
Delivery in Festo Kivengere's Preaching

Alfred Olwa, 4th April 2013

Senior Lecturer: Department of Practical Studies

Uganda Christian University

Abstract

After introducing Festo Kivengere of Uganda and his audience gathered at Urbana to whom Kivengere preached, the topic of this paper is discussed under the headings of two questions, namely, what did he preach? and, how did he preach? By answering these questions Kivengere's view and style of preaching is illuminated.

1. INTRODUCTION: FESTO KIVENGERE AND HIS AUDIENCE

Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda is the third Anglican Bishop of Kigezi diocese (1972–1988). He was the spokesman of and a preacher out of the East African Revival.¹ He preached reconciliation centred in Jesus Christ around the world, especially, between, 1971–1988.² He was a close friend of Billy Graham, thus, he became known as ‘the Billy Graham of Africa’. The context of his preaching, mainly Uganda, was characterized by brokenness, deep wounds, misery, hopelessness and dire need for healing and peace. Influences from the Keswick Movement, the East African Revival Movement, evangelical leaders, especially Billy Graham and John Stott, Karl Barth and Markus Barth, and the apostle Paul: all contributed to shaping Kivengere and his preaching of reconciliation.

¹ See Schmidt, Richard H. *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002, 311. For an in-depth biographical and preaching journey of Kivengere, see Alfred Olwa, ‘Missionary of Reconciliation: The Role of the Doctrine of Reconciliation in the Preaching of Festo Kivengere of Uganda, 1971–1988’. Unpublished Thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2013, 82–103.

² See relevant section, ‘Kivengere's Preaching Reconciliation’, 82–103 in Alfred Olwa, ‘Missionary of Reconciliation’.

In this paper we introduce Kivengere's audience by way of a sermon that he preached on the 31 December 1976, USA, at Urbana. This sermon bears the title 'The Triumph of God's Glory'. Seventeen thousand students attended the conference. Besides the students several important evangelical leaders from around the world addressed the conference including his long-time friends Billy Graham and John Stott.³

Seeing in the mind's eye, Kivengere in the pulpit, speaking passionately and full of energy, two modest questions emerge, claiming our attention: what did he preach? and, how did he preach?

2. WHAT DID HE PREACH?

Kivengere saw himself fundamentally as a preacher of reconciliation centred in Jesus Christ. As he told the International Conference of Itinerant Evangelists (1983): 'To all of us who proclaim the good news of God to men and women, God has entrusted the most precious treasure — "The Ministry of Reconciliation"'.⁴

His commitment to reconciliation was clearly seen by others. Michael Cassidy, Kivengere's long time friend and colleague — with whom he both co-founded the African Enterprise and preached in tandem⁵ — observed that 'reconciliation was the

³ Other notable evangelical leaders present include, *John W. Alexander*, president of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship-USA, Madison, Wisconsin; *Edgar S. Beach* staff member of Wycliffe Bible Translators, assigned to Guatemala and president of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter at the University of Illinois at Urbana during his senior year; *Chua Wee Hian*, General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students; *Edmund P. Clowney*, President of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and Professor of Practical Theology; *Eric Frykenberg*, a retired, though not inactive, missionary; *Samuel T. Kamaleson*, Vice-President-at-large for World Vision International; *Elisabeth Elliot Leitch* served in Ecuador among Colorado, Quichua and Auca Indians from 1952 to 1963; *A. Donald MacLeod*, General Director of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship-Canada since 1975; *Isabelo Magalit*, Associate General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in East Asia; *John M. Perkins*, founder and President of Voice of Calvary Ministries in Mendenhall and Jackson, Mississippi; *Helen Roseveare*, staff of the Missionary Training College of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade; and, *Lemuel S. Tucker*, a student at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, former president of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

⁴ Festo Kivengere, 'The Evangelist's Ministry of Reconciliation: We Are Christ's Ambassadors', in *The Work of an Evangelist: International Congress for Itinerant Evangelists* (ed. J. D. Douglas; Minneapolis, Minn.: World Wide Publications, 1984), p. 157, #1.

