

Are We Silent Saints About the Good News of God?

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In June 1945 a famous report was published in Britain. It was the work of a special Commission on Evangelism appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and was entitled *Towards the Conversion of England*. In describing the part of the laity in evangelism, the report mentions reticence [reserved; restraint] as one of the hindrances, ‘shyness in speaking about the things of God’. ‘**We cannot exaggerate the importance of breaking down this traditional English reserve which produces a Church of “silent saints”**’. As Prebendary [‘pre-bən-der-ē, a clergyman receiving a prebend for officiating and serving in the church] **Wilson Carlile** (who coined this phrase) declared: ‘**I have got the biggest job I have ever tackled in my life. I am trying to open the mouths of the people in the pews**’¹ (Emphasis mine—bold and underlining)

Are we a church of SILENT saints? “Wilson Carlile² [1847-1942], who coined this phrase, declared: ‘I have got the biggest job I have ever tackled in my life. I am trying to open

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Our Guilty Silence* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 9. I highly recommend this book for every Christian to read. This book is available from Amazon for \$26.00, which includes taxes and S & H. **John R.W. Stott** (1921–2011) has been known worldwide as a preacher, evangelist, and communicator of Scripture. For many years he served as rector of All Souls Church in London, where he carried out an effective urban pastoral ministry. A leader among evangelicals in Britain and the United States and around the world, Stott was a principal framer of the landmark Lausanne Covenant (1974). His many books have sold millions of copies around the world and in dozens of languages.

² In 1873, a great depression began and continued with a few breaks until 1896. It brought poverty and distress to working people, but also had immediate and disastrous effects upon the business community. **Carlile Wilson** was among those severely affected by the depression. The prosperity which he had carefully built up suddenly failed. Mental strain led to a physical breakdown and for many weeks he was confined to his bed. All this time he had spent in acquiring material wealth and position, and all for nothing. He began to question the purpose of life. No answer given to him brought him any satisfaction until he happened to read Mackay's *Grace and Truth* [William Paton MacKay, 1839-1885; this book is still available]. Later Wilson would say:

I have seen the crucified and risen Lord as truly as if He had made Himself visible to my bodily sight. That is for me the conclusive evidence of His existence. He touched my heart, and old desires and hopes left it. In their place came the new thought that I might serve Him and His poor and suffering brethren.

Although upon his physical recovery his father took him into his own firm, **Carlile Wilson's** real interest now lay in religious work. He first joined the Plymouth Brethren who met at Blackfriars in London and worked among young hooligans in that area.^[2] Soon he was confirmed in the Church of England, his father

the mouths of the people in the pews”³ If we, as followers of Jesus, are to reach out to the lost, we must be **fully committed** to the cause of Christ. The author of the Book of Chronicles records the remarks of Hanani [hā-nā'nī] the seer to Asa [911-870 BC, ā'sā] king of Judah: “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are **fully committed** to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). Just a brief reflection upon the words of the Holy Spirit to Asa reminds us of the words of Jesus: “**No one can serve two masters**. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

Again, Jesus says, “But **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well” (6:33). This kind of spirit permeated the Macedonian churches (Philippi [fī-līp'ī], Thessalonica [thēs'ā-lō-nī'kā], and Berea [bêr-ē'ā]—northern part of Greece) that Paul founded during his second missionary journey (AD 50-52). **They gave themselves first to the Lord** and also contributed of their financial resources to help relieve the saints in Judea. The Macedonian Christians not only gave money to help the penniless saints in Jerusalem, but they also gave themselves to the Lord. Paul, in commenting on their generosity, wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians from Macedonia by calling attention to the Macedonians generosity: “And they did not **do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Are we like the Macedonian Christians? **Have we really and truly given ourselves to God’s service?** Are we preaching the Gospel of God? Hopefully, we are doing more and more in our desire to promote the kingdom of God (His rule) and proclaiming Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures. **As the body of Christ, are we telling others about God’s Redeemer?** We might almost say that the present-day church is better equipped for every other task than it is for its primary mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. **Is our local fellowship of believers a silent church?** Are we tight-lipped about the Good News of God “in” and “through” Jesus? Have we forgotten our mission? Do we remember the words of Paul to the Corinthians in his first correspondence with them? **Paul reminded these individuals to whom they belonged:** “You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Have we forgotten that Jesus established the church as a **revolutionary company** in order to reach out to the world? Christ formed the church in order for it to become a **fellowship of witnesses**. The goal of the church is to win people for Christ. The church is not a building; it is a fellowship of believers committed to Jesus. **The church is a drill hall for a Christian task force to evangelize the world**. We come together to build each other up on hi-octane. The assembly is a launching pad from which Christians are propelled out into the world to witness.

