

A Biblical-Theological Evaluation of the Preaching of Festo Kivengere of Uganda—Some Methodological Issues

Alfred Olwa, University of Western Sydney/Moore College

Advance Topic Seminar, Tuesday 19th May 2009

Introduction

After close to nine months (August 2008–May 2009) investigating Festo Kivengere's preaching on the topic *A Biblical-Theological Evaluation of the Preaching of Festo Kivengere of Uganda* some methodological issues and concerns have arisen, calling for a careful consideration of a robust methodology of evaluation. In this brief presentation, I propose to state the issues and concerns around five groups: 1. issues of criteria, analysis, and authenticity; 2. issues of politics and culture—tribal identity; 3. issues of language and the need for 'judgment calls'; 4. issues of acknowledgement, encouragement, and motivation; and 5. issues of orality and literacy. I will state briefly each of these clusters of issues. In a final section I will present briefly further issues in my research—the research questions, thesis and objectives. I am expecting your comments to help me sharpen the issues.

1. Issues of criteria, analysis, and authenticity

All these three aspects—criteria, analysis, and authenticity—have to be given serious consideration when one develops a truly 'biblical-theological' evaluation of Kivengere's sermons and occasional writings.¹ This is a problem on how to deal with many sources.

On a more practical level, so many people have responded positively by volunteering or 'supplying' the sermons of Kivengere to me: from their personal libraries, offices, and official

¹ The term 'biblical-theological', is nowhere implicitly or explicitly cited in the Bible. However, to aid our understanding of biblical theology, I am in agreement with D.A. Carson's doubled edged discussion of 'biblical theology' and 'theological approaches': 'Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective', *BBR* 5, 17–41; 'The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology', in J. D. Woodbridge & T. E. McComiskey (eds.), *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991: 39–76. However, for an excellent approach of biblical theology of preaching, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to expository preaching*, Leicester: IVP, 2001.

libraries in Uganda, Kenya, USA, UK, Norway and Australia.² I started to collect research materials: primary—materials *by* Kivengere and secondary—materials *on* Kivengere from literally nothing and to date I have a collection of: 500 hundred sermon transcripts in English, most of them are in good condition; 100 sermons on cassette tapes, CDs, and DVDs, a few in *Rukiga*;³ 2 video tapes: one in a bad condition; 1 DVD ‘The Return to Uganda from exile by Festo Kivengere and two other Bishops: Melchizedek Otim and Benon Ogwal’ after President Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979; and more materials continue to trickle in. For instance, last week I received from Oslo, Norway, a fascinating article by Kivengere entitled ‘The Bleeding Africa’, in *Preaching Christ to his World* (Hanne-Grete Brommeland and Kund Jorgensen, 1984:25–29). Furthermore, I have assembled 300 occasional (devotional) writings by Kivengere in magazines like: *Outlook: A Ministry to Friends*,⁴ *African Voice*, *Christian Herald*, *Global Church Bulletin*, *Christianity Today*, *World Vision*, *Decision*, *Hope Bulletin*, and *Greater Kampala Mission*, 9 of 14 Kivengere annual memorial lectures delivered in Kampala besides 8 of his books (monograph and pamphlet size largely).⁵

Another issue—how many is enough? What constitute an appropriate sample? Our concerns here are many. What criteria have I developed to select 20–30 sermons for analysis from the 600 sermons? This is a critical question because the significance of the present study for understanding and evaluating Kivengere’s preaching will largely depend upon whether we can generalize from the case study of 20–30 sermons and likewise for the occasional writings. Is this selection representative from the diverse sermons which he has preached for 45 years (1943–

² The list include among others —people: Keith Jession (USA), Malcolm Graham (USA), Don Robinson (USA); Richard Bewes (UK), Anne Coomes (UK); Johannes Sannesmoen (Norway); Professor James Kombo (Day Star University, Nairobi, Kenya); Bishops: Edward Muhima, Ernest shalita, George Katwesige, George Tibeessigwa, Joel Obetia (Uganda); Institutions: African Evangelistic Enterprise (Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Canada, Germany, UK, SA, and Australia); Libraries in Uganda, USA, UK, Kenya, and Australia.

³ *Rukiga* is a language—one of the many 43 living languages in Uganda, also called *Lukiga*, *Chiga*, or *Kiga* and is closely related to the *Bakiga* as the people are also known. Its ‘home’ is in Western Uganda. For catalog of the languages and groupings of other dialects under these 43 categories, see Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.), 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Fifteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>

⁴ See African Enterprise document: I have spiral bound them in a 400 paged document of single page photocopy of *Outlook: A Ministry to Our Friends* compiled in the order: Volume, Number, and Date. Additionally there are some documents for press release concerning Uganda’s assessed needs by Mr. Warwick Olson.

