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The making of an evangelist

Jarrott, Reginald Edward

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At the time of writing, the full time itinerant evangelism ministry has lasted for 29 years.

But it was not without a spiritual struggle that I entered this type of ministry.

In 1961, although having a blessed time in the pastorate at Silkstone in Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, I felt God called me to the evangelistic ministry full time.

There were two major problems to surmount:

1. Was I mistaken about the call? I had always considered myself to be primarily a pastor/teacher.
2. My wife Alice and I had a family of four, and some of them had entered their teen years, and would need a father around at this critical time of their lives.

To find out the will of God, Alice and I did what we had always done about calls á–á we prayed separately, so as not to influence unduly one or the other in our prayer result. We have always, throughout our whole ministry, come up with identical answers to our prayers whether yes or no.

It was the same again this time. The answer was 'Yes'; that it was a call of God, and that we would be in it together, despite the difficulties.

It has always seemed to us, that if God was calling, both of us will be sensitive to the working of the Holy Spirit in it, and we should be ready to step into the place of His appointment for us, as partners with Christ.

The results of our prayers were surprising and challenging, about problem #1 above. You see, I not only asked God, but, as mentioned before, also asked a trusted friend to find out what he thought about my call to full-time evangelism. In no uncertain way, he confirmed my thoughts about it.

So we then started to deal prayerfully with problem #2.

In the second problem, a text kept coming into my mind which reminded me that "the one who loves father, mother, son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37).

So I asked Alice how she felt about the added responsibility of being alone, and being both mother and father, in my absence.

Years ago, because God brought us together in the amazing way of which I have written earlier on, I knew what her answer would be á–á 'we would both be in it together'. She has been a great gift from God, and I am profoundly thankful for the many sacrifices she has made without complaint, because she believed I had the call of God.

The ministry has taken us way beyond our dreams and expectations. When I first prayed for a ministry, I used the prayer of Jabez: "'O Lord, that
thou wouldst bless me indeed and enlarge my coasts, and that thine hand might be with me, and thought thou wouldst keep me from evil.' And God granted him what he requested." (I Chronicles 4:10)

The marvellous thing is, that despite the long ministry as an itinerant evangelist, and although the field is not as wide now because of a number of factors, the 'itinerant evangelist' is still the ministry I have been given.

I did not know that God would enlarge my coasts to take in other countries and give me crusades and/or speaking appointments in such places as USA, West Berlin, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Zealand, England, Northern Ireland. Besides there were special learning experiences by sharing in various ways in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea, Mainland China. Congresses were also attended in such places as West Berlin, Singapore, Japan, Switzerland, Holland, Missouri (Lake Windemere) USA, Hyderabad/Secunderabad India, Korea. All these were either World Congresses or International in some other way.

When I prayed the prayer of Jabez, I never dreamed of, nor sought to be working alongside world famous evangelists, authors and great international leaders.

God was still at work, giving me a thorough-going education, according to His plan and purpose in my life. I was learning more and more that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10).

And in Philippians 2:13, I am reminded "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasures". Despite the frailty of our human nature, it is amazing to me that God can mould us like clay on His 'potter's wheel', to bring us right into the place of His appointment, and so to Him, and Him alone, is to be all the glory.

Over the next few chapters, I would like you, the reader, to travel with me, to see how the God of our salvation guides His servants in their work for Him day by day, and over long years.

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After ministering in various positions in Queensland from 1945-1961, then in 1961 God decided to use me throughout every State in Australia, plus the Northern Territory. During the period from the late '50s to 1961, I had been representing the Queensland Baptist Union on the Board of Evangelism of the Baptist Union of Australia, usually in Sydney or Melbourne; but in 1961 God's call to evangelism was to take me throughout Australia, and later overseas many times.

