

**EAGER
TO
PREACH**

by
Geoffrey Bingham



NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.

Eager to Preach

Introductory Explanation of 'Eager to Preach'

This little book gets its name *Eager to Preach* from Romans 1:15, 'I am eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome'. We know that Paul, his fellow apostles and the early church, were eager to preach the gospel wherever they could. I am sure it is still the same wherever men and women have been deeply affected by the gospel.

In a letter sent out to 242 pastors and elders, I suggested that it was time we began to use all the resources we have—human resources mainly—which exist in our own churches, and that we could do this by a spontaneous movement of leaders of churches. If we look at the entire scene of the churches in Australia we can be discouraged by much that we see. There are so many elements which seem to be foreign to the very reason for which we exist, namely, to proclaim Christ's saving work to men and women. If we try to list these elements we find they are linked with what we call materialism, and with things which go under the headings of modernity and post modernity. We have moved, in many cases, from a heart-theology to a reasoned cerebral gospel. Much of our thinking in the higher echelons of theological training and learning is linked with contemporary cultural thinking. We try to interpret the Scriptures in the light of such thinking, and we thus do wrong. In many cases we have moved altogether from the Scriptures to a mixture of morals, ethics and sociological

orientation. In church life we have taken up models for 'selling the good news' to those outside the church. 'We have a good product', we say, 'and we need to market it skilfully'. We are long on marketing brilliance and short on true biblical theology.

Well, we might spend hours over the state of the church and the present shortfall in biblical thinking and proclamation. We are well served by analysts who discern the shortcomings in the church scene, and we are grateful for their penetrating analyses. Also we are grateful for the many evangelistic movements which exist, and which are not just marketing bodies. We are glad of some new groups and methods which are seeking to bring Christian teaching to the churches, especially in setting forth the biblical bases of our faith. We wish strength and blessing to all these movements even if, here and there, we find deficiencies. The great fact is *they are eager to preach the gospel!*

This booklet is not out to set forth another method of preaching or evangelism, nor is its simple approach likely to supplant other approaches which are presently in use. Methods often arise from the way in which a certain pattern of evangelical action has been evidently successful in a church. This successful movement is then formulated as a method, and is tried by other churches which are glad to profit by such a resolved pattern. In some cases the method can be used elsewhere. Often it does not succeed. A group of folk is often led into a pattern of action for their own church, and the Spirit of God works in such a way that the church

is renewed and the gospel is delivered with power. This does not mean that the Spirit of God will work in this same way in other places and churches.

What I propose in the text of this paper is quite simple, and really is the church in action as it utilises its own facilities and personnel in the proclamation of the gospel, and in witnessing to folk who understand this down-to-earth telling of their faith. I am sure that we spend too much time bemoaning the situations we find in our churches. Christ is the Head and Lord of the churches and we can leave them in his hands. There has never been a perfect church, and rather than spend our critical faculties on discerning faults and failures, we would be better to proclaim the gospel, which has its own power when given forth in the name of Christ and by the Spirit of God. Where the gospel works in power men and women will take notice—for good or ill—and many of our weaknesses will be exchanged for the triumph of the gospel. Even heresies do not seem to be able to stand up in the face of this impact of holy power.

A Story to Tell

In the late 60s and early 70s I was involved in a simple movement called 'Faith Advance Missions'. This began following a most effective mission at Wudinna on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. Because the mission was evidently fruitful some pastors and lay folk, mainly of the Methodist church, but with friends from other denominations, formed themselves loosely under the name 'Faith Advance Missions'. The idea was simple enough; folk would be asked to help form a team and begin a mission in a

circuit or parish. The team would camp or be billeted by the church to which they had come. The team would meet daily with the local leaders and have a time of fellowship. The rest of the day would be taken up with house meetings and a centralised meeting at night.

