

THE CROSS AND WORLD EVANGELIZATION

Festo Kivengere

"Man," the upward-looking one, became a creature in dilemma when he lost his bearings (his compass direction). This tragic experience happened when the upward-looking one turned away from the direction of life and became the downward-looking one, or the "inward-looking one." Away from the "life-direction" he turned to "death-direction." Away from light he turned to darkness. Away from the center he became eccentric. No wonder the inspired record described man in this state as "lost"!

Life fell apart — the world became *strange and hostile*, man's fellow-man became a *threatening stranger*. Circumstances went out of his control. He lost the ability to cope with himself, his circumstances and his neighbor. An uncomfortable awareness of emptiness — sometimes less felt, sometimes more acutely felt, but increasingly crippling — dogged his life.

His life has, since this experience commonly called "The Fall," always been lived in the midst of conflicting pulls:

- 1) The upward pull towards the original ideal;
- 2) The downward pull towards deterioration into the base kind of living of slavery to violent appetites and passions;
- 3) The outward pull towards things and people against him;
- 4) The inward pull towards his own likes, feelings and ambitions.

The cry of his heart seems always to have been, "Oh, for a balanced existence in the midst of these great pulls!" It is into these life-breaking contradictions that *God, in Christ*, came. For man in such conflicts was destroying himself. Therefore, God took up the rescue in his self-sacrificing love! "God was personally present in Christ, bringing this hostile world of men back into friendship with himself," says St. Paul (II Cor. 5:19). Thus as he was baptized in the river Jordan among sinners — sinless as he was — refusing to be counted apart from those he came to rescue, so God's Good News, which is Jesus Christ, with out-stretched arms in a mighty embrace, lay hold of our broken lives on *the cross* and its almighty act of love, condemned the hostility to death, releasing the captives.

So the Cross of Christ became God's almighty salvation for us sinners:

- a) *In its divine origin* — ending our despair of ever reaching God through our futile man-made endeavors to goodness and providing the fresh and life-giving way to fellowship with God (Gal. 4:4, 5);
- b) *In its downward reach* — getting beyond the very roots of our depravity and helplessness, thus dealing with our deepest need of moral dilapidation and releasing the cripples;
- c) *In its inward penetration* — replacing our wrong center which made us *self-centered* — by the new and right center — Christ, who makes us "Christ-centered," and so rescues us *from our inner fragmentation*. *The Cross brings inner wholeness.*

d) *In its outward outreach* — removing the conflicting elements in our relationship with our fellowmen as well as our world as a whole. Here, then, is the centrality, the all-roundness, the cruciality of the Cross (the self-sacrificing love of God in Christ) — in the sharing of God's Good News with his world (in evangelism).

Let us now look at the Cross in its practical aspect in evangelism:

1. *The Cross is the message of evangelism.* There is no Christian faith without the Cross. Christianity was born *on the Cross*. It was the love on the Cross of Calvary that broke down all the barriers of *cultural, national, racial and intellectual pride*; which stifled religious aspirations with their (anthropocentric) *humanistic* polarizations.

a) The Cross spells out the desperate moral need of man. Nothing less than the love that God demonstrated in Christ on the Cross could have come anywhere near to meeting our deep-seated *guilt*. And any so-called "good news" which does not reach this shuddering need of our moral insolvency is not worthy of the name. Nor is any evangelism which does not deal with this universal human malady worthy of the name. The Cross primarily deals with human moral guilt, and divine judgment over it and his forgiveness. The Cross is, therefore, the message of *Good News* to all men everywhere.

b) The Cross spells out how seriously God dealt with our sin. It is the price love paid to remove the tragic estrangement our sin had brought between us and God and between us and our fellow

2. *The Cross is the motivating power of evangelism.* It is the light shed from the Cross that scales fall from our eyes and we begin to see the wonder of his incredible redeeming love and the utter wretchedness of our sinfulness. In the Cross, for the first time, we see the reality of the wholeness of Jesus Christ for undone humanity, we see in this "whole Christ" on our behalf, for our well-being, as P.T. Forsyth puts it, "full judgment, indeed, there, but the grace uppermost, as he bears in himself his own judgment on us." (Person and Place of Christ, page 74).

