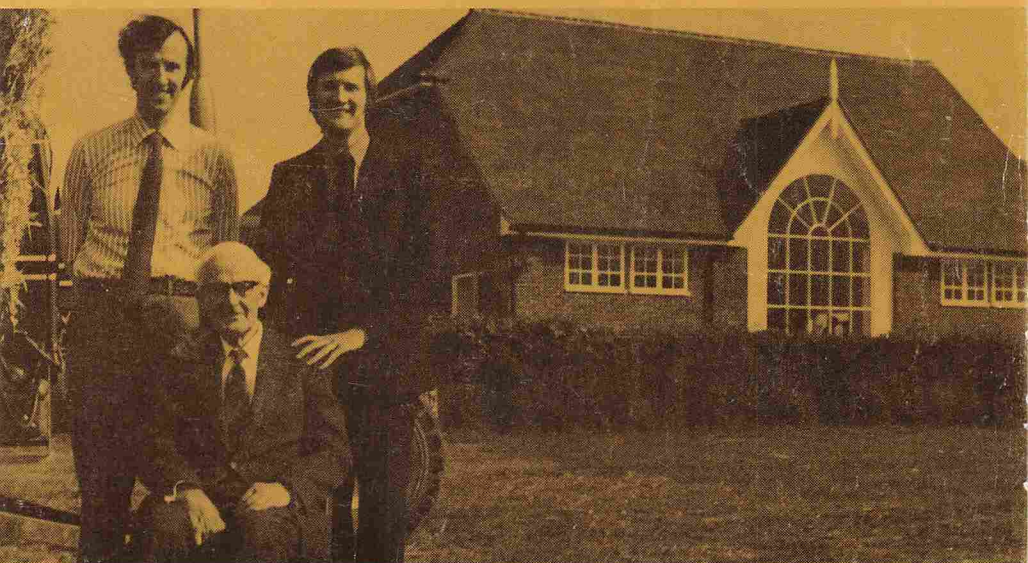


# REFORM- ATION TODAY'80



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*Pastor  
Josif Ton  
his wife  
Elizabeth  
and daughter*

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Front Cover. *Luther Cornwall (seated) between Bob Horne editor of the Evangelical Times (on the left) and Ray Gaydon who has pastored the Barcombe Baptist Church since 1976. The church has a history dating back to 1856. The new building in the background reflects the progress that has been made. For many years the church struggled with a tiny membership. Mr. Cornwall traces a new beginning spiritually to 20 years ago when prayer meetings were well and truly established. Out of that place of intercession came the will to persevere and also a present situation which is immeasurably superior for outreach and evangelism than it was when the chapel tended to be regarded as a little country family affair. The links with Cuckfield were close during the late sixties when several from Barcombe were baptised. From 1971 to 1976 the editor was privileged to fulfil the role of chairman at the church meetings. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the preacher at the opening of the new building this year. He preached on Joshua 24:27 (AV) – the witness of the stones – a call to remember the old paths and God's faithfulness. Ray Gaydon is a south-Londoner, wonderfully arrested and converted from an unbelieving background, ministered to at Westminster Chapel, baptised at Cuckfield, an ex-member of Coldharbour Evangelical Church (pastor Bill Summers), schoolteacher, but now increasingly engaged in pastoring the growing church at Barcombe. He is married with four children.*



## Romania

As a background to Josif Ton's descriptions it will be helpful to know something of his country which has a population of 21 million. Bucharest is the capital with a population of 1,600,000. In 1947 through a Communist coup a harsh and repressive regime took over in Romania which according to the statistics should be one of the most religious countries in the world. In 1963 a nationalistic anti-Soviet stance began to prevail. Romania has been able to resist the Soviet army transit rights to manoeuvres conducted in Bulgaria and resist also multinational integration among armies and economic systems of eastern Europe. She is also the only country that has been able to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. President Nicolae Ceausescu is unquestionably the voice of authority in the country. The 62 year-old Party chief maintains firm control and it is due to him that the nation has been able to maintain its own independent policies irrespective of Kremlin guidelines.

80% of the population are Romanian Orthodox, Muslim 1½%, Roman Catholics 7%, Jews ½%, Protestants 10%. There are a million and a half Hungarians in the country 700,000 of whom are registered as Hungarian Reformed.

*Operation World* from whom these figures are gleaned report that there are 200,000 Baptists and 200,000 Pentecostals. As in Russia there are registered churches and unregistered churches. The Romanian Orthodox church has been the means of nurturing and preserving the culture of the people over the centuries but it is extremely nominal in general outlook. The Roman Catholics care very much about the education of their children but the Orthodox scarcely so.

There has been a revival among the gypsies which form a large 4% of the population.

The Bible is now being translated into their language, Romany. Trevor Beeson in his book *Discretion and Valour* gives some interesting facts about the Jewish population which in 1939 was over 800,000. Now there are only 100,000 of whom about half live in Bucharest. There are seventy-two local Jewish communities and the chief Rabbi of Romania is a member of Parliament.

The only non-orthodox denomination in Romania to have made any significant progress in winning the allegiance of ethnic Romanians have been the Baptists. The Baptist Church has been active in Romania since the 1850's and has grown rapidly in recent years. In 1935 there were about 58,000 and in 1955 about 65,000. There are about 1,000 registered churches and while it is difficult to know how many unregistered this is probably in the region of about 300. The great majority of churches depend on a lay ministry and there are only 150 full-time ministers. Because of their success the Baptists have endured very hard times of repression and persecution. For different reasons the Roman Catholics have likewise experienced harassment and by 1960 four bishops had died in prison and since 1948 over fifty Catholic priests have been killed, 200 have disappeared and 200 have served prison sentences while yet a further 200 have been sent to forced labour camps. In addition to these sufferings, Beeson in his book adds many more details.

During July this year Josif Ton visited this country and the main substance of what he reported concerning his experiences appeared in the *Evangelical Times* of August and September. In *RT56* we gave a brief report of revival in Romania. Such is the interest that has been expressed that we now with the kind permission of the *Evangelical Times* use the transcript taken by their editor Bob Horne of Pastor Ton's personal experiences in recent years. Also we thank *ET* for the photograph.

Pastor Ton returned from a period of study at Oxford in England to Romania in 1972. At that time the Baptist Union accepted him to teach in the Seminary in Bucharest and at the beginning of 1973 four pastors from Bucharest invited him to have times of fellowship and prayer together with the main object of analysing and discussing the subject of why the churches seemed to be dying. From this point on Pastor Ton describes what happened. □□□



# Four Spiritual Battles Described

by Josif Ton

When the Communist regime came to power, their new laws gave us freedom. But when, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Khrushchev closed thousands of churches in Russia, Romania copied him. We had many churches closed at that time. Most of them were re-opened later, though some are still waiting to be re-opened. But they introduced new rules or restrictions on freedom in a very subtle way, so that nobody quite understood their way of operation or their nature.

That was the situation when I got back from England in 1972. The Baptist Union eventually accepted me to teach in the Baptist Seminary in Bucharest, and at the beginning of 1973 four pastors from Bucharest said: 'Josif, we must come together to talk, to have fellowship and to pray together.' I accepted. Right at the beginning the oldest man said: 'We must discuss one topic: that is, why our churches are dying.'

## First Battle

### *The separation of Church and State*

They started to tell what was hindering, what was choking the life of the churches. How they felt the situation as pastors! It was horrifying – 1,000 churches, but only 160 pastors. On average a pastor had to oversee about eight churches. Now the first rule the authorities introduced was that the pastor had the right to preach *only* in these churches. No visits to other places. That way, pastors could not refresh themselves or help other churches.

Now every pastor needed lay preachers to work in the churches; but another rule was that only elected deacons could preach when the pastor was in another church. Fine, except that to elect a deacon the pastor had first to go to the local authority (an atheist) with a list of candidates, and ask him to approve this list. That man knew very well who were the best preachers, so he would cut them from the list; that way, the best preachers were out of pulpits.

If we wanted to hold a baptismal service we had to go to the same authority with the list of candidates and ask: 'Will you approve my baptising these people?' Then he would generally strike from the list those from Orthodox families. There was also a rule that no help could be given to the poor with the money of the church. These were most grievous rules.

I listened to the other four, as one who had studied the history of the Baptists. I realised that the distinctive Baptist doctrine from the beginning was the separation of church and state. I said: 'Today we have the state interfering in the life of the churches.' So I had to write a paper on (Baptist) church doctrine.

I told my churches that, if they accepted state interference in their life, they would lose their distinctive doctrine. Then I put it in biblical terms and said: 'Now, Christ has to be the Head of the church and the church has to obey



only Christ. Churches should stop obeying anybody else but Jesus Christ the Head.' That was in 1973. To write such a paper at that time was in the eyes of many committing suicide.

I prayed with Elizabeth, my wife, for I felt I was a watchman who saw the danger. I knew that if I did not blow the trumpet, the Lord would ask from my hands the blood of my brethren. I felt I was under obligation to write. I went into hiding for two weeks somewhere in the mountains, and that paper just poured out. An expert who analysed it afterwards said: 'Josif, I can't in any way find a fault in it.' How was it written? I was just like an instrument writing and writing and it was pouring down from above.