⁵ For a comprehensive annotated bibliography of the published works of Festo Kivengere 1962–1987 am still compiling the list. To date, I have close to 250 works of Kivengere ranging from booklets to articles and largely occasional writings in magazines.

1988) locally and internationally (Anne Coomes, 1990:105–136)? Is it reliable and sufficient justification?

How do we account for the absence of sermons in the years when there was less tape recording of sermons and Kivengere has been bent on orality (preaching without sermon notes)? Additionally, the nature of the relationship of the sources (sermons, occasional writings, and other people yet to be interviewed) raises a serious tension for my research. It is one thing to ferret out the sources of evaluating Kivengere's preaching; it is another task entirely to work out how to bring the secondary sources into the kind of interaction that allows them to interact effectively in order enable me (the researcher) to construct a biblical-theological evaluation of the preaching of Kivengere.

Currently, I am continuing to compile (scan) and catalogue the transcribed sermon transcripts into volumes of fifty sermons each. I am hoping to publish them into books in the long run. However, the need for criteria to compile them keeps throwing itself back at me: compile by what criteria? Tentatively I have noticed two categories that are floating out of the large volumes of Kivengere's sermons—the major occasions (events) which Kivengere addressed, and books of the Bible (common sermon themes)—see page 15.

While from a world perspective, Kivengere's preaching addressed the following groups: International Students Conference, Illinois (Ann Coomes, 1990:231); Billy Graham Crusades (Coomes, 1990:215); Keswick Convention (Charles Price & Ian Randall, 2000:138);⁶ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (Billy Graham Centre:1974); Lambeth Conference Mission Committee (Lambeth Palace:1978); Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly (PACLA, Billy Graham Centre, 1976); Explo '78, Eurofest (Documentary, Billy Graham Crusade, Brussels: July 25th–August 2nd, 1975) from a common ordinary preaching (pattern of biblical texts he preached from), most of major theological *themes* and *delivery* methods of Kivengere's preaching emerge: Christology, Eschatology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Liberation, spiritual and civic leadership; and, for method of preaching performance, storytelling, orality, musicality, poetry, dramatology, emotion, dialogue, Speech-Acts-Theory, biography and autobiography, and others that contains

⁶ Speaker of the Centenary Convention in 1975 include: John Stott, Alan Neech, Eric Alexander, Canon C.T.F Bewes, Billy Graham, Stephen Olford, and Bishop Festo Kivengere.

responses to both civic leaders of Uganda—Presidents Idi Amin (1971–9) and Obote II (1980–1985).⁷

Beside looking into the suggestion from the Confirmation of Candidature (CoC) meeting to use a Leximancer tool that might be much better than the File Makerpro and Endnotes that I am reasonably acquainted with to help me with cross references of key words and data, I am taking it that the selections I will make are going to be Kivengere's 'best' and most 'systematic', broad and powerful preaching that he rendered; and, the selections then could qualify to represent Kivengere's most rigorous preaching. However, it will be helpful to feed in the comments from the proposed interviews of December 2008–February 2009.⁸ One final issue of concern in this section is in form of a question: how do I know that the occasional writings are genuinely Kivengere's writing?⁹

2. Issues of politics and culture—tribal identity

Given the colonial, missionary, and political history of my country Uganda,¹⁰ great doubt was cast in my mind if I will ever get enough materials on Festo Kivengere's preaching. Some clergy—closer members to Kivengere family, openly but privately expressed to me their suspicion about why I have chosen to evaluate Kivengere's preaching when I am not from Kivengere's culture—tribe. Could it be that I have a political 'agenda' to this investigation? If so, will I be fair to Kivengere in my evaluation?

I was surprised further that this research was not regarded as a inquiry of scholarship, because of the subtle mentality of tribalism that lurks within the church and civic leaders of Uganda. The narrowness of cultural and tribal barriers is responsible for suppressing much of the

⁷ President Apollo Milton Obote ruled Uganda twice: 1961 became first Prime Minister after the British rule and 1969 became first President of the Republic of Uganda but was overthrown by Idi Amin in 1971. His first term is referred to as Obote 1.

⁸ Designing the interview tools is in progress. The target group to be interviewed include: East African Revival leaders who co-preached with Kivengere locally and abroad such as Zablon Kabaza, Bishops who are his contemporaries such as Melchizedek Otim, Ernest Shalita, Edward Muhima, Michael Senyimba; AEE staff: Fred Bazarabusa his former Press Secretary, John S Senyonyi, clergy of his diocese, his Christians and his critics: scholars and journalist of his time. The interview questionnaires are yet to be submitted to the Human Research Ethics committee of UWS for approval.