When that mission was finished the team would prepare for the next one. They would drop a few members, picking up new ones from the mission just completed. In this way churches were able to share the proclamation of the gospel, and team members gained vital experience. Also, churches which had missions would be linked with those yet to come. A body of prayer support was continuously growing. The term 'Faith Advance' was a good one. Had it continued in this vein then it would have covered a vast area of the State and, perhaps, interstate. As it was, certain circumstances happened and the movement lapsed, although its effects continued, and, I would think, still continue.

It is this principle of 'Faith Advance' that I would like to see spring spontaneously within the churches. It could scarcely be called 'a method' as it was simply just folk gripped by the gospel who wanted to share it with others. It is a strange thing when so many churches have such fine preachers and keen lay folk that more inter-church invitations and visitations do not take place. Some did, following the lapsed 'Faith Advance', for the momentum was there to do so. I think a lot was lost when this primary concentration on the gospel was exchanged for

concentration on secondary matters, important as they may have been.

It may seem inappropriate for me to speak of my own experience in the matter of proclaiming the gospel, but that is what I can tell most easily. I have been—and still am—in the work of proclamation. I have a history of doing this over many decades, and in many places throughout the world. It is not a matter of ego to mention this, but of witness. I know myself to be as faulty as any other person or evangelist, yet experience has taught me much. It has taught me that the preaching of the gospel commences with persons who have felt its impact and live by its grace, and have its fire in their bones. Any Christian person may proclaim the gospel—and should—provided he or she is clear as to what it is. No minister or pastor is true to his calling who does not use the pulpit, the study group and pastoral visitation to share the gospel with folk who come within his reach. Every member of the church should use all opportunities available to do the same.

I am sure that in the early church all members were eager to tell out the faith and witness to Christ their Saviour and Lord. The Book of the Acts leads us to this sort of conclusion. Not all had the same gifts, as there were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. There were also gifts given *to* persons, or which the Spirit chose to operate *through* persons. Altogether, church personnel constitute rich resources for spreading the gospel, for preaching and witnessing to the Word.

I would like to share a little of my own ministry. As minister of an Anglican church in Sydney in the early 50s, I saw our

congregation gradually grow in numbers and spirit until they wanted to go to folk outside the church. This they did and in a short time our congregation attendance increased, quite a number of folk being converted. We were then asked by other churches to come and take missions. This we did with varying results, but it taught me the value of a team, that a preacher should have a base from which he could go to other places, and that having a team with him was a fine witness to the gospel—to the reality of Christian love. I also believe that it is imperative for pastors and elders to meet together from time to time to strengthen one another at the level of their ministries.

When we went from that church as missionaries to Pakistan, the opportunities to proclaim the gospel were many. I became the Founder–Principal of the first Bible Institute in that country. Before that time I had been travelling to various Conventions, and having opportunities for what we might call ‘missions’. This amounted to teaching a number Christian groups in which, often, many church members were nominal in their faith. Once the Institute began, we always had week-end ministry with teams of students, and from their ministry small churches would begin. My point is that I have always worked with a team.

As a result of teaching in many situations in Pakistan and at the Bible Institute, we saw two revivals break out. I believe they were the fruit of constant teaching and witnessing, not only by me and teams which went with me, but also they were the fruit of

others who, across the land, had taught the Scriptures constantly and at depth.

When we returned to Australia and I began work as the Principal of the Adelaide Bible Institute in 1967, I found myself shaping up teams from the students and they went with me or with other lecturers, to take missions which we called 'teaching missions'. One team went with me to Wuddina in 1969 and something very close to a revival broke out. This event, by the way, has been well documented. After some years I asked the ABI Council whether I could hand over the Principalship to another person and simply take teaching missions, as often as possible, with a team from the College. The Council did not agree to this and in 1973, having resigned, Laurel and I went out to this sort of work on faith, the requests being so many, not only in Australia but in many other countries. Our last mission connected with ABI was one in Darwin, to where 27 students had driven in a bus from Victor Harbour. It was a grand time.