I realised that those restrictions were almost non-existent legally, because they were not imposed by the state directly. The state told the Baptists, Pentecostals and Brethren that *they* should impose them on the churches. So the leaders just told the pastors: 'If you don't comply with these new regulations, you will lose your licence. If you want to stay fast, then you obey these instructions.' But they were never put on paper. They were, from the legal point of view, non-existent.

So I told the churches in that paper: 'You have the liberty in the laws. Just live according to the laws of the country. Live according to the Bible and live according to the laws of the country.' That was the strength of that paper. Everybody was able to say that Josif just asked them to go back to their doctrines and to the Bible and to obey the laws of the country.

Yet as soon as I spread that paper round, trouble came. I was sacked from the Seminary, my right to live in Bucharest was cancelled, and they tried to stop me preaching. I did not move, nor did I stop preaching. But for three months I was in very bad waters with everybody. Everybody was thinking: 'Why did he do it? we'll only lose him as a preacher, that's all.' A friend told me: 'It's impossible. It's beautiful, but impossible. You should not have done it, we will lose you.'

The President of Romania went to the United States and somebody showed him my paper and explained to him the great importance the Baptists have in America, and how important it was for Romanian interests in America that those problems for Baptists in Romania should be solved, as defined in Josif Ton's paper.

He came back on a Friday and on the Tuesday morning following, the leadership of the Union and myself were invited to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. We did not know why, but there we were told that they were directed by the leadership of the country to solve all our problems according to my paper. In a few months time all those limitations on our freedom were gone. We got freedom to preach wherever we wanted, freedom to elect our preachers and deacons, freedom to baptise, freedom to do what we wanted to do with our money to help wherever we wanted.

So the lesson is this. When the Lord tells you something and you are sure of it – even if from the human point of view it is a madness. One day you will see how God works for you, you will have a victory. You just do your little insignificant part, but you start a miracle whenever you obey a specific guidance, a specific task God gave you. That's one lesson which I saw again and again.

## **Second Battle**

### *The place of the Christian in a Socialist State*

Now after we won that battle in 1974, a gentleman in high position in the country spoke to me. He was not himself a Romanian Orthodox, indeed was not a Romanian, but he lived in Romania, and he said to me:

'You live in an Orthodox country, all the people up to the top are Romanian Orthodox even if they say they are atheist. You know they all accuse you, the Baptists, of being the ones who destroy the unity of the nation. They have this prejudice against you, they see you only as harming this nation. Mr. Ton, you must think of ways of convincing them that you are useful. Don't come with empty hands just waiting for more freedom; you must think of giving something. Mr. Ton, what do you give to this nation as Baptists?'

He then volunteered to give me an example of what he meant. He said: 'Look, I am a lawyer, I have access to information and know that the general prosecutor of the country ordered an investigation, a sociological study, into teenage delinquency. They divided the youth into different groups, and when they divided on religious grounds they discovered that your young people are absolutely clean; no violence, no other delinquency, no crime. All the categories, the columns on your youth sheet are blank. Now Mr. Ton, you can point this out to them and say: "We Baptists give you a clean youth".'

That was great, wasn't it? Following that line I started to think of writing the paper which I entitled: 'The Place of a Christian in the Socialist Society'. What I said to the state was this, in a nutshell. The world-view determines the behaviour. If you tell your youth that life is only here and now, of course they are greedy and start to grab as much as they can. You give them no basis for morals. In spreading atheism you destroy any motivation for being good and honest. Now the authorities are all the time trying to produce the 'new man'. They speak a lot about the new man, whom they define as totally unselfish, totally honest, always giving and only being good. But why should he be like that, if life is only here and now and there is no future, no reward, no punishment? Don't you see?

I went further and I said to them that even the notion of the new man is not yours. It's a Christian one, coined by the apostle Paul, and it's only Jesus Christ who can produce the new man. The new man has to be reborn, born again, he is a new creation. You let Christ do it. And I showed them that this happens. I used the record of our clean youth. I said, Yes, we can



prove the gospel produces the clean youth you want. So give the gospel a chance here.

They didn't appreciate my paper, I'm afraid. A month after I sent a copy to the head of the state, I had eight policemen one Friday morning at 6 o'clock at my door; they searched our house for eight hours, and took away all our library and papers and notes. I was charged with propaganda which endangered the security of the State. By that time I had been transferred from Bucharest, had lost my place in the Seminary and was Pastor in Ploiesti. I was forbidden to leave that town and for months they were just ringing the telephone and saying: 'Mr. Ton, at such and such an hour you will be in for further interrogation.' Well, for six months this went on many times every day, six days a week, five or six hours a day (though I was still preaching and doing my pastoral work).

That period taught me fantastic lessons. When they opened the interrogation a Colonel was there with many others, the prosecutor and the rest. The Colonel delivered a solemn speech. At one point he said: 'Well, you know what Romans 13 says, don't you? that we are ordained by God.' (Yes, they knew that!) I was a little unpolite, I stopped him and said:

'Sir, please let me interpret that for you. Yes, you are ordained by God, and this is what that means for me. I am here not because there is something between me and you, but because of something between me and my God. My God wants to do something to me here. You are only his tools and you are going to do to me only as much as my God tells you and allows you to do.'

You know, he didn't like that interpretation. They tried very hard to break me, but I saw something very interesting. Whenever I opened like that with Romans 13, and with explanations or testimonies, I saw they liked them. Many times I saw them just bowing their heads in silence. At the end of the six months when the charges were dropped, the Major who battled with me for the six months said: 'Now Mr. Ton, everything is all over, we are not going to see each other any more. You know I can't comment on these things. The only thing I can say is, I'll miss you.'

I thought a lot about that . . . 'I'll miss you.' He was a man who needed me, and that was the Lord's opportunity through me to testify to that man. Did I live up to the Lord's expectations? I don't know; I trust so. I believe the Lord said to me: 'Son, you've got a victory.'

But the lesson I learnt there was that I should never think in terms of enemies; I had in front of me people for whom my Saviour died. Redeemable people, people who wait to see Christ in me and are longing to see Christ and hear his message through me. That's how we have to go on, always.

### **Third Battle**

#### *Resisting injustice and oppression*

At the beginning of 1977 there was a new challenge. There were demotions

for evangelicals in jobs, fines for meeting in homes, trouble for children in schools. It was mainly this, the trouble for the children in schools, that hurt me most because by makeup I am a teacher, and I like to be with young people. I felt I had to stand up again. I wrote a new paper, involving this time all evangelicals, and eventually had it signed by Brethren and Pentecostal representatives, so making it a common thing. It was a paper in defence of the Christian's right in our country.

Because of that paper I was arrested one Sunday morning just before going to preach in the church of Iasi, near the Russian border. They took me down to Bucharest by car. They let me go home later that night, but for six weeks I was in Bucharest in and out of interrogation. This was much harsher than the previous sessions — sometimes 12-13 hours of interrogation a day.

The first day of interrogation was a Monday and about lunch time a General came in and joined the two who were questioning me. The General made a sign and the other two went out. He turned around, cursed me once and started to slap me. I started to shout, because we had an agreement with the others (the others who signed were also in for interrogation) and we wanted to have witnesses for being beaten. After four or five bouts of slapping, because I was shouting, he stopped; but then he started again and after many more he hit me with a fist in the forehead and I hit the wall. Then he just turned round and went out.

The others came in and just shrugged their shoulders. They had heard me shout, but continued the interrogation. Tuesday, being kept there without interrogation, I had time to think and pray. Wednesday they continued interrogation.

Thursday lunchtime the General came in the same way, made a sign and the others went out. I was expecting a second round! But he made a sign and said: 'Mr. Ton, I come to talk, so be calm.' Now, you know, it is the Holy Spirit who speaks in us when we are in front of authorities, it's not ourselves — that is what the Lord says. So what happened was not my responsibility. But as soon as he sat down, I heard myself saying:

'Mr. General, because you come to talk, first of all I have to apologise for what happened on Monday.' He couldn't understand. I said: 'Yes, Mr. General, you see on Tuesday you kept me here alone and I had time to think and pray, and suddenly I realised this is the holy week, and you beat me in the holy week. For a Christian there is nothing more precious in the world than to be beaten when his Saviour was beaten. I am sorry for shouting, Mr. General, I should have thanked you for it. You gave me a tremendously beautiful gift. So you have to know I prayed for you and for your family.'

He was choked, couldn't speak. Somehow he said: 'Well, I shouldn't have done it, I am sorry, now let's talk.' And we talked. Next day, because of that talk he gave us all freedom for Easter, and said: 'Now you come back all of you on Tuesday after Easter.'



We duly went back after Easter. We had a very hard time for weeks, but the General came in many times, and whenever he came, I was happy. I had tremendously intelligent talks with that man. We talked very high politics, and eventually I opened to him what the Christians, what the Baptists could do for their country. He said one day: 'Would you put all this on paper, I want the President of the country to know what you told me?' Now I believe that that was the start of a new understanding which came between us and the authorities in recent months. It started there with that General.