As the Holy Spirit illumines this great act of divine love "for us," the dawn of the glorious hope rises upon the whole human race with healing in its wings! In the rays of this redeeming love we see as never before that God has removed the once impenetrable barrier in our way of approach to him, and now he forgives us upon what he has borne for our sins on the Cross! Through the Cross we have free entry into an open presence of God! Thus the Cross becomes *the motivating power in evangelism*. All are welcome. There is no too-far-gone case in the light of this tremendous love! In the midst of *chaos, tumult*, and *philosophies of despair*, and sad divisions among professing Christians, we can lift our voices still, and point to the only place of healing — to the Cross. God was present in Christ removing the polarizing barriers between us and him and bringing us into friendship with himself (and with each other).

3. *The Cross is the inspiration of evangelism.* The Cross is the flesh and bones, the heart-beat of evangelism; divert from this vital pulse and, inevitably what remains of evangelism is a dry exercise in neatly-put, but lifeless, statements of faith; devoid of power to heal broken lives and broken relationships. We may be as morally upright as the elder

brother who never "disobeyed a single order" from his father and yet was completely out of tune with his father's attitude towards his returning brother! Here, I would like to pause and plead with you all as well as myself to re-examine our attitude towards our brothers and sisters whom we regard as being outside the pale of the evangelical camp. Are you in tune with the Father's attitude towards those outside your own conviction? Are we as uncompromising in love as we are in criticism of those "for whom Christ died"; outside our own circle of conviction? St. Paul makes a penetrating statement under the inspiring power of the Cross in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5:21, "God (in his incredible love for us) treated Christ as sin, who knew no sin, for us sinners that we may be brought into right relationship with God through him." If this is what God went through to bring us into right relationship with himself, then we are left no room, no choice for any aloof attitude towards any of his children! There is no justification whatsoever for any other attitude than that of the love he demonstrated on Calvary's Cross for the world. Evangelism flowed direct from the Cross towards those who were in the very act of crucifying the Lord, to desperate criminals crucified with him! The Cross inspires evangelism and there is no other inspiration for evangelism besides.

4. *The Cross — the price of evangelism.* According to biblical record, the Good News became a living, practical reality for us men when he who was equal with God "emptied himself" of all glory in order to come and share our humanness. It cost him his life to reach us in our misery. According to the prophet of evangelism, Isaiah, "He has poured out his soul unto death . . . He was counted as a sinner among sinners." And as James Denney clearly puts it in his book, *The Death of Christ*, "The regenerating power of forgiveness depends upon its cost." The Cross spells out in shining letters that there was no limit to which God could not go in his redeeming love. The challenge that grips the whole life as one sees the extent of what God was willing to undergo on our behalf on Calvary, is so penetrating that all values are evaluated, the whole outlook is changed and most of all, what we regarded as sacrifice becomes humbling privilege. This is what filled Isaac Watts' heart with wonder and praise as he sang:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

This is what St. Paul meant when in the light of impending danger to his life, he burst out, "But life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work of telling others the Good News about God's mighty kindness and love" (Acts 20:24).

St. Paul's words echo those of the Lord who actually hung on the Cross, before he was crucified, "I have a terrible baptism ahead of me, and how I am pent up until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

This is the only way we can look at our lives . . . our possessions, our gifts, our status and abilities in the light of the Cross in evangelism. Any witness who evades this price is out of focus with the Cross, and falls short of the target of evangelism. We must re-examine our priorities in

evangelism in the light of the Cross. May the Lord spare us the deadening tendency of resting in neat, evangelical clichés, in sheltering in secure fences round our lovely cliques, by the power of his liberating Cross. Then we, as his disciples shall stand where the Master stood and then all we are and have will flow in gratitude to him, and in service to the world he died to save.

Can we still withhold anything in the light of the Cross, and still claim to follow him?

