

ies. If I now teach at a seminary, it is because for the time being I believe the Lord wants me to train other pastors and Christian leaders. But although I may remain here for the rest of my working life, I would certainly not rule out the possibility of a return to pastoring a local church. That is the front line, and there are times when working in a quarter-master's slot (which is where I am) prompts me to examine my own priorities.

So now the question becomes not only more urgent, but raises questions about my integrity: How do your present roles reflect your calling to be a pastor—a calling which surely includes the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission?

(2) When I was a young man, through twelve years of tertiary education and early pastoral ministry, I was involved in a fair bit of evangelism. The problem with my present work teaching in a seminary is that I teach Christians all week, and when I preach on the weekend I'm usually preaching to still more Christians. It is frighteningly easy to go weeks and months without a single serious conversation with an unbeliever. Quite apart from the failure to evangelize, in due course one loses the ability to engage in easy conversation with almost anyone. Moreover, in a fast-changing culture like ours, not only does one lose the common touch, but one is soon out of date. The danger is that the only serious contact you have with the broader pagan culture is through books.

So, twelve or fifteen years ago I made a number of changes. I started insisting that a certain percentage of the many conferences I speak at be evangelistic. Gradually my circle of such opportunities multiplied. Often my evangelism is done on university campuses; sometimes it is

SBJT: How does your role as scholar, teacher and writer fulfill the Great Commission?

D. A. Carson: That is a penetrating question that leaves little room in which to hide. I shall try to answer it in five points.

(1) I see myself first and foremost as a pastor, not a professional scholar or writer. The Lord called me to gospel ministry. Three times I have been involved in church planting, and I served a church as pastor before embarking on doctoral stud-

D. A. Carson is Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. He is the author of numerous commentaries and monographs, and is one of the country's foremost New Testament scholars.

church-based.

But the lesson I learned about being intentional in this matter applies to many pastors as well. Some pastors I know never actually explain the gospel to anyone, except in some sermons, and even then mostly to friendly crowds of fellow believers. It is essential that we *seek out* people who have no connection with Christians, people who are sometimes overtly hostile. I have made many foolish decisions in my life, but the decision to *plan* to do more evangelism was a good one. Quite apart from the people who have been converted through such ministry, I find myself able to stand much closer to the front end of the culture than would otherwise be the case. That is important not only for my own integrity as a Christian witness and preacher, but also for my training of a new generation.

(3) That brings me quite naturally to the third point. My teaching ministry is largely geared to training pastors and other Christian workers. Over the years, not only many pastors but many InterVarsity Christian Fellowship staff, Campus Crusade for Christ workers, missionaries-in-training, Bible translators, mission executives, and national Christian leaders from around the world have passed through my classrooms. In some small way, God has enabled me to play a part in shaping them to fulfill the Great Commission. I often wish I did a better job. Yet at some time or other, my teaching and preaching have stretched outward to touch five continents. Sometimes conferences are organized in conjunction with other workers to help train people in evangelism. In May, for instance, under the title "Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns," a number of us will be trying to pass on to others something of what

we have learned in our own attempts at obeying the Great Commission; by now you've probably seen the advertising. In my most sober moments, I am quietly amazed that God uses me and others like me in this task. Certainly there are immense delights when I see former students proving to be faithful and fruitful servants of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(4) In the same way, my writing has been an indirect way of fulfilling the Great Commission. Very little of it has been directly evangelistic. Nevertheless individuals have sometimes told me they have been converted by reading one of my books. More strategically, books that build confidence in Scripture, books that explain what Scripture says, books that teach people to pray, books that help others to preach, books that help students to articulate the gospel in various cultures—all of these help shape their readers, and one of the effects is work and witness which, in the mercy of God, is a little more fruitful than it would have been otherwise.

Moreover, one of the books now on my writing agenda is overtly evangelistic. It stems from years of evangelistic preaching, and will come with a study guide to help small group leaders take groups of people through substantial chunks of the Bible and point them to the Lord Jesus.

(5) Finally, it is important to recall that the Great Commission is *more* than evangelism in some narrow sense. It is the Lord's mandate to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Jesus himself commanded. Strictly speaking, therefore, those who teach believers what Jesus taught are engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission. Of course, that sort of thinking could become a cop out: "I'm a

teacher of Scripture, so even if I never do a scrap of evangelism I'm fulfilling the Great Commission." Well, maybe—if you can parcel out the Commission into entirely discrete chunks. It sounds more like a dreary excuse.

Yet there remains some truth to it. While we recognize the overlapping gifts God distributes to the church, we should perceive that scholars, teachers, and writers have their assigned tasks to fulfill under one Master, whose "Well done!" on the last day is the ultimate reward. Mercifully, God himself is less judgmental than many who worship him, for it is written, "At that time [i.e. at the final judgment] each will receive his praise from God" (1 Co 4:7). That is wonderfully gracious, especially when we remember that, according to the Lord Jesus, on any objective scale we are never more than unprofitable servants.