⁹ On February 5th 2008, at Uganda Christian University I had conversations with Fred Bazarabusa over every article in the Outlook Magazine and AEE Magazines where he ran articles by Festo Kivengere. I probed him on the context of the articles and he claimed to me that Kivengere contributed only one article; 'Kivengere complained that he was too busy to write articles so he would dictated the message and I [Fred Bazarabusa] wrote them for him'.

¹⁰ It is a complex history between church and state leaving behind many 'wounds' not healed.

good in Ugandan cultures. This experience of being under suspicion has helped me to become aware of the need for a ‘conversation’ between political and cultural identity. However, for Kivengere politics and culture is secondary to his figure: revival—the new man in Christ is arguable his primary concern.¹¹ Consequently, revival was first and therefore dominating his ‘personal culture’. So, his revival culture, followed by politics, seems to be a prime focus for the construction of the main feature of Kivengere *the Man and Preacher*. I am also aware that Kivengere’s sermons are not Scripture even though they are based on Scripture. His gifts are unique to him. However, the word of God was embraced by him and preached boldly.

Using the political the ‘political’ and ‘revival culture’ to understand Kivengere’s preaching, does, however, have some drawbacks. For instance, considering that the face of politics and culture in Uganda is changing rapidly, it would seem necessary to re-enter the politics and culture of the past (Hansen and Twaddle, 1991) and (Hansen and Twaddle, 1998).¹² Every time I listen to Kivengere’s sermons I do so with ‘sensitivity’ to political and cultural identity of *his* time. The more I think and work through this research, the more I find Uganda’s political and cultural past challenging. It does not leave me the same.

3. Issues of Language and the need for ‘Judgment calls’

Among several concerns regarding listening, reading, and watching Kivengere’s preaching, two seem to have particular relevance for methodology of my research: Language and the need for ‘Judgment calls’. As for language Kivengere has left sermons both in English and *Rukiga* his mother tongue. These are: 500 sermon transcripts are in English (transcribed from the sermons he preached which were not translated into other in other languages). There are also a few sermons and documents recorded in *Rukiga*. For the purpose of making a fuller collection of Kivengere works, I am building a catalogue (and already deposited to Moore College Library) which include the *Rukiga* sermons but these will not be included in my research.

Judgment calls are also necessary as to what I should include for analysis. Listening to the sermons will have many ramifications in terms of the forceful, persuasive, musical, poetic voice

¹¹ For our purpose of this research, ‘politics’ is simple understood as both a science and art of managing society. However, the state of Uganda emphasizes physical development while the church embraces both as depicted by Kivengere’s leadership.

¹² The two books contain seminal studies that attempt to capture the state of change, and the changing state of Uganda. Both collections highlight the fact that change is definitive part of Ugandan context.

of Kivengere which is never captured in the sermon transcripts in precisely the same way as when his message is heard. Moreover, watching Kivengere's message on the DVD where he addresses his audience, he comes across as a handsome man of God, energetic and well built, healthy, full of gestures and performance: acting out his message. He is well versed in more than four languages widely spoken in East Africa: *Swahili*, English, (spoken generally across the country) *Luganda* (generally spoken in the central), *Runyangkole*, *Rukiga*, and *Rutoro* (spoken in western Uganda). I suspect that he spoke *Kirundi* in Rwanda. The above dimensions in his preaching are not captured in the written messages, his biographies, and sermon transcripts. Of course, there are photographs which need interpretation of who and what Kivengere was. With this wealth of material in a variety of media, judgment calls are needed to know what to leave out and what to include.

More is to be said on judgment. The sermons preached locally—Uganda and Africa seem to be different from sermons he preached abroad—USA, Europe, Asia, and Australia: Northern Territory and Sydney. It seems that Kivengere's preaching had a precision in addressing political, historical, social, economic, and religious factors both locally and internationally. These dictated his message and language of his preaching.

In sum: it would seem that need to make judgment of whether Kivengere's audience may be a significant criteria of selecting sermons to be analyzed considering the fact of his broad preaching—one that took care 'oral learners' and 'literate learners' (David Claydon, ed., 2004: 3).

4. Issues of acknowledgement, encouragement, and motivation

I have been humbled by God answering prayers and the generous response of the people. Most of the materials I did not pay for—those who volunteered the information and materials paid for them. However, some of the volunteers of information on Kivengere have asked me to acknowledge them in my work. Others have asked for a copy of my work. The concern here is: the list is already long and more is expected. I am considering listing them in an appendix attached to my work. Moreover, key church leaders and scholars in Africa (lay and ordained) and beyond; have written to me saying they are looking forward to my completing this research. To this end, I have developed a feeling of the significance for this work; rather than being unsure of

what it will do, I have begun to 'reap' the fruits at seven months and already it has been truly gratifying.