⁵ 'Tandem style' is a method of preaching that Michael Cassidy claimed to be 'the East African Revival way' in which two or more speakers, in this case Kivengere, an ordained minister, and a black Ugandan, and Cassidy, a lay minister, and a white South African, preached on the same theme and text. See Michael Cassidy, 'Festo Has Died But He Still Speaks', *AE/August* (1988): 8.

heart of Festo's message';⁶ that Kivengere preached 'reconciliation between God and man and between man and man'.⁷ Jay Russell observed that in the midst of tribulation in Uganda Kivengere preached 'love and reconciliation'.⁸ Quinn wrote: 'Forgiveness, reconciliation and proclamation were the three cornerstones of Kivengere's ministry, which continued until his death'.⁹ And, Shaw observed that Kivengere preached 'racial reconciliation and reconciliation with God through Christ'.¹⁰

Let us note: Kivengere not only preached reconciliation from explicit reconciliation passages, but he preached reconciliation from non-explicit reconciliation passages because he thought about reconciliation for a long time. And, his method of exposition may be described as 'Theological Exegesis'. It enables him to do so.

Just before Kivengere entered Pittsburgh Seminary, Karl Barth toured the United States of America delivering five lectures subsequently published as *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*.¹¹ The presence of this twentieth century Swiss theological giant caused a massive stir in the States; 'I delivered the first five of these lectures in Chicago and Princeton, and the first one also in Richmond and San Francisco [...] to see myself suddenly engulfed by such an avalanche of "publicity", to which I was quite unaccustomed'.¹²

The ripples from this visit were still apparent when Kivengere arrived to begin his theological studies in Pittsburgh. Indeed, the impact of a heavyweight New Testament scholar and theologian such as Karl Barth engulfed him, however, even more significantly his public acknowledgement of Karl Barth's influence over him.

[W]hen I was studying for my theology in America, reading Karl Barth's (pause) great big things ... (Sustained laughter). We had a professor who was teaching systematic theology and we had come to the atonement and it was a

⁶ Cassidy, 'Festo Has Died But He Still Speaks', 8.

⁷ Festo Kivengere, *Revolutionary Love* (ed. Dorothy Smoker; Fort Washington, PA.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1983).

⁸ Russell, 'Ministry of Reconciliation', 304.

⁹ Quinn, 'Kivengere, Festo'.

¹⁰ Shaw, *Global Awakening*, 107.

¹¹ Charles Dickson, 'Markus Barth and Biblical Theology: A Personal Re-View', *HBT* 17/2 (December 1995): 96.

¹² Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992 [1963]), v-xii.

problem with my professor. He found it terribly difficult to teach us about the atonement, and he had twenty theories about atonement (pause) — which we appreciated (laughter).

But I could see that he was embarrassed. He just did not get excited and I was frustrated. I was expecting this course to really hit me hard and fill me and get me deeper and it just flopped. However, when I read Karl Barth I found that actually, Karl Barth was a little brighter than my professor.¹³

For Kivengere like Barth, reconciliation was the center of the Christian Gospel.

3. HOW DID HE PREACH?

As Barth's 'Theological Exegesis' centres on reconciliation in Christ so that the event of Christ then yields an approach to Scripture, the same order is true for Kivengere: content determines style.¹⁴ The reconciliation content also determined the style of illustrations chosen. As was common in the Revival preaching, these drew upon biographical and autobiographical accounts of individuals being reconciled to each other. No doubt Kivengere's style of closing the gap between the preacher and his audience is one of the most neglected areas in homiletical training, at least in African Seminaries that I know of.

¹³ Kivengere, *The Spiritual Life of a Pastor*. 46.44 mins into the tape. An important incidental evidence for Kivengere's love for Karl Barth's theology and preaching the gospel can also be found well beyond his Seminary period. Michael Cassidy recalls that like himself in spare moments during mission preaching trips, Kivengere spent much preparation time in solitude: 'He was so steeped in theology, and the Bible, plus the anointing of the Holy Spirit [...] especially anything on the cross [...] Festo was reading — often dense German theology, picking up insights as he went [...] he was thoroughly absorbing'. Amongst these works of 'German' theology were the two Barths. Cassidy further recalls that Kivengere 'really got into the heavies, and this no doubt provided an ever-deepening base for his popular [preaching] ministry'. Coomes, *Festo Kivengere*, 290–291.