The year 1973 had the rudimentary shape of a ministry which later came to be called 'New Creation Teaching Ministry', and whereas I had worked hand-in-hand with 'Faith Advance', that now widened out into a series of teaching missions over all States of Australia excepting Tasmania. In many cases I was able to take a team with me, or work with one created in the area to which I went to teach. Quite a number of Pastors and others helped to form teams, and often other Pastors would combine to make teams for further missions. Not only were missions conducted in capital cities but in far out places so that quite an amount of Australia was covered.

The beauty about New Creation Teaching Ministry was that

the churches would invite us, and our teams would be composed of members of churches. We also had begun recording audio tapes and printing books and booklets which were supportive of the ministry given. We would leave an amount of these in the area where we had taught so that others would hear the messages given. Two exceptionally fine 'follow through' books were written and are still greatly used, namely, *Beginning the Christian Life* by the Rev. Barry Manuel, and *Help me to Grow* by the Rev. John Annells. Both of these are easy to read, but substantial books. We published these and went on to publish many more helpful books, and today have a vast collection of books, audio cassettes and video cassettes. I include this material to show that teaching missions do not take place in a vacuum, and that what eventuates happens within the churches to whom we go. New Creation Teaching Ministry (NCTM) is not a church. All Staff and Council members also work in their own churches.

Some Suggestions

What I have written above has been set out so that you can see it is not a method nor a set pattern, but probably just the expressions of churches who (i) wish to see the Word of God come to their congregations, and (ii) desire to be teachers not only to their own congregations, but also to help other churches.

My conviction is that all the human resources we need are already within the churches. Many a good evangelist is left to convert his own congregation and none other! Many a teacher teaches only his own congregation, whereas both evangelist and teacher would be greatly freshened by having wider opportunities than their respective congregations, and the gospel would be going out into new places. Churches which go beyond their own local bounds become enlarged in spirit and heart: they become vitalised.

Suggestions About Team-making

My suggestion, then, is that pastors and elders—whoever the church leaders may be—consider calling other pastors to lead a team and cover a mission whether it be called ‘evangelistic’ or ‘teaching’. Church members would be greatly enriched by going on a team with their pastor or with another such leader, and they could give expression to their faith. I have seen persons who are seemingly quite timid, but who have been emboldened when the opportunity for sharing their faith has arisen. Some ‘receiving’ churches often lack musicians and singers and folk who can give sane testimonies. They may also lack persons who can lead a house meeting. In such cases the best team is one which has both folk from the local church and those of the visiting team. All come together to make a team and so share their gifts. The Team Leader is usually the speaker or teacher or evangelist, but another may do all the organising so that he would be free to concentrate on teaching.

Suggestions About Training

The Team leader would arrange for members to get together for prayer and discussion of the mission theme, and help to train them in the studies they may lead in house meetings. If possible he would also help to train folk from the church he is visiting. On arriving at the church or area where the teaching will be given, all members would be brought together and schooled regarding the theme and all details of the mission. It would be an opportunity to share musical gifts and the songs and hymns which would be used.

Suggestions About Resources

These do not need to be many, but a book stall may provide good literature, audio and video cassettes for later use, and perhaps a study book or two for any ‘follow through’ ministry. The hymns and songs which are to be used should fairly fit the pattern the receiving church has known and used, but new songs which fit the theme and adorn the worship should also be used. No drastic ‘cultural’ changes should be made. Of course singing and musical instruments would be planned along these lines.

Billeting is less difficult than arranging tents and such accommodation. Opportunities should be taken to share daily in the progress—or otherwise—of the mission, so both visiting and

local members of the team can share the prayer support of the ministry.

Suggestions About Meetings

The simple pattern we followed was to have a fortnight's mission. The first week comprised as many house meetings as possible, both during the day and the evening. They were called 'coffee mornings', 'coffee gatherings' or some other name. We would use what pulpits were available in the three week-ends of the visit, and in this way—along with the house meetings—came to know the local folk. In the second week, commencing with the Sunday evening, we would have a week of evening meetings at one central venue. Following meetings there would be supper and an opportunity for the team to share with folks.