Two examples on this front will suffice. I have received a letter of request from a Professor at UWS asking me to give him permission to give my CoC document to a priest whom he believe will be inspired by this work in his ministry and to do a Doctoral research of such nature in three years time and a meeting with one professor from Sydney University as a basis for inspiration on the front of performance and preaching. Indeed I have been promised a storytelling lecture for an intensive course offered by Sydney University Performance School (Emails to me: April and May 2009). The above experiences have greatly motivated me to love my research and my supervisors have shown interest in my work besides their supervisory role: asking any new things I am learning, alerting me to take note of any materials on Kivengere that they have seen as they carry out their research, praying frequently with me over my work. All these combination has provided the support and under girded the sense of loneliness and feeling of exhaustion which occasionally crept into my research.

Our interest in the project at hand is over and above academic discussion *per se*; my main driving motivation springs from two fronts: firstly, I myself was touched by God's love preached in an autobiographical style when I surrendered my life to this loving God in 1982. Secondly, living in Uganda, I have seen men and women like Kivengere passionately and boldly spreading this love of God. Thirdly, I have a passion to train a new generation of preachers in Uganda, considering the fact that last year in August 2008, the Church of Uganda Provincial Assembly declared a decade of mission:¹³ I have a singular opportunity to train and raise preachers for this mission. All, these put together, gives me a strong passion to see God's love in his son Jesus Christ preached into the world as Kivengere did.

5. Issues of orality and literate forms of communication

Among the several possible hermeneutics of preaching, two seem to have particular relevance for Kivengere's interpretation and delivery of his message. Kivengere uses devices of orality powerfully in his preaching—emphasizing *hearing the word* and *understanding through*

¹³ See 'The Church of Uganda: Resolutions Adopted by the 19th Provincial Assembly of the Church of Uganda held at Uganda Christian University, Mukono', from 26th–29th August 2007: 1–9, citing 3, Resolution Number 6 sections 6.1 to 6.7.

telling stories, proverbs, drama, songs, chants, and poetry not reading the word. This is a strong feature of orality in Kivengere's preaching as opposed to using literate form of communication, which 'relies on lists, outlines, word studies, apologetics and theological jargons' (Davis Claydon: 2005: 3). Orality is crucial for Kivengere's preaching; 62% of Ugandans are illiterate, communicating mainly through oral means (Patrick Johnston and Jason Mandryk: Operation World, 2001).

Kivengere's international community has recorded a massive shift from learning through literate thought forms to orality in the form of electronic media (Research Division Report No. 46: Washington DC, 2004: iv). In the US which is literate, '58% read another book after high school', '42% never read another book', 'Adults spend four hours per day watching TV, three hours listening to the radio and 14 minutes reading magazines' (David Claydon: 2005:34); in Britain, 'teenager pleasure reading declined by a third from 1991–1998'; In Denmark 'one-third of adults do not read'; In Netherlands 'more than a half hardly ever read a book' (David Clayton: 2005:34). These statistics indicate the kind of audience to whom Kivengere preached—majority have chosen to learn orally even though they are literate. This has significant implication for our understanding of Kivengere's preaching.

There are lots of materials on both literate and oral forms of communication; and, choosing just the relevant materials are proving to be a challenge. I have been reading materials on orality from biblical scholars to scholars in other disciplines: linguists, educationist, psychologists, and others. The studies affirm the special place of preaching through orality as a vehicle that renders a powerful thought form of communicating a message that audience will listen to, understand, and make appropriate meaning. The list of these studies include, J. Campbell (1949), C. M. Carlo M (1969), M. Cole, G. John, A. G. Joseph, and W. S. Donald (1971), M. Cole and S. Sylvia (1974), J. Goody (1977), J. Bilmes and T. B. Stephen (1979), W. J. Bausch (1984), Egan, Kieran (1986), T. E. Boomtershine (1988), C. L. Birch and A. H. Melissa (1990), J. R. Anderson (1995), T. Freidman (1999), D. Davis (2000), M. A. Cate and D. Karol (2003).¹⁴ This list is far from exhaustive,¹⁵ but it does demonstrate the range and strength of adherence of the position in question. Though differing in many details, some of which do not even mention the phenomenon of orality in

¹⁴ See bibliography under name and date.

¹⁵ There are doubtless other fine resources not listed in our selection. However, of our list some are intensively practical while others are academic and technical.

Christian preaching or ministry, each author (s) share the conviction that orality has a fundamental practical significance for presenting the thought forms of cultures that learn largely through narratives/stories, proverbs, songs, chants, poetry, and imitation.

