching idea was wrong. I would not teach Latin and French – but Christ and His Word. Homiletics⁴ classes with Dr Clarence Roddy were a particular trial. Trying to preach was hard enough, but in front of twenty other students with "crit-sheets" it was unendurable. Yet I survived. Suddenly I knew that between the Lord, Dr Roddy and the inescapable thrusting calls to speak something was slowly happening.

Preach the Word!

The chains of paralysis in my spirit and nervous system, as well as in my speaking, were slowly being broken. Joshua 1:5 was, and has remained, my emergency verse. On every public occasion of any sort I claimed it: "... as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you." A million times I have fired that

⁴ Homiletics is the study of sermon preparation and delivery.

telegrammatic reminder to God. My testimony, forty-five years later, is that He is true to His word. He has never failed me. Even now preaching is often to me like walking on water for the first time. But our Lord is faithful. He does not fail or forsake. What he calls us to do, He enables us to do. His strength is made perfect in weakness. Dr Roddy, whose memory I honour and cherish, pressed this home to me amid all my reluctance and initial refusal to believe him. Finally I accepted his word when he presented me with Helmut Thielicke's *Encounter with Spurgeon*, which he inscribed: "To Mike - You have the 'Preach'. Stir up your gift! Work hard! Study hard!! Pray hard!!! Preach the Word!"

"Speak and do not be silent . . ."

My first summer vacation at Fuller produced a glorious opportunity for travel in the New England states and Kentucky with an evangelist and team of friends from the seminary. Throughout this formative and sometimes hilarious experience the pressure within me to launch an evangelistic team for work in Africa was becoming overwhelming. By the end of the vacation I knew I had to tour Africa the following summer of 1961 and explore my call. That journey is another story.⁵ But

⁵ Told more fully in chapter 5 of *African Harvest - The captivating story of Michael Cassidy and African Enterprise* by Anne Coomes.

two memorable experiences stand out in my mind. One was in Lagos, Nigeria, reading Acts 18, where the anxious and fearful Paul stands before Corinth. The Spirit of God spoke to me from verses 9-10: "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you or harm you; for I have many people in this city." In that word the Lord finally said to me that city evangelism in Africa was my calling, with special reference to the leadership circles within those cities. The Spirit even showed me where our first citywide mission would be. In the margin of my Bible I wrote: "Pietermaritzburg". It was not my home town then, of course, as it is now. Maseru, Lesotho, was still home for me.

Sheer terror

Later in the tour – by someone else's design, not mine – I was scheduled to speak on the campus of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. No single meeting ever cost me more. For three days before it I could not eat. On the day of the talk my only inclination was to flee. And who would come anyway, seeing I was totally unknown? My incredulity and alarm when I saw an enormous, packed lecture hall knew no bounds. But again in the event came an astonishing freedom to

discharge what I had seen on the trip through Africa and what I felt God was wanting.

Citywide evangelism

Unbeknown to me, three students rushed out, booked the city hall for two weeks the following year and the local cricket/soccer stadium for the closing rally on Sunday, August 25th, 1962. They then came to me saying they felt we should do a youth mission to the city the following year. I was overwhelmed. This then developed via the Rev Dr Calvin Cook⁶, a Presbyterian minister in the city, into the call for a major, interdenominational citywide campaign. "The time has come," Dr Cook told the trembling ministers' fraternal, "for the church of this city to take a major risk!" And they did. The formal invitation came back to me in California several months later. The little embryonic African Enterprise team of five Fuller Seminary students was getting its first assignment.

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⁶ Calvin Cook became a "father" of the AE work in South Africa, was a board member until very recently, and is still a close friend, mentor and counsellor to me. He has also over the years served as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, lecturer in biblical studies, philosophy of religion and history of religion at the University of the Wtwatersrand, and professor of church history at Rhodes University.

In the months before going out to Africa for that first campaign I heard an important lecture series and read an important book in terms of my approach and presuppositions in preaching. The lecture series at Fuller Seminary was by John Stott and the book was J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. I had already been helped and influenced at Cambridge by both Stott and Packer. Stott's preaching and another fine book by Packer, this one on the evangelical view of biblical inspiration, entitled "*Fundamentalism*" and the *Word of God*, plus other Cambridge and Fuller Seminary influences, were all leading me to a high view of biblical authority. I have never forsaken this. Indeed I believe such a view to be indispensable for effective and life-changing preaching.