¹⁴ Alfred Olwa, 'Missionary of Reconciliation: The Role of the Doctrine of Reconciliation in the Preaching of Festo Kivengere of Uganda, 1971–1988'. I analyzed twenty-seven sermons of Kivengere from a biblical theological perspective and evidence in the sermons pointed that for Kivengere content determines the style of his preaching.

During his second year at Pittsburgh Seminary,¹⁵ USA, he went back to Uganda to attend the third ten yearly Kabale Convention of the East African Revival Movement. After all the American influence on his preaching, he said ‘I discovered I was losing my freshness in communicating with my African brethren [...] I was after all going to college to prepare myself for ministry in Africa!’¹⁶

Kivengere wanted to be careful not to lose his understanding of the African way of communicating: ‘I made up my mind that Western influence should help to clarify my thoughts, but not force him into a set mould’.¹⁷ He resolved that from now on: ‘I would learn from my brethren in the West and use it in the relaxed atmosphere of the African approach’.¹⁸ Here, we have an essential key to understanding his manner of preaching. These important confessions of Kivengere are highlighted by the fact that the sermon under our consideration (together with other sermons contained in *Missionary of Reconciliation*) opens with a deep sense of Kivengere the man and preacher: relaxed before his audience with a message that is *his*.

In fact, In 1981, in a special lecture he gave at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, USA, Kivengere revealed: ‘Marcus Barth was my professor of New Testament [...] I expected him to give me a few clarifying points and Markus Barth did that’.¹⁹ This succinct autobiographical statement reveals his self-acknowledged debt to Markus’s influence, all the more significant because it is an incidental remark eighteen years after

¹⁵ For a history of Pittsburgh Seminary, see James Arthur Walther, ed., *Ever a Frontier: The Bicentennial History of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary* (First Edition.; Eerdmans Pub Co, 1994).

¹⁶ Anne Coomes, *Festo Kivengere: Authorized Biography*, 240.

¹⁷ Coomes, *Festo Kivengere*, 240.

¹⁸ Coomes, *Festo Kivengere*, 240.

¹⁹ See Kivengere, ‘A Special Lecture’. His link with Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry came through the founding Australian Principal, his Tanzanian ‘Godfather’ mentor, Bishop Alfred Stanway with whom he had special links since his days at Alliance High School, Dodoma. ‘To their great surprise, Alf [Alfred Stanway] was invited on the recommendation of John Stott to be the founding President of Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The school as yet did not exist, but it was as though all Alf’s experiences were a preparation to date. So he responded positively and in 1975 they moved to America. Over the next few years the College was established and continues to flourish’ — From a brief biography of Bishop Alfred Stanway, John Wilson, ‘Bishop Alfred Stanway - Heroes of the Faith’, *The Melbourne Anglican* (March 2011), Cited 2 Feb 2012, Online: <http://melbourne.anglican.com.au/NewsAndViews/TMA/Heroes%20of%20the%20Faith/Bishop%20Alfred%20Stanway%20-%20Heroes%20of%20the%20Faith%20-%20March%202011.pdf>.

the Seminary at Pittsburgh, showing that Markus Barth was an abiding influence on his life and thought.

Markus Barth was known for his commitment to the Word of God as Scripture, his dedication to thoroughness, and his obvious joy in discovering new things in Scripture.²⁰ ‘Believing that if one finds in Scripture only confirmation for what one has always believed, one has probably not listened closely enough’.²¹ In his preaching Kivengere marvels at new discovery he makes in the text he preached from.

Passing these remarks, let us listen to how Kivengere preach to his audience — international students and evangelical leaders coming from different parts of the world at Urbana.