Meetings should not be long, house meetings would have some singing, a study or talk, and perhaps a testimony from one of the team. Evening meetings should not exceed an hour and a half—7:30–9:00—and perhaps less. Even so, talks should not be flimsy but aimed at both mind and heart, and fully related to the environment and the types of persons attending.

Suggestions About 'Follow Through'

'Follow up' seems to indicate that the persons affected by the teaching mission may easily collapse and they should be 'followed up', lest they fall! 'Follow through' has the idea of going on beyond the point reached at the mission, and growing in grace and faith. Many means may be used, literature, use of cassettes recorded at the mission, the use of video cassettes played in

'follow through' house groups within the church... This undergirds what has been heard, and brings teaching to others to whom the cassettes are lent. Sharing the whole adventure in prayer would be basic to further ministry and spiritual growth. Further exchanges of pulpits and visits to the participating churches may strengthen ties and bring enriching fellowship. If some members then go with teams to share a new experience then that would be good. Literature that is chosen for personal and group study could help fortify the truth already given, so that a mission is not just a flash in the pan!

Suggestions Are Not for Techniques

I hope that readers of this paper will not think I am setting forward some method which will inevitably bring forth fruit. I repeat that I have seen whole districts change as a result of missions, and have seen the lasting fruits after decades have passed. I have seen many called into the ordained ministry and, often to fields overseas. I have seen church folk greatly settled in the faith, and fruitful in their lives. I am not saying the way I have suggested is the only way or even *the* way. If there is not the fervour that the gospel gives, and the fire that the Holy Spirit lights, and the sense of the church as God's true Family, as the Father reveals, then much energy may not produce much fruit.

We, ourselves have adapted many variations on the basic idea that we have in conducting missions, and none should feel there is a method that must be carried out in a prescribed way. Far from it: the Spirit leads in many ways and blesses where he wills. It may be years afterwards that some of these endeavours will be shown to have been fruitful, but such considerations should not govern us in what we do. When a group of genuine Christians get together on mission and have regard to churches and their 'cultures', then I believe such mission times will be greatly fruitful.

The Content of the Gospel

If the gospel is looked upon as a way of increasing the size of our churches, then we have missed the point. We may be 'eager to preach' in order to have larger congregations. If so, we have the wrong idea; proclaiming the gospel is to bring eternal life to our listeners. Seven strong sets of advice come to the seven churches of the Book of the Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. One piece of advice is that, 'You have a name that you live but are dead. Awake and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death'. No: the gospel must first be of the most amazing nature to us personally, seeing it has personally transformed us. All groups can be enthusiastic about getting others to believe what they do, but there is no merit in that. All that we speak in this paper is to no point if we do not burn with the gospel.

The church has always been in the midst of conflict because we

are ever wrestling with principalities and powers, we are ever fighting heresy, and are in the battle for the souls of men and women. We must understand the great verities of the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing of them, the liberation from all forms of evil, the greatness of grace to bring human beings into a wonderful freedom. Above all we must understand the saving power of the Cross, and what it is to come under Christ's Lordship in life, as the battle goes on to make the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. The teams we help to prepare must know these things, and that they may know them more we must train them helpfully. Each team must go 'in the fullness of the blessing of Christ'. This does not mean they need to be advanced theologians, but persons with a simple testimony and the love of God in their hearts. I believe there are plenty of such people in our churches. Let them, then, have some opportunity to share Christ with those to whom they go.

I might point out here that we often took on team with us folk whom we called 'observers'. They were persons who were shy and reluctant to share their faith, but being part of a team the gospel came home forcefully to them, and as never before. They were anxious to participate fully in missions that followed. However, the team at heart should be those who are burning in the faith.