Authority

Packer put it this way: "The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church ever faces. This is because Christianity is built on truth: that is to say, on the content of a divine revelation."⁷ This truth and revelation I saw as enshrined in the Scriptures. I embraced what I believed to be the original

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⁷ J.I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 42.

Christian view, and certainly the Reformation position, on Scripture. Said Packer:

Its basic principle is that the teaching of the written Scriptures is the Word which God spoke and speaks to His Church, and is finally authoritative for faith and life. To learn the mind of God, one must consult His written Word. What Scripture says, God says. . . Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, who caused it to be written, has been given to the Church to cause believers to recognise it for the divine Word that it is, and to enable them to interpret it rightly and understand its meaning. He who was its Author is also its Witness and Expositor.⁸

The power of effective preaching

My conviction, then as now, is that the preacher's job is to elucidate the Word of Scripture and make it plain to the hearers. In that Word, in that authority and in that faithfulness to its content lies, I believe, the power of effective preaching, especially effective evangelistic preaching.

⁸ Packer, 47.

The Gospel (or *Kerygma*) as a fixed deposit of Truth

It is very important at this point to register that the Gospel preacher or evangelist has been given by the Lord a particular message (called in Greek the *kerygma*) by which uncommitted listeners may be brought to faith and new life in Christ. This is in distinct contrast to another body of truth known as *didache*, which is ethical, moral, spiritual and devotional teaching given to Christian converts so that they may grow in faith, commitment, discipleship and obedience to their Lord.

Grasping this distinction is extremely important because in many churches people endlessly hear *didache* but have never heard, properly understood or fully responded to the *kerygma*. Pastors and ministers often preach the doctrinal superstructure before the doctrinal foundation has been laid. Not surprisingly, many churches in consequence are filled with nominal though sincere people who have never experienced true conversion (Matt 18:3; 1 Thess 1:9) or spiritual new birth (see John 1:12-13, 3:5, 8; 1 Peter 1: 3-4; 2 Cor 5:17). I was an exhibit A of this myself – baptised, confirmed, a regular communicant, even reading my Bible and saying my prayers – but I had not understood or responded in repentance, faith and commitment to the *kerygma* and

had accordingly not found Christ or come to know Him personally.

The error of baptismal regeneration

This kind of phenomenon is not uncommon in certain denominations where the disastrous, mistaken and non-New Testament notion of “baptismal regeneration” is taught. This teaches that when a baby, or an adult for that matter, is baptised, they are automatically born again and regenerated. Such teaching cuts the nerve of evangelism and *kerygmatic* proclamation and gives people the false idea that by an external ceremony, ritual or sacrament they have been born again into the Kingdom of God.

In fact baptism, especially infant, like circumcision in the Old Testament, simply indicates the person is brought within the privileged place of being in the “visible household of God”. The new birth has yet to happen (in the case of christened infants), and should already have happened in the case of adults coming to be baptised by immersion. Whichever mode is followed, the Apostle is clear that “. . . in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but *faith* working through love” (Gal 5:6). Then he repeats this in the next chapter: “For neither circumcision counts for

anything, nor uncircumcision, but *a new creation*" (Gal 6:15) – i.e., being regenerated by the Holy Spirit into newness of life by new birth (see also Titus 3:5-7). In other words, the external (whether circumcision or baptism, as its New Testament counterpart, as Paul links them in Col 2:11-12) is not so much the critical thing as the *internal*. The Apostle therefore not surprisingly declares his priority activity and commitments in these terms: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but *to preach the Gospel . . .*" (1 Cor 1:17). The Greek word used here is *evangelisthai*, i.e., "evangelise".

Respond by faith and commitment

Baptism has its important place, as an external symbol of *a reality still to come (infants)*, or *a reality which has already come (adults)*, but it never replaces the importance of the preacher declaring the *kerygma* and the potential new believer responding to it by faith and commitment. Likewise in his Great Commission, Jesus urges going to "*make disciples of all nations*" (Matt 28:19a), then "*baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (vs 19b), and beyond that "*teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (vs 20a). In Mark's version of the Great Commission, Jesus says: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel . . ." (Mark 16:15). Then he adds: "He

who believes and is baptised will be saved" (vs 16a). Finally the very sobering addendum: "but he who does not believe will be condemned" (vs 16b). Faith – that is, commitment and trust in the saving work of Christ, combined with self surrender – is clearly here again made the critical component to entry into the Eternal Kingdom. This *is* sobering stuff. And the importance of the *kerygma* and its call for response to Christ and His saving work is clearly strongly in purview again.