That was another big lesson. Love conquers evil. Only love. Now after five weeks of interrogation I had from the Lord that I shouldn't answer their questions any more. I thought that they shifted the emphasis; they were not questioning me any more about my paper, but about other Christians, and I felt I shouldn't answer that. It was clear from the Lord: 'You don't answer the questions any more.'

I told Elizabeth this one Sunday morning. I realised what a challenge that would be for them, and what an anger I would stir. But we had a great time in prayer, a fantastic blessing in prayer. It's always so when you accept the Lord's will. So I was sure it was of the Lord.

I went on Monday and I told the major: 'I'll not answer your questions any more.' He was very angry, he was very much using abusive language for hours, and eventually he said: 'Now you go home and tomorrow morning at 9 you be back. And I promise that tomorrow you will answer any question in the world I want you to answer.'

I went home and I told Elizabeth. We prayed, but we felt we needed help. So we went to some friends and told them the problem. They were great Christians and ministered to us. When we went on our knees I felt as never in my life that I wasn't on the ground — I was somewhere up in sheer beauty and joy.

I went the following morning at 9 o'clock and waited half an hour in the waiting room. That was an unusual thing, it had happened only once or twice before. Then the major came, jovial and shining as if nothing happened the day before and said: 'Mr. Ton, I am very busy today, you go home and one of these days I'll ring you and tell you what happens.' Two days after that he rang and asked me to go in, only to tell me that the investigation was over, the charges dropped.

Now at that time Elizabeth, who always watched me, said this: 'You see, Josif, the battle is in us. It is God who fights with us until we accept his way and his will. And when the battle is won *in us*, we discover that there is no battle to be fought any more out there, it's only a victory to be gained.' I'll never forget those words. The battle is always in us, until we accept God's way, God's will. And when that battle is over and won by God, we discover that the victory is already prepared for us. What a mighty lesson.

Now the investigation was over (this was May 1977), but they took away my licence as a preacher and told me I could go. By that time the church in Oradea had elected me their pastor. That is the largest Baptist church in the country, with 1400 members. They told me I could go and work there for three or four months until the autumn and that then they would tell me whether they would give me back the authorisation or else give me a job with the state.

#### **Fourth Battle**

*Should I be silenced to preach?*

I went and started my work, but I also started to do new things. I started the Monday evening lectures — doctrine and biblical topics to the young people in two hours of Bible lectures. As soon as I started them I had 400-500 young people every Monday in that hall. That's their hunger to be taught. Immediately a church in Cluj (a university town in the centre of Transylvania) asked me to go on Wednesdays with the same lectures. There 1000 young people come every Wednesday for two hours — 200 of them standing for two hours, some putting their notebooks on the wall to take notes, and about 20-30 tape recorders around me.

Now this was not especially to the liking or pleasure of the authorities and in the autumn I was told that they had decided not to give me back my authorisation, but rather to make use of the law against parasitism and force me into a job. They told me they were going in a month's time to find a job for me in Cluj, where we have our legal domicile. (I was commuting to Oradea which is 100 miles from there.)

So I went to Bucharest to see that major (a different major — I had many majors in my life!), a new and very harsh major who told me: 'We are going to put you in that job and so you will stop the work with the young people.'

I went back home and I told Elizabeth: 'Now I don't see any way out. I must get a job.' She was furious with me: 'No, you should not give up, you must stay here, your place is as a pastor, a preacher. You must go on as a preacher.' For two weeks I said: 'I can't.' For two weeks she said: 'You must!'

After two weeks she saw she had no breakthrough and so had a word with two retired ministers, and brought them together and told them: 'You must do something, because Josif is in a corner and he shouldn't give up.' And after they spent a time together and prayed together, one of them came to me (I didn't know about this plot). I'll never forget him; he was a man who always spoke in parables. He said:

'Well done, son. One day you took a flag and you said: "Come after me boys." Everybody followed. It was great. But one day you got afraid and you put that flag on the ground and you hid in the bush. Why don't you at least have the courage to tell the people: "Look, I am afraid. That flag is vacant, somebody else take it and go on with it"? It was so vivid — I even saw that



poor flag there lying on the ground. In that moment it was finished. The battle was over in me. I just turned to him and said: 'It's settled. I am not going to leave that flag there. I'll go on. You stay now, for we have to talk.'

In the end we found that I could get over that law in a legal way. We discovered that a church could employ seasonal workers, and so we made a seasonal or temporary contract between me and the church. I am even today employed on the basis of that seasonal contract of labour!

Now my major came from Bucharest a week after; I told him that I would not accept their job. He sent somebody to summon me in front of him and said: 'Well, Mr. Ton, what do you have to say to me now?' I said:

'Mr. Major, I want to tell you that I have made all the preparations for dying.' 'What do you mean?' 'Well, you told me that you were going to put me in that job and stop me preaching. Now I went and stood before my God and I discovered that my God wants me to be a preacher and I said: "It's better to fulfil God's will and be beaten by secret police, rather than be beaten by God." Now I know that in refusing your job, I challenge you; you have the power to crush me. They expect you to do it. But, you know, I had no other choice, so I went back before my God and made ready to die. I solved all my problems, and everything is ready now. Whenever you want me to die, I may be crushed.'

I never saw a man changing so quickly. From the harsh man I knew before he just became human. And, my, in a nice voice he said: 'Well, Mr. Ton, who talks about death here? You will stay pastor in Oradea all right, nobody will harm you there. But Mr. Ton, would you at least please stop the youth work in Cluj, the 1000 people every Wednesday night.'

'Well,' I said, 'Mr. Major I want to explain to you why I can't.' I just explained: 'I am actually a member in that church in Cluj, where I hold the lectures on Wednesday nights. I have my legal domicile there, and a flat also. Because I do not have these legal requirements in Oradea, I cannot settle there. Also, I cannot move my membership there, for the constitution of the church says that if I do not attend the church for three months, they must expel me from membership. All weekends I am in Oradea, and the Cluj church says: "If you want to stay our member, you come on Wednesdays to our place." So you see, that's the way I justify my membership here.'

'Well,' he said, 'I see you have a logic in what you say. OK, you go on for the time being and we shall see.' And we still see! That young people's meeting has been going on for the last three years — one of the greatest joys of my life. I lectured for a year on the major Christian doctrines, a year on the Old Testament prophets, a year on the teaching of Jesus. And I have now started on Romans.

Now this is the last lesson. When you put your life on the altar, when you make ready and accept to die, you are invincible. You have nothing any more

to lose. It was a tremendous battle in Elizabeth until she won that battle. I told her: 'You must put me on the altar and say, "Lord, if you want Josif in prison, I say yes to that".' She said: 'I can't pray that prayer.' You must. You will not be free until you say that prayer.'

In one of the most difficult times, she could not sleep one or two nights, and one morning at 4 o'clock she woke me and we went on our knees and she prayed that prayer. That was the day when she became free. That was in 1974. Since then she was the most courageous in our family. It's only when you put everything on the altar, then you have nothing else to lose, because you have given everything to God. Nobody in this world can take anything from you because you die, and only they who die bring fruit. That is the Lord's saying: only the seed that falls in the ground and dies brings fruit.

Maybe you are at the crossroads in your life, maybe God is doing battle in you. He has a plan for you. He wants to do something with your life. He can do mighty things with your life, but only when He has won the victory in you. You put your life on His altar and say: 'Here it is. You decide what to do with it. It's yours. You have the command.' Then you will see miracles. As we have seen miracle after miracle.

Now about my greatest vision. Remember the young people – 1000 in Cluj, 500 in Oradea? Half of those in Cluj are university students. Many of them come to me and say: 'Brother Josif, we would like to study for the ministry.' Now we have 1000 churches, but only 160 pastors. The Seminary in Bucharest has only 30 students. We need 1000 preachers, 1000 pastors.

But to make them you need books. There is no theological book in the Romanian language. We only got our first concordance in Romanian five years ago. There is no Bible Commentary, no Bible dictionary in our language. The Seminary in Bucharest has no text books for any subject. The teachers just take notes from books in English or in French (whatever language they can read a little) and pass those on to the students, who take notes. That is all their instruction.

We need text books for the Seminary, and then we need them for the whole country, for thousands of young people say to me: 'I would like to study at home.' Some of them are teachers, some are engineers, some are medical doctors. They want to be taught. We need 30-40 books covering the whole field of theology to put in their hands. A whole Christian library in their language: that is the challenge. □ □ □

*'Now I begin to taste of Holy Scriptures. Now, honour be to God! I am set to the most sweet smell of holy letters, with the godly savour of holy and ancient doctors, unto whose knowledge I cannot attain without diversity of books. Nothing in the world I desire but books. Once I have those, I do not doubt but Almighty God shall perform that in me which he of his most plentiful favour and grace hath begun.'*

Miles Coverdale in about 1530 felt like our brother Josif Ton. The rich library of spiritual books in the English Language is an answer to Coverdale's prayer. May it be the same for Romania.



# The role of the Church in Sanctification

There are several aspects of holiness upon which comment can helpfully be made before we view the way in which the church is used as a means to promote individual sanctification. After that, by way of conclusion, the climate in which sanctification is usually placed will be viewed.

