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# DANGER Applause

Lee Sparks

Shortly after Ted Haggard left New Life Church, Fred Craddock came to Colorado to lead a preaching workshop. Fred is as well-known in mainline circles as Ted is in evangelical and charismatic ones. For many years he was a homiletics and New Testament professor and is author of several preaching textbooks, including *As One Without Authority* and *Preaching*. He sat down for an interview at lunch where we talked about the fall of Ted Haggard.

“Many great ministers have two lives,” Craddock said. “Part of it is the highly public life and the desire to withdraw into the shadows. That doesn’t excuse the immorality. Usually these people have extraordinary personalities. They’re very attractive. And they play off of that. If their rise to public prestige in rapid, most of them have not developed the inner life to handle it. If I prepared myself for a life in a rural church of 120 members and suddenly I’m in a room with 20,000 and everyone wants my signature, I may not be ethically or morally ready for that.

“Every minister has to deal with how to get ‘down’ from the pulpit. I know a minister. He’s a great preacher. [After preaching] he wants two or three others to go with him to a bar, so he can come down. He’s not trying to lead two lives. But the principal life he leads has such an extreme high, and it he’s not careful, there will be an extreme low. I think it is related to the incapacity to handle favorable attention. Who can handle applause? Never at home or in seminary did anyone teach me how to handle applause. You don’t think about it when you’re coming along because you never imagine yourself getting applause for anything. Then when it happens, you say, ‘Hey, I can get use to this.’ Pretty soon, you’ve got to have it. So you surround yourself with people who silently applaud you for one reason or another. And then your life is gone.”

After lunch, Craddock again addressed the topic of the pastor’s moral character. He surprised many of us by drawing from church history instead of the social sciences or current psychobabble to look at the question of the pastor’s private world.

In the fourth century, under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, Christians were persecuted and many suffered martyrdom. Many others, including priest and bishops, renounced their faith and surrendered the Scriptures. When the Diocletian Persecution ended, many of the “traitors,” were reinstated as priests and bishops. The Donatists, who had not renounced their faith during persecution, refused to accept their authority and argued that the sacraments and preaching were invalid if conferred by traitors.

Augustine was the principal opponent of the Donatists. While the Donatists argued that the faith and character of the preacher is integral to the effectiveness of the preacher, Augustine argued that the Word of God is pure and come through a flawed channel.

Craddock recounted a time when a seminary student came to him for rebaptism after she learned that the pastor who had originally baptized her had had an adulterous relationship and thus her baptism was tainted. Craddock refused and used the moment to teach the student that the sacrament was because of Christ and not the pastor.

“The church argued back and forth and finally sided with Augustine,” Craddock said. “And I’m glad they did. But I can’t get Donatus out of my mind. I agree 100 percent with Augustine, that the Word of God has an efficacy and effectiveness apart from my character or lack thereof. And I agree 75 percent with Donatus in that if my life is tainted, sooner or

later it will destroy my ministry. That’s the plan fact. If I were to lie to my children, it would take many, many years for them to believe me again. So I need to attend to my character.

“Augustine was right – preaching has nothing to do with your faith or character,” Craddock said. And then, after a long pause, he said, “Augustine was wrong.” □

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—Fred Craddock

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