Fixed deposit of Truth

This *kerygma*, proclaimed by a Gospel *Herald* (Greek: *keryx*), as Paul describes his calling in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11, is a fixed deposit of Truth. The Greek word for "herald" is *keryx*, from which of course *kerygma*.⁹ It becomes more understandable when we grasp that the *keryx* or herald of the ancient world was the town crier who got his news from the lord of the manor and drew attention to it by ringing his bell. He never gave his own views on things, but got the "fixed deposit" of his news from his superior, and then declared it. Likewise must it be with the evangelistic Christian preacher. He or she is not to declare all his or her private views, but to proclaim faithfully the fixed

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⁹ The original title of this essay (now substantially revised) was "The Preacher as Herald".

kerygmatic deposit by which the uncommitted “may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33, 1 Thess 2:16). Says the Apostle Paul: “. . . it pleased God by the folly of what we preach [Greek: *kerygma*] to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21). So what then is the *kerygma*? In a nutshell, the *kerygma* is “Jesus”, as Luke summarises Philip’s message to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:35. Said John Wesley once: “I gave them Jesus.”

We proclaim Jesus Christ, not ourselves

And the verb “proclaim” (Greek: *kerysso*), used 61 times in the New Testament, means, says the famous Kittel’s *Wörterbuch* (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament), “the declaration of an event ... Like the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, this proclamation is part of God’s saving plan. It is the declaration of the saving facts in order that they may be also a saving reality for believers.” Therefore, as Paul says, “For what we preach [*kerysso*] is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord” (2 Cor 4:5). And, adds Kittel:

If the word enacts what it proclaims, the content is indeed of supreme importance. It is not determined either by the situation of the hearers or by the ideas of the proclaimer but by the divine kingdom or lordship that Jesus himself announces and brings. The

imminence of the kingdom poses the demand for *metánoia* [repentance] as the possibility of participation. With this demand goes the declaration of forgiveness as a divine act of judgment and grace that will mean condemnation for some and deliverance for others. Which it will be depends on the response to Christ (1 Cor. 1:23-24). [NB also John 3:16, 18, 36.] The king is intrinsic to the kingdom: the total Christ who is Lord by death and resurrection, and who is proclaimed as such (2 Cor. 4:5). Here is no myth of a dying and rising god, for the reference is to the factual event of a life in history. Yet the mere life, edifying though it might be, has significance only in the light of the resurrection. What is proclaimed, then, is not just a human history any more than it is merely human dogma. Salvation history is proclaimed, and its proclamation is itself [a] saving event. At work here is not just the content of what is proclaimed, but God himself. For this reason, it is God's power (1 Cor. 1:24), it will permit no adulteration (Gal. 5:11), and it must be proclaimed in season and out (2 Tim. 4:2).¹⁰

So let me try now to summarise the *kerygma* in a neat 1-2-3-4 outline:

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¹⁰ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*), translated and abridged into one volume by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1985), 432-434.

A Passion for Preaching

1. ONE EVENT: The Christ event of His birth, life, substitutionary death, atoning sacrifice, historical resurrection and return at the end of the age. This latter aspect of the Second Coming of Christ might seem to some a surprising inclusion in the *kerygma*, but the great Cambridge New Testament scholar, C.H. Dodd, believed it belonged in the *kerygmatic* content in order to give the potential or new believer the assurance of God's sovereign control over history.
2. TWO GOSPEL OFFERS. The *kerygma*, as is very clear in the first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:38), presents two amazing Gospel offers, or gifts. The first is *forgiveness*, which deals with the past. Our sins are put away (Psalm 103:12), and we are washed clean forever in the blood of Christ (Rev 7:14; 1 Pet 1:18, 19). The second Gospel offer is that of the gift of the *Holy Spirit*. Often in our evangelistic preaching we preach the first offer of forgiveness and salvation and forget the second – namely the Person, power (Acts 2:4, 17; 4: 7-8, 29-31), fruit (Gal 5:22-23) and gifts (e.g., 1 Cor 12 & 14) of the Holy Spirit. As forgiveness deals with the past, so the gift of the Holy Spirit addresses the present and the future (Eph 1:13-14).