## *What is sanctification?*

The basic meaning of holiness or sanctification is apartness and separateness. The English words holiness and sanctification are used synonymously in translation of the Greek word (*hagiasmos* set apart). The Old Testament Hebrew word (*qodesh* separation) translated holiness, means separateness. When God reveals himself it is as one who is utterly separate or apart, sacred, transcendent, different, wholly other. The seraphim worship God with the description 'holy, holy, holy'. They mean that God is glorious in his self-existent eternity in a way which is incomprehensible to any created being. Jahweh is altogether apart, unique, separate, he is holy. When Jesus said, 'for their sakes I sanctify myself', that had nothing to do with Jesus becoming holy. He is eternally holy. He meant that he was setting himself apart as the only sacrifice for our salvation.

## *Instant and perfect sanctification*

Every believer has been the subject of instant and perfect sanctification. The theologians sometimes call this definitive sanctification. It simply means that when God the Father calls a person out of this world's darkness he separates that person and places him in a state of oneness with his son Jesus Christ. That dynamic act of God the Father in calling us is both instant and perfect. Effectual calling is frequently mentioned in the New Testament and is always ascribed to the Father (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:8, 9; 1 Jn. 3:1; Eph. 1:18). The Scriptures emphasise the authorship of God the father in sanctification from its inception in calling to its conclusion or consummation which is glorification — election, predestination, calling, justification, glorification (Rom. 8:28-30). Yet it is important to see that all three persons of the Trinity are fully involved in the holiness of believers. Sanctification can be said to be from the Father, by the Spirit and in Christ. Although there are dangers in every illustration some aspects can be depicted simply like this: the Father is the architect and owner, the builder is the Holy Spirit from foundation laying (regeneration) to completion (the resurrection), while Christ is the one who buys all the materials and he is the occupier. He loves the house and lives in it. The metaphors used in the New Testament such as the building of Ephesians 2:19-22 are not to be pressed in every detail. In contrast with the illustration used above, regeneration is instant. In actual fact in modern building, concrete foundation laying is a swift procedure, but no illustration, parable or metaphor is fully adequate.

Major passages dealing with sanctification in the New Testament stress the once-and-for-all separation of believers into union with Christ. The most important exposition of the matter is the Romans epistle. Having outlined the meaning of justification by faith in the first five chapters Paul explains sanctification in terms of believers' baptism which depicts instant and perfect sanctification. The whole argument of Romans 6:1 to 7:6 is based on the principle that the believer has been baptised into Christ — past tense, or aorist in the Greek. The verb tenses of Romans 6:2-10 are aorist (correctly translated in contemporary translations and wrongly in the AV). We died in Christ, we were baptised into Christ, we were buried with Christ. We have been united with him. Hence we were sanctified or set apart in him. In that sense of apartness (holiness) we have been instantly and perfectly sanctified. To be plunged into water and raised again depicts the point.

Instant or perfect separation or sanctification is seen in such statements as 1 Corinthians 1:2, 'to those sanctified in Christ Jesus,' and 1 Corinthians 6:11, 'But you were washed, you were sanctified.' In shepherding souls we often have to counsel those for whom effectual calling (looking at it from God's side) or conversion (the way we experience it) is not instant, perfect, dramatic or sudden. Rather it is a long drawn out business and an awful struggle. For them conversion is not like an overnight setting of immovable foundations or a swift plunging in and out of liquid, but a desperate and terrible battle for assurance in which they search and cry for help. But whether our experience of coming into union with Christ is quick or protracted we must ultimately strive for, and come to, that place where we can testify that while we cannot specify the time, nevertheless we have now been (past tense) set apart in Christ. It is because the believer has been set apart or sanctified that he cannot wilfully give himself over to sin (1 Jn. 3:6-9). He has been born again and the power of the new life resides in him to resist sin and combat it. In the same epistle John declares that Christians do sin, but it is to be confessed and forsaken (1 Jn. 2:8-2:2). That brings us to progressive sanctification.

### *Progressive sanctification*

In a single opening sentence The 1689 Confession anchors sanctification in effectual calling.

Those who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, have a new heart and a new spirit created in them; and by His word and Spirit dwelling within them, this personal work of sanctification is indeed carried further.

The Confession goes on to devote the rest of its formulations to systematic or progressive sanctification. The creative work having been performed and the believer having been set apart he is then subject in the entirety of his being to a work in which evil desires are increasingly weakened and saving graces increasingly enlivened and strengthened. This thrilling but often painful process results in an irreconcilable and continual warfare — the flesh fighting the Spirit, and the Spirit the flesh.



A variety of means are used to promote progressive sanctification. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer. It is his work to carry forward and ensure purification. He employs the Scriptures as his main tool. Our Lord referred to sanctification through the 'Word of truth' (Jn. 17:17). In particular he employs the moral law without which there could be no standard to highlight that which is sinful. The Holy Spirit uses the moral law to convict the believer of his sinful practices (Rom. 7:14-25) and then enables him to put his evil habits to death, 'if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live' (Rom. 8:13). 'Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry' (Col. 3:5).

Our Lord exhorted us to aim at perfection (Matt. 5:48) and Paul spoke of 'perfecting holiness out of reverence for God' (2 Cor. 7:1). In writing to the Thessalonians he made it plain that progressive sanctification is the will of God. In that context he refers to an important part of holiness, namely avoiding sexual immorality and learning to control the body in a way which is pure and honourable (1 Thess. 4:3). The means used by the Holy Spirit for sanctification are never divorced from the church. The gifts of preaching, teaching, pastoral nurture, oversight and care proceed from Christ the head and are given to the body of his people, the church (Eph. 4:1-16). These gifts are never given to become the private property of individuals. This brings us face to face with the role of the church in sanctification.

### *The role of the church in sanctification*

The prominence of the church in sanctification is seen in the way it occupies the major sections of application in the New Testament. Romans 12:1-8 deals with the relationship of members to each other and the humble submission of those members with their gifts for the service of the body. Hebrews 10:19-39 asserts the necessity for individuals to cleave constantly to the body for its wellbeing and to guard against falling away. Ephesians 1:11 to 4:16 displays gloriously the unity of the body as the accomplishment of Christ and consequently insists on the total integration of all individual believers into that body. Both Peter and Paul speak of living stones being compacted and cemented together into one building (1 Pet. 2:5, Eph. 2:20-22).

The divisions at Corinth resulted in some terrific words from Paul concerning the utter necessity of corporate unity for all individual members (1 Cor. 12:31). Every member is important. One sick part makes the whole body feel sick. Every function of every member has relevance as it relates to the wellbeing of the whole physique. All praise and glory achieved is attributed to Christ the head. Richard Chester used a striking illustration recently which well deserves repetition. He pointed to the victorious athlete who standing on the rostrum has a gold medal put around his neck. Imagine the athlete's legs crying out in audible protest — 'hoi! we did the work not you!'

It is when we get down to detail that we see the effect that the body of the

church has on the individual to advance his sanctification.

1. *Humility.* Repentance or the transformation of the heart is the very essence of true Christianity. Humble willingness to be taught and consequently a readiness to obey God's commands are essential. The individual has to submit to the will of the body in the inconveniences caused when his own will is crossed or his time utilised to attend worship services and prayer meetings. When the errors of thought and practice are corrected it is painful for him. Likewise when his abilities are properly assessed according to the principles of Romans 12:3 he will be humbled. For instance it can be hard for a young believer who imagines that he is a born preacher to discover that the consensus of the body is very firmly of the opposite opinion. Humility of mind and heart is a vital and precious part of sanctification. When the bricklayer takes the brick and trowels off corners, shaping it up to be fitted in to the rest of the brickwork, that pain is acute. This can be humbling but if pride raises its ugly head then church discipline in all its aspects, from reproof to excommunication, is provided to assist and ultimately ensure the integration and sanctification of the members of Christ's body.

Writing in *Local Church Practice* Baruch Maoz warns against individuals separating themselves from the body of Christ:

In these modern days of heightened individualism, we must labour hard so as not to be influenced by the spirit of the age. Modern-day over-occupation with the individual is nothing short of an ungodly selfishness that sets itself over against the Holy Scriptures. We must constantly purge our minds from this kind of thinking if we are to live according to God's good pleasure — and God's good pleasure is to raise up to himself Christian churches for the promotion of holiness, the spread of the Gospel, the encouragement and support of the weak, the rebuke of those that stray and the salvation of sinners to the glory of his own ever-blessed name. Even when John introduces us into heaven, we do not see every redeemed soul sitting on his private cloud singing his own little song before God. They are all singing together one glorious song. That is how we must learn to live and think and labour.<sup>1</sup>

2. *Love.* Hebrews 10:24 insists on believers observing or considering one another. This cannot be done *in absentia*. It necessitates regular faithful assembling of ourselves together. To quit that or to opt for spasmodic attendance will lead eventually to non-attendance and ultimately the severance of the particular branch from the vine. Dead branches that have dried up are gathered to be burned in the fire (Jn. 15:6).