having joined some time before. About this time, in 1875, **Dwight L. Moody** [1837-1899] held his great rallies in Islington ['iz-līŋ-tən, borough of N Greater London, England]. Wilson offered his help. **Ira David Sankey** [1840-1908], the musical director, recognized the young man's ability and placed him at the harmonium where he accompanied the singing of the huge crowds who came to hear Moody. Following this mission he went with Moody to Camberwell where he chose and trained the choir for the South London mission. Thus he gained a solid understanding of the techniques of evangelism and the part that music can play. This knowledge would stand him in good stead when he became leader of the Church Army.

³ Stott, *Our Guilty Silence*, 9

The church is the fellowship of the committed. Also, we should never forget that the church is the company of the redeemed.

Do we share Jesus in our day-to-day walk with God? **Unfortunately, too many Christians are too reserved about telling others about God's Way of salvation, namely, Jesus.** When we are silent about God's kingdom and the Lord Jesus, we are not true to our calling. Do we not incur guilt when we do not pass on the Gospel we have been entrusted with? As members of God's family, we cannot be a true *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklēsia*, congregation, church) when we are silent or exhibit quietness about the Good News of God's way of salvation "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. About AD 61, Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus about the purpose of God's community of saints:

His intent was that now, **through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 3:10)

We should never forget that we are the **church**. We are God's **temple**; we are God's **community**. Today, there is a great deal of shyness in speaking about the things of God to a lost and dying world. As God's people, we must work toward breaking down the traditional aloofness that produces a community of silent saints. **As members of the company of the Resurrected One, are we praying for the advancement of God's kingdom?** Are we seeking to work the harvest to gather in the lost and to encourage the faithful? Are we praying that God will send forth laborers into His vineyard? Matthew, one of the Twelve, mentions an occasion in which Jesus was reaching out to men and women who were harassed and helpless. As He looked upon these individuals, Matthew informs us that **Jesus' heart was filled with compassion**. Listen to Matthew as he captures the tender compassion of Jesus:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ **When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them**, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few**." ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:35-38)

Are we workers for Jesus? Have we asked the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field? Are we allowing God to send us? **Having said this, we must not depreciate the importance of the local congregation, which body of believers are designed to proclaim the message of peace.** The congregation of God should be so structured that it encourages mobilization of the people to be a gathered people, that is, a group called out from the world to strengthen, to encourage, to comfort one another, and to proclaim the Gospel.

Hopefully, every local body of believers will scatter and go out into the world to confess and to proclaim Christ. **There is a divine rhythm—come and scatter**. The words of Paul to the Christians in Rome should cause us, as believers, to reflect upon our calling. While Paul was in Corinth, he wrote the Book of Romans (during his 3rd missionary journey, AD 54-57) in order to set forth God's means of justification—justification by faith. In this letter he addressed the need for proclamation of God's Good News of justification by faith in the work of Christ:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? **And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”¹⁷ Consequently, **faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** (Romans 10:14-17)

Again, we must ask ourselves, are we silent about our faith in Jesus? Have we forgotten our mission? Peter, one of the Twelve, wrote to the Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia (kăp`à-dō`shĭ-à), Asia, and Bithynia (bĭ-thĭn`ĭ-à) about their conversion to Christ and its implication in their lives. His first Epistle (First Peter) was written about AD 65 to call attention to individual responsibility to preach Jesus:

But you are a **chosen** people, a **royal** priesthood, a **holy** nation, a people **belonging** to God, **that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Do we praise God for His love, His kindness, and His mercy? Are we conscious that we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God”? This statement by Peter includes both men and women. John, the one who put together the Book of Revelation as revealed to him by Jesus, called attention to God’s purpose in the lives of His people:

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ **and has made us [both men and women] to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:4-6)

Are we, as priests of God, serving God? Every child of God should be proclaiming the message of grace. Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth (from Macedonia about AD 57) about his ministry. Even though Paul is writing about his ministry and those with him, nevertheless his words are still applicable to all of God’s children. His words about the “ministry of reconciliation” are true of every believer. One sees passion in his remarks concerning the spreading of the administration of mercy:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation:**¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**²⁰ **We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **6:1 As God’s fellow workers** [both men and women] we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. (2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1)

To further illustrate God's intent for His people, we need to reflect upon Christ's appointment of an additional seventy-two to proclaim the kingdom of God and His message of reconciliation. For example, after the episode on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus "set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Following the events of the Transfiguration, Jesus then appointed seventy-two others to proclaim the Word of Truth, that is to say, the kingdom of God and Himself as the Savior of the world. Luke records this experience:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, "**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**" ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. (10:1-3)

God is still making His appeal through us. We are God's fellow workers. It is in the vein that Paul wrote to the Philippians during his Roman imprisonment (AD 62, at this stage, the church in Philippi is about twelve years old) concerning their relationship to God. Paul called attention to God's activity in them. We need to listen to the following words:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always **obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation** with fear and trembling, ¹³ **for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.** (Philippians 2:12–13)

Are we workers in this harvest field? Where do we stand in relationship to this harvest of lost souls? **Are we allowing God to act in us according to His purpose?** Are we workers in God's kingdom? Are we spreading the Good News of God or are we just a group of hush-hush saints? Are we Christ's ambassadors? Are we aware that God makes His appeal to the lost through us? **Are we guilty of total silence about God's grace?** Have we fled from Him in our daily walk? Are we familiar with the name Frances Thompson (1859-1907)? He wrote "The Hound of Heaven" to describe his own spiritual journey. Hopefully, as you read his spiritual biography, you, too, will examine your own life to see where you are in your spiritual journey. The following citation is just the opening part of his Hound of Heaven:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed ['vis-təd] hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—

‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’⁴

Are we conscious that God is also pursuing us? Saul of Tarsus is a classic example of the Hound of Heaven. Just a brief overview of Paul’s conversion reveals that Jesus was pursuing Paul. In spite of Paul kicking against the goads (**κέντρον**, *kentron*, pointed rod, sometimes tipped with metal, used for driving or guiding cattle, especially oxen in plowing.). This Greek word can be translated as “spur,” “whip” or “rod.” In spite of his rebellion, yet, Jesus still pursued him. Are we revolting against God’s invitation? Are we kicking and screaming that we do not want God in our lives? Are we willing to surrender ourselves as Paul did in his encounter with the living Christ?⁵ We should never forget that Jesus is the answer to our problems in life. Jesus is still saying:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

⁴ See John Stott, *Why I Am a Christian* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 13–14. See also the Hound of Heaven (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 23. From my research this poem was a part of his poems published in 1908. The following comments by Stott introduce just a brief history leading up to this poem:

‘The Hound of Heaven.’ It is a striking expression invented by Francis Thompson, whose story has been told, and his poem expounded, by R. Moffat Gautrey in his book *This Tremendous Lover*. Francis Thompson spent a lonely and loveless childhood, and failed successively in his attempts to become a Roman Catholic priest, a doctor (like his father) and a soldier. He ended up lost in London until a Christian couple recognized his poetic genius and rescued him. Throughout these years he was conscious of both pursuing and being pursued, and expressed it most eloquently in his poem ‘the Hound of Heaven’.

⁵ For a detailed study of the “Hound of Heaven,” I suggest that you read the chapter “The Hound of Heaven” by John R. W. Stott, which story is found in his book *Why I Am a Christian* (pages 13-31). This book is also available from Amazon.