In the period 1945-1961, God was using me to plan and organise meetings either on my own or with other people, for well-known evangelists, or Christians with interesting backgrounds, such as Rev Les Nixon; Dr Charlie and Laurie Taylor (evangelists from the USA); the late Dr Edwin Orr; Corrie Ten Boom (from Holland); Pat Zondervan (of the well-known publishing company). Add to this those fervent and dedicated souls, not quite as well known but who left an indelible mark on my life, and to whom I am tremendously grateful. Too, I would be remiss if I did not mention the great help given to me by the late evangelist, J.C. Sloan, and the late Dr G.J. Morgans, a great pastor who was always doing 'the work of an evangelist'.

In 1959, I was being used on the Landline Committee of the Queensland Billy Graham Crusade, to help organise the distribution of landlines throughout Queensland, Northern Rivers of NSW and New Guinea at Port Moresby. Besides this in the local Ipswich area, God gave me the privilege of organising special trains, with the Queensland Railway Department, specially printed time tables, when about 3000 people were able to go from the area to the Billy Graham Crusade in the Exhibition Grounds, Brisbane.

An Anglican minister friend had worked hard to get his people to the crusade, but he took sick when the time came and had to go away. He asked me as Baptist pastor of the Silkstone church, if I would do 'follow-up' for those who responded among his people. He did have quite a good number who needed to be helped in this way.

In 1961, I became Evangelist/Secretary of the Baptist Union of Queensland's Evangelism Committee. I had only been in that position for one month, when I was approached (through the committee) by a member organising a return visit of Evangelist Dr Leighton Ford (of the Billy Graham Association) to Queensland. He sought to obtain my release for a number months, to act as Field Secretary, which position gave me oversight of the Queensland Leighton Ford Crusades, which took place in Brisbane, Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. I was privileged to travel with Leighton Ford and to learn first-hand how he worked for God in the Crusades. Leighton Ford was accompanied by his wife Jean (Billy Graham's sister), and his little daughter Debbie.

I was able to take my wife Alice up to the Toowoomba crusade, where we stayed with the Leighton Ford team, which also included Rev Irv. Chamber, a singer.

One night, in the Brisbane crusade, held in the number one court of the Milton Tennis Courts; (Davis Cup matches were played there at times); it was teeming with rain. I was talking with the Sergeant of Police, who was in charge of the police who were there to see that nobody interfered with the service, and to guide the traffic which became heavy at times.
The sergeant, thinking of the open stands in which the crowd would be seated, said, "You won't have anyone come tonight. And I replied, "Oh yes á-á I am sure we will".

Later, the crowd still came in their hundreds, armed with raincoats and umbrellas, and he stood there shaking his head and saying á-á "I wouldn't have believed it, and for a religious meeting, too. I don't understand it..."

Again, still later on, God gave me the privilege of organising meetings in Brisbane for Stuart Hamblyn. The well-known hymn writer and singer, usually known for his 'testimony hymn', "It is No Secret" and "Until Then" á-á the piece that turned a discouraging experience into a most encouraging piece of music.

My appointment in 1961, to be the State Evangelist for the Baptist Union of Queensland, gave me a charter to try to develop the Evangelistic Committee into a Department of Evangelism.

I had an office table, chair, bookshelves, some books and a filing cabinet and a minute book. And little or no experience in developing a Department. I wanted the Department to bring glory to the name of the Blessed Saviour, in an increasing fashion.

I sat behind the desk, and asked God to help me to build the Department. Having just finished praying, I was prompted in my spirit to look in the bookshelves, and there among the books was a book which had been give me but I had not read it up until then. Rumbling through the pages, I found it was about a very famous man of the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA, who had tried unsuccessfully to develop a framework for evangelistic promotion and outreach. He kept trying, year after year, and finally he was able to lay a great foundation for evangelism. I picked up the book, and between what I read there and what I had gained in experience previously, I was able to set up the Department with various working committees.