Regular exposure to each other in sharing affects our love for each other. How do you grow in affection for something you do not see or know much about? In some churches the people seem to disappear very quickly after the formal worship but in others they linger for as long as possible, sometimes until the doorkeepers persuasively usher them out. Provision must be made for fellowship.<sup>2</sup> Fellowship is the primary means of fulfilling the exhortations to growth in love such as that to the Thessalonians: 'May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours



does for you' (1 Thess. 3:12). Likewise Peter urged, 'love one another deeply, from the heart' (1 Pet. 1:22).

This love for God's family is an important part of progressive sanctification. At the beginning of our Christian lives we are called into fellowship with the church (1 Cor. 1:9). As we come to know the other members of the body more, so we become more prepared to labour or work for their good out of love for them (1 Thess. 1:3).

Professor Murray shows the gravity of the sin of negligence in failing to be concerned for the sanctification of others:

If the individual is indifferent to the sanctification of others, and does not seek to promote their growth in grace, love, faith, knowledge, obedience, and holiness, this interferes with his own sanctification in at least two respects. 1. His lack of concern for others is itself a vice that gnaws at the root of spiritual growth. If we are not concerned with, or vigilant in respect of, the fruit of the Spirit in others, then it is because we do not burn with holy zeal for the honour of Christ himself. All shortcoming and sin in us dishonours Christ, and a believer betrays the coldness of his love to Christ when he fails to bemoan the defects of those who are members of Christ's body. 2. His indifference to the interests of others means the absence of the ministry which he should have afforded others. This absence results in the impoverishment of these others to the extent of his failure, and this impoverishment reacts upon himself, because these others are not able to minister to him to the full extent of the support, encouragement, instruction, edification, and exhortation which they owe to him.<sup>3</sup>

This is a very clear warning concerning lack of love, resulting in the robbery of others of that which is their right, and the simultaneous stunting of the progress of the guilty party.

3. *Growing and advancing in other graces.* As seen from the quotation just made there are many virtues involved in progressive sanctification — grace, love, faith, knowledge, obedience and holiness. The Hebrews exhortation speaks of spurring 'one another on towards love and good deeds'. The attributes of humility and love have received attention in this article. Good deeds means acts of devoted service. We learn about how to do that not only through preaching and exposition but by the observation of fellow church members in action. When we get down to thinking about it we learn most of the Christian life by seeing others in action. We learn perseverance by observing persevering fellow believers. We learn how to pray by hearing others in prayer. Faith is increased and strengthened by sharing with those who exercise it. In Hebrews chapter eleven attention is drawn to the example of those who exercised faith.

Joy is best seen when it is alive in the persons of our fellow members. Likewise when a joyful peace is exhibited by one who is suffering it strengthens others in the body. When believers portray the beauty of holiness and evidence patience in adverse circumstances, it fortifies and increases similar graces in other members.

We have been thinking of the regular and intimate union and communion of believers in a local church. Lack of space prevents detailed explanation of how churches affect each other for good or ill in sanctification but a pithy quotation from Donald MacLeod will help us appreciate that matter and further illustrate the role of the church in the sanctification of every believer:

The ministry of the Word and sacraments are not dispensable luxuries, but the divinely appointed means of all Christian growth and progress, which we neglect at our peril. All this serves to remind us that believers cannot be indifferent to the general condition of the Church. The Body of Christ is a closely-knit organism, and each member is affected by the tone and standards which characterise the whole. No matter how we try to insulate ourselves in congregational or denominational or even individual units, each member suffers loss from the apostasy in life and doctrine which affects the Church at large. For this reason ecclesiastical reformation must be seen as something in which the most vital interests of every Christian are involved. A debilitated Church is not only unable to function effectively as an evangelistic and pastoral agency, but is a corrupting influence upon the life of each of its members. And conversely, of course, the backsliding or apostasy of the individual Christian prejudices the whole Christian community, so that to maintain the tone of our spiritual lives is something we owe not only to ourselves but to the Church in general.<sup>4</sup>

No Christian can afford to neglect constant integration with a living church. Even the most experienced and eminent ministers decline if this principle is neglected. I believe that Mr. Pink's testimony suffered in proportion as he isolated himself from the local church. He did so on the pretext that the churches were apostate, a sweeping overstatement which is unacceptable. Evangelical churches are very often sick, superficial or weak. The remedy is not to abandon them but to help them. For this to be possible every Christian should fulfil his responsibility and not weaken the churches further by setting up yet another private organisation.

The Bible depicts progressive sanctification as a hard work which calls for the help of others. Holiness of life in the great majority of cases is accomplished in difficult circumstances. The climate of sanctification appears as a separate article. A suitable comment with which to conclude is that the members of the church throughout the age are fitly framed together in an intimate family. The 'times of eternity' (for want of a better phrase) will be necessary to appreciate the perfect wisdom of God in arranging it that way. □□□

Editor

<sup>1</sup>Carey Publications. pp. 190. £2.40.

<sup>3</sup>*Collected Writings of John Murray*.  
Vol. 2. p. 299. Banner of Truth.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.* p. 90ff. Also article RT38.

<sup>4</sup>Banner of Truth magazine. Oct. 1972.  
(no. 109) p. 19.



# Review

## Grace Unlimited

Editor Clark H. Pinnock  
Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship. 1975  
pp. 264. \$4.95.

As Dr. Pinnock makes clear in his introduction the purpose of this symposium is to set out what the contributors believe to be a biblical alternative to the Calvinistic understanding of the doctrines of grace. As such it represents a conscious attempt to rehabilitate the Wesley-Armenian position as against Reformed orthodoxy, aimed initially at the American evangelical public.

Dr. Don Carson has elsewhere helpfully reviewed this volume (*Themelios* Vol 3, no 1, 1977 pp. 29, 30) and for the benefit of *RT* readers without access to this journal I reproduce his helpful summary of the contents of the volume. Thereafter, like him I restrict my comments to the theological and exegetical material, leaving the last three historical pieces aside.

'After an introduction by the editor, Vernon C. Grounds writes the first chapter, "God's Universal Salvific Grace". He argues that grace is universal, but halting at universalism, concludes that grace "depends for its actualisation on a believing response". In the second chapter, under the title "He died for All: the Universal Dimensions of the Atonement", Donald M. Lake argues that Christ has paid for every man's sins by his atonement. Therefore no-one is condemned because of his *sins*, but only for the individual *sin* of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. Of course to discuss the extent of the atonement raises the question of election. Jack W. Cottrell discusses this in Chapter Three; and his view is adequately summed up by the title "Conditional Election". William G. McDonald and Clark Pinnock follow that up with two chapters which stress, in different ways, the personhood of God. The former is primarily concerned with the significance of the coming of the Spirit into an individual, and the latter with the manifestation of "responsible freedom in the flow of biblical history". David Clines and Howard Marshall (two British-based contributors) survey predestination in the Old and New Testaments respectively; and then Grant Osborne writes two chapters, the first dealing with "Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews", and the second providing some "Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts".

The tenth chapter is an attempt by James D. Strauss to deal with Romans 9-11. The final three chapters (11-13) written by A. Skevington Wood, Donald M. Lake and James D. Strauss, deal respectively with aspects of the theology of John Wesley, Jacob Arminius and Jonathan Edwards.'

The individual essays here are inevitably of uneven quality. But taken overall they add up to a sustained attempt to overthrow the Calvinistic understanding of grace. However I have (appropriately enough for a Reformed critique!) five main areas of criticism to raise.

My first point concerns the dangers the collection runs by its generally polemical stance. Here Clark Pinnock sets the tone, in an introduction which is both sweeping and aggressive in its indictment of Reformed theology. Now while there is nothing wrong in seeking strongly to argue a case, it is easy to prejudice the exegetical or theological outcome of the issues under debate. Having accused their Reformed opponents of reading their own presuppositions into the biblical data, the contributors then often proceed to do the same. Strauss' chapter on Romans 9-11 is a good example. He starts by *assuming* the relative freedom of agents involved and so must then explain away the hardening of Pharaoh, the passing over of Esau and the unbelief of the Israelites as examples of the consequences of choosing to disobey God.

My second point concerns the handling of Scripture by many of the contributors. Generally there is a failure to acknowledge the interpretative principle of *the analogy of scripture*. For instance Donald Lake asserts that texts such as John 3:16, 2 Peter 3:19, 1 John 2:2 and Romans 5:18' must be teaching a universal atonement. Now it is possible that they might be, taken by themselves. But then on the *analogy* principle they must be set alongside other texts which speak of the extent of the atonement in more precise terms. So the charge of exegetical deceitfulness cannot really be sustained against the Reformed position. (Interestingly, as against R. T. Kendall in his recent discussion of the issue, Lake finds no evidence from Calvin's discussion of 1 John 2:2 that the Genevan Reformer accepted a universalist construction of the text.)

Neither must the *analogy* principle be neglected as the level of whole books within the Canon. To use the warnings against apostasy in the letter to the Hebrews (Osborne in his first essay) to overthrow the doctrine of final perseverance without consideration of any other NT teaching is quite unconvincing.