3. THREE DEMANDS. In coming to faith in Christ, we must engage in *repentance* (Greek: *metánoia*), which means a real change of heart and mind, and a willingness to leave our sins (e.g., the Prodigal Son), followed by a real change of direction – i.e., to stop going *my* way and begin genuinely to go *God's* way. The Prodigal changed his mind about his lifestyle and then changed his direction to go back to the Father's household and embrace.

The second demand is that of *faith*. Said Jesus in the opening words of His public ministry: “repent, and *believe*” (Mark 1:14-15). Now here is where we can easily miss a key component of the *kerygma*, because faith as understood in the New Testament is never merely intellectual assent. In fact, James says “Even the *demons* believe” (James 2:19). In other words, they have intellectual belief in Jesus but no commitment to Him of surrender, obedience and love. New Testament faith, on the other hand, is intellectual assent *plus* volitional commitment of our life and destiny. As when you believe in an aeroplane and board it, or when you believe in a doctor and commit yourself to him or her for surgery, or when you “believe” in a woman and marry her. Unless this full commitment and life-

surrender component of the *kerygma* is preached, many will never make the full discovery of new life in Christ.

The third demand is to *follow* – i.e., serious, committed discipleship. Said Jesus: “Follow me” (John 1:43). He added: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and *follow* me” (Luke 9:23). The casual Sunday church-goer who is not daily seeking to walk with his or her Lord and earnestly follow Him has missed this dimension of the *kerygma*.

4. FOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

- *A new relationship with God through Christ.* God is now not our judge, but our Father (*Abba* = “Daddy”), Saviour, Lord and Friend (see Gal 4:4-7; Romans 8:15-16).
- *A new relationship with ourselves.* Valued, esteemed, loved and accepted by God, we can now value, esteem, love and accept ourselves. Indeed, Jesus exhorts us to love our neighbours “as yourself” (Matt 22:39). As we properly love ourselves, we are both freed and enabled properly to love our neighbour.

- *A new relationship with the Church.* Belonging to Christ, we now belong in a totally new way to His people in the fellowship of the Church (Acts 2:42). We register then that an isolated believer is a contradiction in terms. That is why we must not be “neglecting to meet together” (Heb 10:25) with fellow believers. And in our preaching to potential new believers they must know this is part of the deal!
- *A new relationship with the world.* We turn *from* the world’s lifestyle *to* the world’s needs. We will become witnesses to the world in its lostness and will grasp that we cannot be secret disciples (Romans 10:14-15). The fact is that either our discipleship destroys our secrecy, or our secrecy destroys our discipleship. Beyond verbal witness we seek to witness by how we live and how we care for people in need (Matt 25:31-46).

Summarising the *kerygma*, we can say that we present:

- a historical proclamation – of the facts of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, e.g., He died on the Cross.
- a theological explanation – as to what this all means, e.g., He died on the Cross *for our sins*.
- a volitional summons – i.e., we have to do something about it in the response of reception, surrender and

whole-hearted discipleship, e.g., we decide today to give our life to Christ.

It is perhaps worth noting that at times in the epistles there are elements of overlap between *kerygma* and *didache*, but the basic distinction remains serviceable for our purposes in terms of *what* we preach and teach *when* and *to whom*. As this matter of response is so critical in *kerygmatic* preaching, I want to add a further word about it.

Response

Until I heard John Stott and Billy Graham preaching at Cambridge I had never understood the necessity for response nor seen the challenge to commitment worked out in a Christian gathering. Stott held “after meetings” at Cambridge and at All Souls Church in London for inquirers interested in commitment. Billy Graham at Madison Square Garden, as elsewhere, had people come forward at the end of the message. What was one to make of this? And what was I to do?

First of all I had to grasp the theology of the thing. The scholarly consensus was – and this included C. H. Dodd, as mentioned, the great Cambridge biblical scholar of yesteryear – that the *kerygma* closes with an ethical

summons to repent and receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Canon Bryan Green once said “you tell the story, you explain the story and you *secure a response* to the story.” Said Stott:

[T]rue evangelism seeks a response. It expects results. It is preaching for a verdict. Heralding is not the same as lecturing. A lecture is dispassionate, objective, academic. It is addressed to the mind. It seeks no result but to impart certain information and, perhaps, to provoke the student to further enquiry. But the herald of God comes with an urgent proclamation of peace through the blood of the cross, and with a summons to men to repent, to lay down their arms and humbly to accept the offered pardon.¹¹

Calling for a verdict

Once I had grasped this, I accepted that calling for a verdict would become part of my ministry. The method would be inconsequential and could vary from situation to situation. But people must not be allowed to remain indifferent. As Packer wrote, evangelism “is a matter, not merely of informing, but also of inviting.”¹²

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¹¹ John R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 42.