When the Department of Evangelism was accepted by the Queensland Baptist Assembly, Assembly moved that the name of my position was to be changed from Evangelist/Secretary to that of Director of Evangelism. From then on, I was able to contact Departments of Evangelism in NSW, USA, Scotland and other places, and was finally able not only to be the State Evangelist, but as Director of the Evangelism programme, was able to teach evangelism through schools, seminars and the like.

Later, I gave lectures in the Theological College, and shared methods, and tried to develop a passion for the lost and the lost people's Saviour. The work of the Department was later responsible for radio programmes, TV opportunities, and Christian film distribution to churches still further on. Prison work also came under the control of the Department, and Rev. Ray Euston was appointed the first full time prison chaplain. Because of our widening influence, the Baptist Union decided to rename our department the Department of Evangelism and Mass Media.

There are some interesting stories about happenings during my period with the department.

The meetings held for Stuart Hamblyn caused a great deal of interest. He had been a Hollywood actor in cowboy films, and he often had played the
part of the 'bad guy'. He actually was a cowboy in real life, and dressed like one.

After his conversion to Christ in the Los Angeles Billy Graham Crusade, while a number of film stars decided for Christ, Stuart, a tall man and a singer, and his wife Susie, an attractive small woman, decided to attend a church in the Los Angeles district near Hollywood. One Sunday, after they returned home from the morning service, Susie called Stuart to come for lunch. He was sitting at the piano fingering the keyboard, and said he didn't feel like eating. Susie sensed something was wrong, and asked him what it was. Although reluctant to tell at first, Stuart finally told this story: (this is the gist of what he said)

On coming out of the church on that Sunday morning, a lady came up to him and she chided Stuart. She said á"You ought to be ashamed of yourself coming to church dressed like a cowboy; and singing so loudly too á God isn't deaf, you know!"

As a new Christian, he could have been put off by the unfair remarks. Remember, he dressed like a cowboy any day of the week, because he was a cowboy. His singing was strong, but he had a very nice voice, and it certainly was not offensive.

But instead of letting the incident discourage him, as someone has said somewhere á"He was handed a lemon and turned it into lemonade". He sat at the piano right then at lunch time, and composed the lovely hymn, "Until Then". In it, he tells of heartache that comes our way and difficulties and discouragements, but the song looks to the future in heaven, with its attendant glory. The chorus of the hymn goes something like this:

  Until then, my heart shall go on singing,
  Until then with joy I'll carry on,
  Until the day my eyes behold the city,
  Until the day God calls me home.

My work as Director of Evangelism and Mass Media gave me great opportunities for wide ministry both at home and abroad.

On the home front in Queensland, it meant that besides conducting crusades throughout Queensland and some other States, it gave me opportunities to speak on various radio stations on a regular basis, as 'the voice of the Baptists'. Our programme was heard in two of the six states of Australia, and the Northern Territory.

The programme changed its name a number of times, but whatever the name and wherever it was broadcast from, it helped me to become familiar with the techniques of broadcasting the gospel. Also, we built our own studio with our own broadcast standard equipment and instruments, and with further help by some top professionals in the radio world, we gained quite a bit of experience.

God also gave a good opportunity in the field of television, as Director for Mass Media.

In the very early days of Brisbane television, we had been able, through the generosity of the Southern Baptist Radio and TV Commission in Fort North, Texas, USA, to obtain some half hour films for TV, and we were able to furnish quite a few of these first-class programmes, not only
for Baptist programmes but for other denominations to use. Because of the programmes we had, Baptists were well to the fore in the opening days of television.

Channel 9 was the first commercial station to open in Brisbane and one of our Baptist ministers, a former chairman of the Department of Evangelism (then called Evangelistic Committee), the late Rev F.T. Smith was the first Baptist minister to go on the first Baptist TV station programme.

I had the privilege a little later to be the first Christian minister to go on the first religious TV programme on Channel 7 in Brisbane. It was my task to welcome viewers for the first time to view a religious programme on that station. My position as Director of Mass Media gave me the opportunity on being on the committee which started the Christian Television Association in Queensland, and of which I was a member for a number of years.