My third point concerns the treatment of the doctrines of predestination and election. Several contributors suggest that both can be interpreted only in general and impersonal ways. Cottrell argues that election is corporate rather than individual, not to salvation (since that depends on believing response) but to holiness. Barth's controversial refashioning of election — believers are chosen because they are found in Christ, who is the real object of the Father's choice — is aired as an alternative by Pinnock in his introduction. But this is not a satisfactory handling of texts such as John 17:6 or Ephesians 1:4. Neither can the personal character of God's predestinating work be avoided. Neither Pinnock nor Clines in their essays seem to face this. The Old Testament testifies to God's detailed control of the events of OT revelation — what do they make of the prophetic choosing of Josiah or Cyrus as instruments of divine work (1 Kings 13:2, Is. 44:28)?

My fourth point concerns the repeated attempts to distort the Reformed understanding of grace by unbalancing its assessment of Biblical teaching. Of course the Reformed position can be made to seem unsatisfactory by the use of distortion and caricature. So we are told that in the Reformed teaching on conversion repentance is not free but forced. Reformed teaching on predestination is said to negate human responsibility and make God the author of evil. It is thus (so it is said) no better than a pagan determinism. But is this really fair? Have reformed people really neglected prayer, sanctification and evangelism as a necessary consequence of their theology? Pinnock rejects (p. 101) the attempt to hold the Scripture teaching on divine sovereignty and human responsibility together (in what Dr. Packer has elsewhere<sup>2</sup> called a biblical *antinomy*) as mere word-play. But his alternative in emptying the content of the biblical teaching on God's sovereignty is hardly satisfactory.

My fifth point is to stress that the results of the alternatives set out by the contributors to the Reformed position are not

very convincing in dealing with the theological issues they see to be at stake. The alternative to the Reformed distinction between the decreed will of God (what actually comes to pass) and his prescriptive will (what God desires, but may not always come to pass) is the Arminian distinction between God's permissive and prescriptive will. As Dr. Carson puts it 'if a sovereign God permits something evil which his foreknowledge tells him will come to pass, how does this permission differ from decree'? If it does, then how can we be sure that God's good purposes will 'triumph over evil in the new heavens and the new earth'?

Finally the book as a whole has a message to those who seek to defend and assert the doctrines of grace. First as to approach: here we need to beware of rationalism, of supposing that we can with our finite, sinful minds fully grasp the extent of God's saving grace. Second as to content; we need to maintain in our preaching the full biblical balance in the doctrines so as to leave open no doors for distortion or caricature. Finally as to action that we undercut any Arminian suspicions that the doctrines of grace lead to weaknesses in evangelism of the Christian life. The publication of this symposium, however much we may regret it, is a reminder that such suspicions still remain amongst the evangelical public at large.

Charles Whitworth  
September 1980

<sup>1</sup> Lake takes the opportunity to argue in this essay against Augustine's use of Romans 5 to establish original guilt. He does so by the hoary old means of faulting Augustine's use of the Vulgate's rendering the Greek *eph ho* in 5:12 by *in quo*. But while the proper wording of the verse may not be specific the argument of the section concerning the racial character of the fall is clear. Generally Augustine is roughly treated by the contributors, Pinnock accusing him of diverging radically from the Fathers in the matter of predestination vs. free will (p. 101). But here again the issues are not so clearcut.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Packer argues, in his *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (IVF, 1961) that we should regard the biblical juxtaposition of divine sovereignty and human responsibility not as paradox or contradiction but as *antinomy* to be equally affirmed and believed.



# The Climate of Sanctification

Great is our comfort when we meditate on the fact that progressive sanctification takes place in adverse circumstances. Progressive sanctification is an extremely resilient plant that survives and grows in desert and wilderness circumstances. This principle has been true throughout the history of the Church. Think of the long trials of faith experienced by Abraham and the tribulations of Jacob who complained that everything was against him. Remember the increasingly difficult circumstances of the children of Israel over a long period of time before they came out of Egypt. And what about the hardships of the forty years in Sinai? When they came into Canaan it was not long before they were struggling to survive. Think too of the beleaguered remnant in Isaiah's day and the even smaller nucleus in the time of Jeremiah. What about the seventy years in captivity? Was that easy? When eventually they were restored to Jerusalem God's people found it to be a heap of rubble. The struggle under Nehemiah and the others was exacting and prolonged. The wait for the Messiah which followed took over four hundred years, decades of perseverance, hardship and hazard. Only the smallest remnant survived to welcome our Lord's first advent.

There have been wastelands just as bleak and barren during the Christian dispensation. Let us recall the rivers of blood flowing out of the ten great persecutions under the Roman Caesars. When Christianity was recognised at the time of Constantine spiritual declension soon followed. Such were the errors added to the Church for over a millennium before the Reformation that when the great change came the corruption of teaching and life was so bad that Christianity was hardly recognisable. Yet when we search the records we find that in spite of the appalling conditions that prevailed many were sanctified in those dark centuries. Nor should we romanticise about the Reformation itself. Multitudes of Baptists were slaughtered by misled Protestants.

What of our generation? We can truly say that today the nations are deceived (Rev. 20:3). Whole countries are still under the superstition of Rome. Spain is 99% RC, the Republic of Ireland 93%, Belgium 89% and Italy 94%. Evangelical believers in such countries face enormous odds.

Think of the sanctification process experienced by believers in the Communist lands like China with about 900 million people. The scattered little groups have been, and continue to be, purified by intense suffering.

Remember too the territory of Islam; 800 million Muslims. Afghanistan is 99% Muslim, Iran 98%, Turkey 98%, Saudi Arabia 99% and Algeria 99%. Mauritania is one of the smaller Islamic countries. There are only 20 Protestants (none indigenous) out of a population of 1,300,000. Since there are no known believers in Mauritania it is perhaps irrelevant as an illustration of sanctification so we will think instead of Iraq (11,400,000). A generous

estimate of the proportion of evangelicals is 0.15% or 150 to a million or one to every 7000. The discouragement of the few in such places is severe.

In our Western countries we suffer from spiritual deadness and decline. In desperation many believers turn to all kinds of remedies for solutions. We must resist being blown about and should remember the fact that sanctification is a plant which has its roots in dry ground. We long and pray for revival but courageously must face the fact that the vast proportion of God's elect have been sanctified without any helpful glory-ride on revival clouds. And even when we investigate those wonderful revival stories of the past we soon discover that they were often followed by long and terrible seasons of barrenness, times when God's people struggled to stave off disillusionment and discouragement. Jonathan Edwards was ejected from his church at Northampton not too many years after a revival. Nostalgia about revival can be positively harmful if it is allowed to unscrew or disjoint our spiritual lives or lead to the attitude that all our labour is in vain because God is not blessing as he is supposed to in revival. Some magazines present exaggerated success stories at such a rate and colour that anyone would think everything is progressing at a marvellous rate. Such glossies create an artificial euphoria far removed from the grim realities of progressive sanctification. Superficial literature which feeds people with sensations can easily create discontent as it spreads the notion that the church exists to provide entertainment, enjoyment and especially success projects to boost individuals and provide thrilling ego-trips for them. But the church is used by the Holy Spirit to deflate individual pride, compel believers to face up to reality, and encourage them to persevere in the hard and long slog of sanctification.

### *Joy in sanctification*

In the above reminders that conditions for sanctification are tough it would be unbalanced if we lost sight of the joyful aspect. In persecution we are urged to rejoice and be glad (Matt. 5:12). Frequently in Scripture tribulation and joy are brought together. 'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings' (Rom. 5:3). Never are we allowed to think along stoical lines. Jeremiah thought that his task was intolerable — his pain unending, his wound grievous and incurable — yet he found God's words the joy and delight of his heart (Jer. 15:16ff). Enduring hardship and discipline is an essential part of progressive sanctification that exercises us for our good, 'that we may share in his holiness', as the Scriptures says, 'no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace' (Heb. 12:7-11).

The greater our understanding of the purpose of God with respect to our sanctification the better the prospect of beneficial results in times of trials. Only as we come to terms with this will we be able to follow the advice of James: 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds' (James 2:2).

E.H. □□□



*A comment by pastor Chris Robinson of Dublin*

# The Pope's visit to England?

I do not think that it would be appropriate for me as an Irishman, living in Dublin, to tell Britishers what their attitude to this proposed visit should be. However, as it is only just over a year since he visited us here in the Republic of Ireland, perhaps I will venture to make a few comments.

It is surely wrong to allow various leaders of false cults and false religions to visit England and at the same time discriminate against the leader of the Roman Catholic Church! Is it right to discriminate between Roman Catholics and Protestants? Surely there is no difference between them in God's sight — all are in need of God's saving grace and mercy. 'The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.'

My objections to the office of Pope are theological, that is, I do not accept the claim of the Bishop of Rome to be the Vicar of Christ on earth and the Head of the one, true Church of Christ. Scripture clearly teaches that there is only one Head of the Christian Church and that is Christ himself. Jesus said: 'And do not call any one on earth "father" (Pope means father) for you have only one Father and he is in heaven' (Matt. 23:9 NIV). Scripture does not support the claims of the Roman Catholic Church to be Christ's Church. Indeed when we test these claims we find that they are false. In proof of this let us first of all consider the question of:

**1. Authority** — For us this is the Word of God *alone*. See Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17. For the Roman

Catholic this is the Bible plus Tradition interpreted by the Magisterium or Teaching Authority of the Church. Thus we are not bound to believe anything that is not taught in Scripture, whereas the Roman Catholic is obliged to believe whatever the Church defines, whether there is biblical warrant or not e.g. The Dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary defined by Pius XII in 1950.