¹² J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961), 50.

Packer had another critically important insight. This was the fact that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the matter of results. Our job is to proclaim faithfully and challenge people to repentance. But God brings His results in His own time and way through the Holy Spirit. Indeed “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). To see this is to be delivered from pride and inflation when we see results, and from despair and deflation when we don’t. The sovereignty of God stands over and above the proclaimed word of the human instrument. Knowing this has again and again been a great personal life-saver to me in different preaching situations.

Sermon-craft

The years subsequent to those early beginnings with the much-blessed first Mission to Maritzburg in 1962 simply built on the initial foundations as I sought to find my own style. Inevitably there were and are still many lessons to learn. One related to illustrations. I spend as much time in working on illustration, story and the use of the anecdotal as on anything. In the first place these provide a change of pace, which is vital if listeners are to maintain their concentration level. Beyond that, truth wings home on illustration better than anything. This is a truism, I know. Yet again and again when listening to

preachers I find myself silently crying out: “Illustrate! Illustrate!”

Humour is also valuable – not just for ice-breaking, but also as a means of taking home some of the harder truths which would be resisted if presented without this loving lubricant.

Touching mind and heart

I also discovered that purely cerebral Christian apologetics, however well done, rarely convert – even though they may do what I call intellectual “jungle-clearing”! They need to be linked with testimony and with contemporary evidence of Jesus and His Holy Spirit in action and alive today. If both mind and heart are touched, the will is generally moved in response. Another precious discovery is that moving and deep worship will often launch a spoken message as nothing else can. The God who “inhabit[s] the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22.3 – NKJV) prepares hearts most wonderfully in worship for the reception of the proclaimed word.

We should also note that a good sermon should normally have a clear outline with well crafted transitions between the major sections. This often requires careful, thorough and intense preparation.

Considerable attention should also be given to both the introduction to the message, and especially its conclusion. Even more so if an evangelistic appeal is to be given. If it is, listeners should be alerted early in the piece to the fact that they will be challenged at the end of the message to respond. And further reminders of this should feature at several other places in the body of the message so that the listener is not suddenly frozen and paralysed at the end of the message by a sudden and previously unannounced call for response. In a sense they should be having the opportunity throughout the message to be thinking what their response will or won't be!

Agony and ecstasy

Of course it goes without saying that preaching is sometimes ecstasy and other times agony. It is ecstasy when you get it right, feel anointed, sense the Word going through and see a response. At other times it is agony. The reasons for this can be many and various. One reason may lie in one's own inner dryness, tensions or attitudes which put one in bondage during proclamation and therefore block the free flow of the Spirit. Or one may be physically and emotionally exhausted. I find it very difficult to preach well unless I feel reasonably rested and physically and emotionally

on top. Or one might also be meeting resistance and hard-heartedness. This I find draining and sometimes downright depressing. Thankfully such experiences are the exception rather than the rule.

The right message

Preaching is also agonising when one is suddenly aware that one has not got the right message for the occasion. This happens less easily in the evangelistic situation when, as we have seen, the message (*kerygma*) is fixed and all one has to do is to vary the wrapping paper around the package. However, getting it wrong happens all too easily in Christian conferences, church services or special Christian gatherings when the Lord has a particular message for that particular context and group and one misses it by failure to listen. Instead one presents what the Bible calls “visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer 23:16). This is awful. And I have done it so many times.

When we fail to get it right I see it as a failure in appropriating the gift of prophecy which is the one gift Paul says we are all to covet (1 Cor 14:1, 5, 39). I understand prophecy, as I have elsewhere written, as:

the exercise of that gift and ministry of the Spirit which takes place when a believer who knows the mind, will, purpose or righteousness of God declares it, whether to the Church or the world. The knowledge on which this utterance is based is received not only by understanding the written word and abiding in the living Word, but sometimes by supernatural discernment, or by listening and hearing, or even by direct revelation of the Spirit received by faith. The twofold test of prophetic authenticity lies firstly in whether it is consistent with the revealed Word of God, the apostolic deposit, and secondly in whether it receives the positive affirmation of the Body of Christ, especially other prophets.¹³