3.1 Kivengere bridges the gap between the preacher and his audience

Kivengere begins his sermon by bridging the gap between the preacher and his audience by expressing his inadequacy to address such an important topic: ‘The Triumph of God’s Glory’, which he described as the ‘very heart of your salvation and mine’ (p. 1, #1), thus, bridging the gap between his audience (‘your’) and preacher (‘mine’).

The beginning of this sermon illustrates the principle of delivery upon which his preaching proceeds. Frequently he is using deferential expressions that close the gap between him and his audience: expressions like, ‘including myself’, ‘God paid for my sin and yours’, ‘us’, etc. This stylistic feature bringing preacher and audience together can be seen as a direct outworking of his reconciliation message proclaimed by the sermons’ content. In delivering his sermon, the gap between the preacher and the audience must be bridged.

3.2 Kivengere has a steady and charming voice²²

Kivengere’s voice could best be described as a steady and charming voice. It is straight,

²⁰ Gowan, ‘In Memory of Markus Barth: A Personal Note’, 93.

²¹ Kivengere, ‘In Christ’, p. 3, #1.

²² Listen to the audio version of this sermon, Festo Kivengere, ‘The Triumph of God’s Glory’. Sermon Transcript. Urbana, December 31, 1976. AO: 19761231.

strong and true-to-life. There is a convincing sense of passion and urgency in his voice leading to a tremendous sense that what he says matters.

Unlike many preachers, his voice gives assurance of forgiveness: ‘if you have a sin to repent, it can still be forgiven’; assurance of hope in the gospel: ‘Jesus is coming back [...] Signs are here’ (p. 11, #51). This comes through the content and his excitement of the biblical message. His voice is rich and melodious. Kivengere’s voice expresses his personality very well; and, there is a strong sense of link between the preacher and the person.

Kivengere does a good job of speaking to such a mixed audience. He is able to speak to all sectors in a highly effective way. His voice is a good mix for the setting. He had an evangelist’ voice and not an academic voice, yet he is able to speak to a highly educated congregation in a manner, which effectively uses direct speech. When speaking to the youth in his audience, he spoke the language that the youth identified with: ‘in your lonely rooms’, ‘during exams’.

3.3 Engaging audience with questions

Engaging his audience with questions at different points in his preaching runs throughout the sermon. For example in the sermon he asks:

Can you imagine God becoming a baby so that he may pick us in our weakness?

Can you imagine God who is almighty putting such limitations around himself?

Condescending to be like you and me, in utter weakness?

Is there any glory in death?

You mean this man who is hanging on the cross is a king? The cross is his throne?

The thorns the crown? A shattered body a kingly body? A naked body covered with robes of a king?

Will you tune up?

Kivengere’s use of engaging questions to his audience is found throughout the sermon.

3.4 Marvel at biblical texts

Kivengere's marvel at biblical texts is reflected in many of his sermons. Listen to four cases in this sermon:

(a) Echoing Barth's Christological explanation of God, who in Jesus Christ humbled himself, and crossed the barrier of sin to us, he marveled at this coming of Jesus to us, overcoming the distance between eternity and time: 'What a coming!'

With his confessed influence of Markus Barth over his joy in discovering new things in Scripture and that if one finds in Scripture only a confirmation of what one has always believed, then one has not listened closely enough to Scripture,²³ it is not too much to claim that Kivengere's confession on the coming of Jesus, hint at his insight on the nature of God in the coming of Jesus that Kivengere saw. Fascinated by it he reduced it to three words: 'what a coming!' This is even further strengthened by the influence over him by Markus's commitment to the Word of God, believing that there should be joy on discovering new things in Scripture.

(b) Explaining the triumph of God's glory in the human situation, he said that Jesus 'became one of us in order to make us what we should have been'. God's glory has triumphed over our disintegration and that is a remarkable experience (p. 5, #22). Again, he marveled: 'What a beautiful, wonderful Savior! What an almighty God!'.²⁴

(c) Explaining the discovery of how Jesus removed darkness in man by the thief on the cross at Calvary, Kivengere said: 'Immediately the man who was dying as a criminal was ushered into the presence of glory, liberated from despair, removed from darkness. What a discovery!' Again, Kivengere's statement 'What a discovery' is consistent with a possible influence from Markus' exhortation to his students to be

²³ See relevant section, Chapter Three, 4. 'Markus Barth's link to Kivengere' in Alfred Olwa, *Missionary of Reconciliation*, 152–155.