The Way to Commence Series of Missions in Our Churches

As I suggested before it would be a grand thing if Christian folk sensed that the life and health of our churches, depends not primarily upon the brilliance of theologians, the social action which shows our concern for disadvantaged people, the organising of church growth, and the use of other techniques and marketing strategies. Whatever value these things may or may not have, the primary purpose of the church is to preach the gospel throughout the world and to bring its saving power to persons outside the message of salvation and the community of Christ. The primary resource is the Word of redemption, the Word of God's love, and his grace which brings guilty human beings into the peace of forgiveness and justification. This Word makes them to be part of Christ's community—the church. This is the community of love and care, but its first care is that men and women and young people should come into the peace of forgiveness. The rest will follow.

I suggest that pastors, elders and keen Christian folk know the situations of various churches. They are friends, one of the other, and it would take little for these spiritual leaders to contact one another and make suggestions. In fact I wonder why it is that so few of these contacts are made. As I commented previously, we spend much of our time bemoaning the defects in our theology, faith and practice, and dissipate a lot of useful energy in opposing and berating those whose views and practices are not as our own. I believe we should stand firm in the Scriptures and in biblical faith and practices. If we should oppose what we see to be

wrong—and I believe we should—then the best way of doing so is to share the gospel with our congregations and other churches.

Is This a Promotional Scheme for New Creation Publications?

It is not. It simply struck me, who am constantly in this kind of ministry, that we have 142 pastors and elders on our mailing list. We are having increasing pleas for help from some third world countries in regard to our literature for church folk, and also for clergy. We seek to help build libraries with our own publications and study materials. We have well over 100 pastors and elders who receive our monthly studies—notes and cassettes—and we conduct Pastors' Schools in South Australia and some other States, so we know there are many keen spiritual leaders.

Our suggestions in this booklet are gratis. We desire no return. We do not even suggest you should get in touch with us, much less that you should use our resource materials, even though we think they are most useful. What we would love to happen is simple enough, pastors contacting pastors, pastors and elders getting together with one another and spontaneously arranging teaching and evangelistic missions. I personally believe that teaching is the best form of evangelism. I am not convinced that extremely simple presentations of a few points with strong

pressure to 'make decisions' is the best way of bring life to the churches and the churches to life. Even so, I believe God uses all kinds of human endeavours, often in spite of ourselves, our ideas and our methods.

We here at New Creation Teaching Centre, will be happy give what help we can. Our staff is not large, and we cannot raise teams for you, any more than we can supply leaders for teams. We do not even request that you should inform us of what you have decided. We can, however, make suggestions across the board, and if you wish to have a mission, and others wish to share in such, then we can put you in touch with one another. We can send you catalogues of resources should you wish, but we know that many of you will want to use your own kind of resource materials, fitted to what you think is useful. We are certainly not asking that we participate in arranging missions or being in the action of them. We are fully busy doing what we are at—our classes, schools, counselling, printing, publishing and distributing.

Some Action Already Commencing

Partly, I imagine, as a result of the previous letter I sent out, two ministers have written to me. I have a very high regard for these two men. One is in the ministry of planting new churches, and he has told his supporters that he offers teams to come to their churches and to help them. He, himself, was the beneficiary of at least one 'Faith Advance Mission'. The other pastor is the minister of a church in the Iron Triangle of South Australia. His church

and elders know of his special gifts and have voted to give him 50% of his time to devote to such ministry. This would include sharing in Pastors' School, for which he is most apt. I have also heard other murmurs, and I hope there are murmurs which I have not heard.

I would conclude then, that rather than agonise about and yearn for the coming of revival, that we take heart from the life of the early church given, as it was, to paying attention to the apostolic doctrine, the prayers, the fellowship and the breaking of bread. This caused the Word of God to spread. The same Word and the same Spirit, and the same Lord of the church are with us today. Let us all, then 'be eager to preach' and whilst some things we say will fall on deaf ears, yet, too, much will fall on listening ears, and the fruit will be rich, and all will be to the glory of God.

Geoffrey Bingham,
Kingswood, 25/11/96