**2. The Person of Christ** — Rome is doctrinally orthodox concerning the Person of Christ, but in practice denies the humanity of Christ by her teaching about the Virgin Mary and the Saints. If Christ is perfectly human and perfectly understanding then why go to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude or the Virgin Mary? The Roman Catholic idea of the office of a priest is also an infringement of the mediatorial office of Christ, for the priest is said to be 'another Christ'. In the Sacrament of Penance he hears confession and forgives sins. This is a denial of Christ as the sole mediator between God and men; see 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6. It is also denial of the fact that Christ's priesthood is an *intransmissible* one: see Hebrews 7:24. Believers do not offer any sacrifices but the sacrifices of praise, prayer, thanksgiving and almsgiving: see Hebrews 13:15-16. Christ's priestly offices *on earth* is completed. He is now ministering in heaven: his state of humiliation has ended. He is now in a state of glorification — see Hebrews 8:4; 9:24; 10:10-14.

**3. The Work of Christ** — If you suggested to a Roman Catholic that the Roman Catholic Church did not

really believe in the Sacrifice of the Cross, he would be shocked! Are not crucifixes and statues in evidence everywhere? Indeed is not the Mass, the renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross? However the Roman Catholic Church by its teaching about the Mass completely devalues the Work of Christ on Calvary, for it teaches that the Mass is, a. A renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross b. A sacrifice that atones for sin c. A continuation of the Work of Calvary.

But Scripture teaches that Calvary cannot be renewed or repeated because it is final, full and complete, being:

a. *A sacrifice to end all sacrifices* — ‘... what he has done, he has done once for all; and the offering was himself’ (Heb. 7:27): ‘... where they are so remitted there is no longer any room for a sin offering’ (Heb. 10:18).

b. *A completed work* — ‘... by a single offering, he has completed his work for all time in those whom he sanctifies’ (Heb. 10:14).

c. *An all-sufficient sacrifice* — It is his own blood, not the blood of goats and calves, that has enabled him to enter once for all, into the sanctuary: the ransom he has won lasts for ever (Heb. 9:12).

4. *The Nature of the Church* — We believe that there are two Scriptural uses of the word ‘Church’, both speaking of the one Church from different aspects.

The Church is *universal and invisible* — consisting of all the redeemed, past, present and future — the Body of Christ, all those who are born again of the Spirit of God.

The Church is *local and visible* — consisting of those who are believers, joined together in a corporate fellowship, preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, observing the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and exercising a godly discipline. In contrast to this, the Roman Catholic view of the Church is of a visible society with a hierarchical structure of Pope, Bishops and Priests.

5. *The Nature of Worship* — True worship is in spirit and truth (John 4:24). False worship is mere ritualism and is taken up with the form and misses the inner reality. It is invariably divorced from the realities of life, so that multitudes can go through all their religious duties and yet continue to live a life of sin. True worship transforms the worshipper and gives glory to God. Roman Catholicism more often than not is mere ritualism and we are reminded of our Lord’s condemnation of the Jews of his day: ‘You hypocrites, it was a true prophecy Isaiah made of you, writing as he did. This people does me honour with its lips, but its heart is far from me; their worship of me is vain for the doctrines they teach are the commandments of men’ (Mark 7:6-8).

As far as Pope John Paul II himself is concerned, he certainly appears to be a very pleasant person. However, the question is, what is his theological position? What does he believe? The purpose of his visit to Ireland was to visit a Marian Shrine at Knock, Co. Mayo. Mariolatry is anything but Christian, savouring more of superstition and idolatry. His speeches here in Ireland were certainly in the traditional vein. One had the impression that the liberals were so shocked by his ultra-



conservatism that they could not speak. Their silence was anything but golden!

John Paul II, as Head of the Vatican State, cannot say with Jesus: 'my Kingdom is not of this world . . .' (John 18:36). Politics and religion make an unsavoury alliance. The Roman Catholic Church is now a stranger mixture than ever with traditionals and liberals, political priests and old-fashioned conservatives being such strange bed-fellows!

Having, I hope, made my position clear regarding the Roman Catholic Church, I would like also to say that I hold no brief for apostate Protestantism. Nominal Protestantism has never saved anyone. What is the use in belonging to a Protestant Church, with a sound creed which multitudes of so-called members, and indeed leaders and ministers, do not believe!

I see no evidence of Christian love in constantly attacking the Roman Catholic Church, while at the same time making no effort to reach Roman Catholics with the Gospel. 'God so loved the world' — and that includes Roman Catholics!

Let us remember that whatever politico-religious system we face, the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but spiritual, divinely powerful. There is only one answer to counterfeit Christianity and that is to speak the truth in love. The truth without love is a lie and love without the truth is confusion!

Therefore while I cannot support the call to oppose the visit of the Pope to England, at the same time I hope I have made it clear that I do not agree with the specious claims of the Bishop of Rome. □□□

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## The Question of the Text—Majority or Eclectic?

On Thursday 11th September 1980, the Whitefield Fraternal met at 5 Fairford Close, Haywards Heath, Sussex, to consider matters relating to the text of the New Testament. The chairman for the day was Bob Horne, editor of the *Evangelical Times*, and the two speakers were Keith Davies (Tuckingmill) and Bob Sheehan (Bexleyheath).

Keith Davies 'opened the batting'. He spoke first of the various areas of agreement already existing between Evangelicals on textual matters. The number of the known Greek manuscripts (over 5,000) and their broad agreement is generally accepted among us (100% of the MSS agree on 80% of the text; 95% agree on another 10%; over 95% agree on another 4%; over 90% agree on another 3%; so, for only 3% of the text do less than 90% agree). We also agree on the Doctrine of Scripture — *verbal* inspiration of jots and tittles, vowels and consonants. He said that the issue is not so much whether any major doctrine is affected, it is a question of what exactly is God's Word. What are the words of Scripture? Then he made some comments on the conduct of the debate — 'We must be frank, yes, but brotherly too'. The two papers and their reception by the large number of men present conformed to this desire. A good spirit of humble enquiry dominated the meeting.

Keith Davies then proceeded to make some comments on the 'Received Text', first by giving the history of its production in 1633 by the Elzevir brothers of Leiden, whose preface to that edition attached the label 'Received' to it — 'Thus you have the text that is now received by everyone. . . .' In England Stephens' edition of 1550 is usually treated as the 'Received Text' while the Elzevir edition of 1633 is so regarded on the Continent. The 'Received Text' is not, strictly speaking, identical with the 'Majority Text' but it is very close to it, as less than 1,500 adjustments would be necessary to bring it into line with the majority of manuscripts.

From these and other additional comments, Mr. Davies went on to the bulk of his paper under the heading 'Arguments in favour of the Majority Text'. He opened this up by

expressing his disquiet over the so called 'assured results of textual criticism' in a number of particulars. The manuscripts and their age and origin were first considered, and what disturbed him was that nearly all the earliest manuscripts came from one geographical area – Egypt, an area to which no autograph copies of New Testament books had been sent. He was uneasy about the attempts at grouping manuscripts according to genealogy and 'community of error'. He then expressed concern over the view that relegates the testimony of the majority of manuscripts in a way that suggests that the text they contain is a late development. From these areas of disquiet he went on to make comments on the evidence available to us. Firstly he spoke of the external evidence of Texts, Versions and Fathers, and sought to show that the Majority Text is not to be ignored because there is in fact early evidence for its existence. Then, secondly, he dealt with internal evidence and the so called 'canons of textual criticism'. These 'canons' as criteria for arriving at the best text were shown to be questionable in their suitability for each has grave weaknesses in application.

From this section on 'evidence' Mr. Davies discussed the history of the transmission of the text in two ways (a) starting from the autographs, and (b) starting from the manuscripts in existence today. The final section of the paper dealt with appropriate criteria for arriving at the best text, and the speaker considered that Dean Burgon's seven 'Notes of Truth' provided a suitable framework for determining the text today.

His final comments expressed a desire to see the Received Text revised to conform to the majority of manuscripts, a desire to see a translation in Standard English based on it, and finally a plea that the spirit of division among Evangelicals should be overcome.

After a time of profitable discussion, lunch was served following which Bob Sheehan presented his paper.

He also made one or two comments on the 'Received Text' but went almost immediately into a consideration of the five positions on the textual issue which he believed confront us today.

He first dealt with what he called the 'Arithmetic Argument' which is that position that regards the text of the majority of manuscripts as the true text. Mr. Sheehan found this argument weak, because large numbers do not of themselves guarantee truth or accuracy. He then passed on to what he called the 'E. F. Hills Theory'. Dr. E. F. Hills has set out his ideas in various publications, and they may be simply put as reliance on the singular providence of God to the Greek speaking Church to preserve the true text. The speaker felt that this argument is unproved and unprovable, particularly as the Byzantine text type was unknown before the fourth century.