²⁴ See Chapter Three, 4. 'Markus Barth's Link to Kivengere', 152–155.

excited at what they have discovered in the text.²⁵

(d) Expressing Jesus' action of love for us he marvel: 'Oh what a life!'. Painfully 'Jesus moved into Gethsemane. He moved to the hill of Calvary. He lifted that wood on which he was going to hang and he died'.

His marveling at insights he discovers on Jesus in the text is visible everywhere in his language. With this marvels, Kivengere leads his audience to insights in the text. As a preacher he lets the text speak authoritatively to his audience. However, let us not be deceived by his frequent marvels at his discoveries in the text, he has embodied the texts on its terms in his life and ministry. He is deliberate at every marvel of what he discovered in the text.

3.5 Preaching passionately

By way of introducing Kivengere's passionate preaching from the sermon, a snap shot of his of preaching can disclose why he often preached so passionately:

Jesus was buried and he was resurrected. Jesus' death overcame the sin and the guilt and the separation. Jesus' resurrection conquered death, the last enemy of mankind. The last enemy of mankind makes men tremble and it makes clever men weep. Death is a point of despair; a point of departure, the dead end of the road (p. 7, #32).

However, there is good news.

Jesus entered the realm of death, three days in battle, down there in grip with the terrible enemy of mankind, he killed death [...] and changed the whole nature of death. To a Christian, death is not a departure but an arrival. It is no longer a dead end but the beginning; no longer darkness but the dawn of a new life (p. 7, #32).

To grasp Kivengere's passion, oratory and pictorial preaching, the spontaneous applause of Urbana audience that was so gripped by his explanation of 'Jesus' defeat of death',²⁶

²⁵ See Chapter Three, 4. 'Markus Barth's Link to Kivengere', 152–155.

²⁶ I am indebted to Peter G Bolt for this phrase 'Jesus' defeat of death', the title of his book. See Peter G. Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark's Early Readers* (First edition.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Bolt shows Jesus casting back the shadow of

interrupting the flow of the sermon with applause, causing Kivengere to pause before he could continue his explanation,²⁷ must be taken into account.

On the one hand Urbana was a beacon, casting its light all over the world. Later in the sermon Kivengere stressed the need for ending his message in reverence and not with applause: ‘we are going to end with reverence to God not with applause’. Referring to himself as a little man he said ‘This little man does not deserve even one twenty-seventh of applause’. On the other hand the audience at Urbana did not show themselves confident enough to reach out in mission with the message of the love of God. No, the world cannot despair with 17,000 evangelists whose hearts are beating in tune with the passion to preach the gospel.

3.6 No section designated application

His preaching is clearly concurrently applicatory — there is no section that he designates application — thus, he constantly called upon his audiences to hear the truth of what God is saying. His message is addressed to the heart throughout the sermon.

Listening to the audio version of the sermon, the impact of the oratory of the sermon upon his audience is evident.

2.7 Conclusion

In the mind’s eye we have seen Urbana with its ‘17,000 disciples of the Lord’. However, we have also heard this single-minded preacher, distinctively bridging the gap between him and his audience motivated by the principle that content determines the style of preaching. He was nothing but a tool — a herald of God, attempting to deliver the message of reconciliation from non-explicit reconciliation passages even though he does not explicitly mention reconciliation. Indeed, the word should be delivered in a manner that penetrate the heart of the audience and reflected in the preacher’s style of handling the content.

²⁷ death in Mark’s Gospel, and he argues that this pushing back the shadow of death was a primary strategy for Jesus’ final defeat of death in resurrection, which Kivengere’s explanation of Jesus’ defeat of death in the resurrection alludes to as ‘the dawn of a new life’.
To hear the applause and deep passionate and emotional explanation of this theological truth on death, not a departure but an arrival for a Christian, listen to the audio sermon, 26 minutes into the sermon.

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