Inner conviction

Of course hearing the Lord's whispers, so that one may prophesy aright, is often difficult and the process of it highly mysterious. I have no simple explanation of the process. But the reality of it is often, though by no means always, unquestionable. At times the process seems very human, natural and cerebral. One gets a sort of hunch or inner conviction that a particular line of presentation or thought is what the Lord wants for a given occasion or situation. At other times the inner

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¹³ Michael Cassidy, *Bursting the Wineskins* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 277.

whisper is so compelling as to be unmistakable and one knows one has been “given a word” from on high by the Holy Spirit. And when it is delivered the Lord confirms by signs following in terms of impact and consequence. On those occasions preaching is a deeply satisfying experience of freedom and fulfilment. When one misses it, then one faces trauma all the way, often accompanied in my own experience by a deep sense of failure before God. “Lord, I blew it” I have often had to say – with repentance and the resolve to do better next time.

Affecting eternity

My path into preaching has been long, arduous and often costly. Yet I can say with all my heart that not only has it become the most exciting and fulfilling activity of all life but also the most rewarding. To know that many people have found eternal life or been encouraged in their faith by one’s preached word is to know that God still endows this seemingly weakest of enterprises with his special blessing and anointing. Beyond that one knows one’s life has affected eternity. And nothing could be more wonderful or gratifying than that. If the Church could find a renewal of confidence in the power of biblical preaching it would find that it had stumbled on one of heaven’s greatest keys to spiritual life and growth.

ABOUT AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

African Enterprise is a ministry sprung from African soil which firmly believes Africa will become the fulcrum of world mission in the 21st century. AE's aim of *EVANGELISING THE CITIES OF AFRICA THROUGH WORD AND DEED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CHURCH* is contributing to the spiritual renewal and transformed lives of millions who have been brought to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

However, AE seeks also to demonstrate the love of Christ in powerful tangible ways. In addition to preaching the Gospel, AE's peacemaking work has been ongoing in violence-wracked Burundi since the mid-1990s, while thousands of widows and orphans out of the 1994 Rwandan genocide are assisted and ministered to. Prostitutes and street children are discipled and given job training in Ghana, while Foxfire youth evangelists in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe impact the lives of countless young people, equipping them to live according to biblical sexual standards, thus enabling them to avoid the ravages of the HIV/Aids epidemic.

Perhaps most remarkable was the ministry's contribution in South Africa in 1994, when AE founder Michael Cassidy played a crucial backstage role in bringing in the Kenyan diplomat who facilitated the political breakthrough which averted near-certain civil war.

AE has sought in the spirit of John 17 to be a unifying force among Christians, by spearheading the largest gatherings of Christians in Africa over the last generation, such as the South African Congress on Mission and Evangelism in Durban (1973), the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly in Nairobi (1976 and 1994) and the South African Christian Leadership Assembly in Pretoria (1979 and 2003).

AE was founded in 1961 and operates in the countries listed on the following page. Please contact us for further information.

CONTACT AFRICAN ENTERPRISE

Africa Teams

Congo – Kinshasa

aerdcinfo@yahoo.fr

Ethiopia – Addis Ababa

(01) 716637

aeec@telecom.net.et

Ghana – Accra

(021) 235457

aeghana@4u.com.gh

Kenya – Nairobi

(02) 884512

aee-kenya@wananchi.com

Malawi – Lilongwe

(01) 761993

aeemalawi@malawi.net

Rwanda – Kigali

87372

aee@rwanda1.com

South Africa – Pietermaritzburg

(033) 347-1911

aesa@ae.org.za

www.africanenterprise.org.za

Tanzania – Dar es Salaam

(022) 276-0550

aee-tz@africaonline.co.tz

Uganda – Kampala

(041) 250386

aee@imul.com

Zimbabwe – Harare

(04) 746761

aezim@mweb.co.zw

Support Offices

Australia – Sydney

(02) 9889-1799

ae@africanenterprise.com.au

www.africanenterprise.com.au

Belgium – Brussels

(02) 359-09-12

ae-belgium@infonie.be

Canada – Vancouver

(604) 228-0936

aecanada@africanenterprise.com

www.africanenterprise.com

Great Britain – London

(020) 8559-2422

info@africanenterprise.co.uk

Ireland/No. Ireland – Belfast

(028) 9086-0703

t.l.wilson@btinternet.com

New Zealand – Auckland

(09) 579-1287

info@africanenterprise.co.nz

United States – Los Angeles

1-800-MR-AFRICA

info@aeusa.org

www.africanenterprise.org