All these things were due to the guidance and direction of God, who puts us up where He wants us to be, and puts us down when He doesn't want us there. I was glad that He took on an ordinary person like myself work in His great harvest field.

Through my interdenominational efforts, I was appointed by the Queensland Council of Churches (not a branch of the World Council of Churches), to be the Secretary of their Evangelism Committee for quite a number of years. Later, I was appointed to the position of President of the Queensland Council of Churches. These positions gave me a great deal of opportunity to meet outstanding and sometimes world famous evangelists.

The Queensland Council of Churches Evangelistic Committee organised from the Queensland end of things, many crusades, such as the Billy Graham crusades and the like.

Referring again, to the TV side of our work, the Church had to work together to produce programmes because of the expenses involved. Some of the programmes which we brought in from overseas areas for viewing, or some of the Christian Television Association programmes, were not always as good as we would have liked them to be.

A humorous thing happened in a programme in which we used children. It was put on live, as a Baptist production. My wife, who was in charge of the children's segment, had been giving them instructions on how to behave before the cameras. She happened to say, "Even if a fly gets on your nose, try to take no notice. Don't slap at it, or you may cause others to forget what they are supposed to do." The inevitable happened. One young boy had a fly land on his nose, and he nearly went cross-eyed trying to see it. He made no noise, nor did he slap it, but he certainly tried hard to shift it by wriggling his nose furiously.

The half-hour films we used in the television programmes were produced in or by the Southern Baptist Radio and TV Commission in Fort North, Texas, USA. These were also widely used by the Baptist Union of Queensland's Department of Evangelism as a gospel film ministry. From time to time, we exchanged the films with other State Union libraries, so as to give a variety of choices.

On occasion, we were able to offer free Bible Study courses with our radio programmes, too.
To help churches in the music side of worship and outreach, and at the same time do something to help the music side of broadcasting and telecasting, we had schools of music. Our department of evangelism organised them, but he leaned heavily on the expertise of topá-álíne musicians, both vocal and instrumental, to give instruction in the different areas of music used in services á-á song leading, solos, appeal hymns, use of the microphone and many other useful hints. On one occasion, we even had an organ builder, who came to show us how an organ works. He brought a small pedal organ, which he stripped of its outer casing to show what happened when certain stops were used. Church organists and others attending found this of great interest, and help in understanding the instruments they played.

Added to this the instruction was given by an expert in the use of the electronic organ, and hints were given on the use of orchestras.

Another field of evangelism which was under our Department's control, was our Baptist prison work chaplaincy in the State of Queensland.

The work had been started on a voluntary basis by Rev Frankie Williams, but later our Department took over the responsibility for it, and appointed the Rev Ray Euston as our first full time prison chaplain. We had some other chaplains assisting in various ways á-á Rev Reg Jarrott; Rev R.O. Frewen, Rev Bob Stewart to name a few of the earlier men in the Brisbane area, plus ministers visiting country prisons with their teams. This work later became The Prisons Mission Association of Queensland, and at the time of writing, goes under the name of Correctional Centres Chaplaincy (including the Prisons Missions Association of Queensland). The work has developed and has become wider, and does a tremendous work for God in the prisons of the State of Queensland.

Over the years, many prisoners have made decisions for Christ, and have been followed up by Bible Study sessions and counselling. These included some guilty of very serious crimes. Besides these Bible studies, Rev Ray Euston and others visited the prisoners' homes and/or met them when they came out of prison.

I suppose if there was a text applicable to the work, it would have to be á-á "I was in prison, and you visited me."

There is also a women's chaplaincy, too, working in the women's prison, and this has been attended to by some very dedicated Christian ladies who have given long service. The present chaplain is a Christian lady doctor, Dr Ruth Hayes.

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