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

5. *The Cross is the uniting power of evangelism.* Only through the constraining vision of Christ and him crucified can the Christian church repent of its unfortunate weakening divisions and dividedness in its ranks, the wastage of its man-power, and the corroding hoarding of its material means. We need to catch a fresh vision of our Lord's words: "He who spares — loses" but "He who lets go — gains" and the commentary of these words seems to me to come from St. Paul's words in Rom. 8:32, "He did not spare even his own Son but instead of sparing him he gave him up on our behalf." This is the right attitude of those of us who have looked at the Cross, towards the material means available for us in this ministry. The Cross is where there can never be any justification for the "hoarding attitude," the "sparing attitude," the "withholding attitude." This sparing attitude does not apply to money and buildings only, but it covers persons as well. It is our physical lives which are to be offered as a living sacrifice to God. There is a tragic practice among those of us who desire to further the cause of evangelism to hoard gifts in our denominational ghettos, while open fields go on starving for good teaching and preaching. There are wealthy pockets of the Christian community who are unaware of needy areas where good men have no facilities for training for preaching the good news. May the Holy Spirit so inspire our spirits with the consuming vision of "He did not spare even his own Son," during this Congress that we shall leave here under the compelling vision of God's love in Christ for the world as we see it in the Cross.

6. *The Cross is the drawing power of evangelism.* It is the Lord Jesus himself who drew the attention of his bewildered disciples at the end of his physical ministry — as it is recorded in John's Gospel (12:32), ". . . When I am lifted up (on the cross) above the earth, I will draw all men to me." No matter what methods we may use in sharing the Good News with men, still the drawing power is the Cross of Christ. It is Christ, the one crucified, who wins rebellious lives, melts stony hearts, brings life to the dead, and inspires stagnant lives into unsparring activity. It is the crucified who makes us see the world *alive with need for forgiveness*. It is the crucified who crosses out our fancies and introduces us to the inestimable value of people. It is the crucified Christ who destroys our prejudiced evaluations of our fellowmen as racial cases, tribal specimens, social outcasts or aristocrats, sinful characters, and religious misfits, by giving us the fresh evaluation of all men as redeemable persons "on whose behalf Christ died." Evangelism fails miserably when its purpose becomes to draw men to its programs of preaching or social

concern. Men are to be drawn by the power of the self-sacrificing love of God in Christ into new life in him. The Cross gives flesh and bones to evangelism. It is in the Cross that the truth becomes incarnate and reaches us where we are and as we are. It is the Cross which encourages us to cross over the barriers of our particular camps to meet God's world. The Cross of Christ is the panacea for the deep troubles of the human race. It is the hope for my beloved country of Africa with all its conflicting problems. It is the panacea for the so-called richer nations of the West, with their disturbing disintegrations of lives in the midst of material plenty.

Christ, the one crucified, is the power and the wisdom of God in evangelism. The Holy Spirit uses the Cross to remove not only sin and guilt; but also the crippling effects of fear and suspicion. The Cross is God's liberating power in evangelism.

We can never speak about the Cross and remain immune! The revelation through the Cross brings all sorts of men into the focus of the soul! It is under such exposure that you may have to leave your religious exercise (sacrifice) on the altar and go first and be reconciled to your brother; and then come and continue your worship!

The Cross in evangelism forces us to go and wash our Judah's feet in ministering love. In conclusion, I plead that as we receive the bread and the cup we will open our hearts to the estranged brothers and sisters. That we will allow the Cross to lead us out of the spiritual ghettos of our security — to him — and as we go out to him we shall meet many who come to him from other camps and shall have fellowship with them round the Cross. Then the communion with him and with each other will be a life-liberating and satisfying experience, sparking off the fire of evangelism for which our churches are in desperate need. And our age is waiting for the redemption of God's children from the corroding influences of this world's powers of evil into the glorious liberty of the fullness of life in the New Kingdom of our Lord. Let us approach with boldness, and enter the presence of God through the Cross and enjoy fellowship with God and with each other; and by the power of the Holy Spirit proclaim God's good news to our age. "As for me — God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

Section IV:

Public Meeting at Laustade