Thirdly Mr. Sheehan dealt with the theory of W. N. Pickering who rejects the ideas of text types. He also argues that the early Church with its high view of Scripture would have endeavoured to copy the Scriptures as accurately as possible. Most errors would have come from the influence of heretics. The weakness of this theory is that the orthodox were also known to tamper with the text when it suited them. The speaker also took issue with Pickering over his attack on the extreme eclectic method which only uses two of the 'canons' of textual criticism. To define eclecticism so narrowly is unfair, as most who would want to follow an eclectic method would want to use a wider selection of criteria for assessing a reading.

So, Mr. Sheehan gave his own views under the title of 'an eclectic approach'. Where there is competition among readings, he listed the following principles as suitable to use in coming to a conclusion as to which reading is to be accepted: 1. It is important to know the date of a particular variant and the dates of its rivals, 2. It is also important to know the number of witnesses to a particular reading, and 3. Those witnesses need to be understood in their groups and historical locations. Also, knowledge of the conditions in which the copyists worked is necessary. We must also understand that they were men who had the same frailties as we have. So, when two variants are before us which seem to have equal support, we have to consider how the scribes would have reacted.

In his final summing up Mr. Sheehan spoke of what our attitude should be to those who differ from us in these things. Both speakers were brothers in Christ and were not prepared to break fellowship over their differences on textual matters. They both sincerely believed the other to be mistaken, but they would not break fellowship over that. He pleaded for the same spirit of brotherliness and respect to be seen among others. The time of discussion which followed exemplified that spirit and was therefore all the more profitable for those who attended the Fraternal. It was a good day, and augurs well for the future, as undoubtedly more discussion will take place on these issues. □□□



*David Eby who studied at Westminster Seminary is now engaged in church planting in Denver, Colorado, USA. The following work (in which some of the Owen quotes have been slightly abridged) is extracted from a larger study prepared by Mr. Eby guided by Dr. Daniel Clair Davis. The references to Owen's works volume and page numbers are shown in brackets.*

## **The place of prayer in Sanctification**

### *1. The Definition and Importance of Prayer*

For Owen, prayer is 'a gift, ability or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight and other graces, in a way of vocal requests, supplications, and praises unto God' (4:271). The Scripture clearly sets forth the Christian's access and approach to God to be by Jesus Christ and through the enabling of the Holy Spirit (4:336). Since faith is the instrumental cause of our sanctification (3:414) and since prayer can be described as an act or working of faith (3:385, 445) although there are several duties that are necessary for our growth in holiness (3:554) prayer, due to its own nature and God's appointment, is particularly contributive to spiritual growth (3:398; 4:224).

Since Owen's definition of sanctification gives us a framework for viewing the Christian life as having both a negative side (putting off sin) and a positive side (putting on righteousness) we will consider prayer in light of this two-part framework.

### *2. Prayer As a Means of Dealing With Sin*

We shall deal with this heading under two divisions: A. prayer and cleansing from sin, and B. prayer and combating sin.

#### **A. Prayer and Cleansing from Sin**

Sin involves both guilt and pollution. Guilt arises from the legal problem of God's broken law and God's flaunted authority, and pollution comes from the fact that the image of God has been marred in us. As Owen puts it, our spiritual beauty, harmony and symmetry has been deformed and our spiritual nobility debased (3:429-430). All men, including the conscience-stricken pagan who continually attempts to cleanse himself by washings (3:429), are aware of their spiritual filthiness before God. A sense of filth and shame accompany an awareness of sin (3:428) and purification from this filth is 'the first proper notion of internal real sanctification' (3:423).

Owen establishes the need for cleansing from the pollution of sin in these words:

To suppose that an unpurified sinner can be brought unto the blessed enjoyment of God, is to overthrow both the law and the gospel, and to say that Christ died in vain (3:432-433).

Initially the need for cleansing from sin is met when the Holy Spirit takes a sinner through a sequence of events, drawing him to Christ and bringing him to the point where he actually, specifically applies to the blood of Christ as the only hope for his cleansing from sin. Owen advances four steps in this work of the Holy Spirit. First, he convinces the sinner of his defilement from sin, as stated in John 16:8.

Without this preparation, whereby we come to know the plague of our own hearts, the infection of our leprosy, the defilement of our souls, we shall never make application unto the blood of Christ for cleansing in a due manner (3:443).

Secondly, he presents to us the only remedy for our purification, the blood of Christ. Thirdly, he works faith in us so that we actually apply to that blood through faith acted out in prayer, and finally

The Holy Spirit *actually* communicates the cleansing, purifying virtue of the blood of Christ unto our souls and consciences, whereby we are freed from shame, and have boldness towards God (3:445).

The basic elements of this process remain in force for the believer after initial conversion. The Christian does not graduate into some higher programme in the name of advanced sanctification. No, he continues to be cleansed from sin in the same manner.

In all fervent supplications for the purifying and cleansing of their souls by the sprinkling and washing of the blood of Christ, the faith and persuasion whereof give them peace and holy boldness in the presence of God, without which they can have nothing but shame and confusion of face in a sense of their own pollutions (3:445).

In light of this, the believer has two duties, firstly continual self-abasement remembering the awful state from which he has been delivered.

But when believers shall consider what was their vile and polluted state with respect unto God, when first he had regard unto them, it will cause them to walk humbly in a deep sense of it - - God calls his people to self-abasement, not only from what they are, but from what they were and whence they came - - Hence proceed their great and deep humiliations of themselves, and confessions of their own vileness in their prayers and supplications considering the holiness of God (3:459).

Secondly, everlasting thankfulness for his initial deliverance.

Owen proposes three things which attend this latter duty of thankfulness. The first is a rightful evaluation of the blood of Christ, that it alone was able to purify us, and it alone can continue to purify us.

Had we not been washed in the blood of Christ, we must have lived and died in our pollutions, and have lain under them to eternity; for the fire of hell will never purge the defilements of sin, much less will the fictitious fire of purgatory cleanse any from them. How ought we then to prize, value and admire, both the virtue or efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the love from whence it was given for us and is applied unto us! (3:460).



The second is inward joy due to our freedom from shame, based on God's kindness toward us and our awareness of the ability of Christ's blood to cleanse us, giving us filial boldness before God and the third is an acknowledgment of these things in actual praise.

Since pollution is part of every sin, and the Christian defiles himself daily, the believer needs to continually go to Christ's blood for cleansing.

We defile ourselves everyday, and if we go not everyday to 'the fountain that is open for sin and for uncleanness', we shall quickly be all over leprous. Our consciences will be filled with dead works, so that we shall no way be able to serve the living God, unless they are daily purged out. -- I am persuaded no true believer in the world is a stranger unto this duty; and the more anyone abounds therein, the more genuine is his faith evidenced to be, and the more humble is his walk before the Lord (3:463).

## B. Prayer and Combating Sin

The Christian is called to do battle with sin, not only to fight it, but to destroy it. Prayer plays a substantial role in this battle (3:557, 6:224). Again, Owen stresses the authorship of the Holy Spirit in this activity, not as sole agent, but as our enabler, so that we perform the duty of prayer that God has appointed for the mortification of our sin.

With regard to sin and its power, prayer does two things, it complains and it petitions. In prayer the believer pours out his complaint to God about the trouble and grief caused by indwelling sin, its deceit, its omnipresence, and about his lack of ability to control sin. Owen says that this ought to be the 'principle matter and subject' of the Christian's complaints to God (we would do well to ask ourselves what we complain about in prayer) and goes on to ask:

What is more acceptable unto God than for his children, out of a pure love unto him and holiness, out of fervent desires to comply with his mind and will, and thereby to attain conformity unto Jesus Christ, to come with their complaints unto him of the distance they are kept from these things by the captivating power of sin (3:558-559).

In prayer, the believer also petitions God about sin, asking for grace to fight and conquer it.

And these petitions or requests are -- wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, who therein 'maketh intercession for us, according to the will of God'; and hereby doth he carry on this work of the mortification of sin, for his work it is. He makes us to put up prevalent requests unto God for such continual supplies of grace, whereby it may be constantly kept under, and at length destroyed (3:559).

Owen also points out that prayer does something within the Christian that tends to weaken and destroy his indwelling sin. When the believer prays about sin, either in complaint or petition, his desire for holiness is increased and his hatred for sin is strengthened. He grows in his love and delight in holiness, his mind is fixed on it so that prayer can really and actually mortify sin because,

the detestation and abhorrency of sin is increased in us; and where this is not so, there is some secret flaw in the prayers of men, which it will be their wisdom to find out and heal (3:560).

Owen leaves us with the idea that sin can prevent us from praying properly about sin, or possibly neglecting to pray at all. His piercing statement 'Be killing sin or it will be killing you' (6:9) may be re-phrased as 'If you are not praying properly about your sin, sin may destroy your prayer life.' Sin opposes all duties of obedience. Since prayer is one of those duties, which in its 'own nature and by God's appointment' is especially designed to weaken and destroy indwelling sin, sin will attempt, through deceit, to draw the mind away from attending to it.

Owen devotes chapter IX of his treatise on 'Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers' to this subject. Prayer and meditation on Scripture are duties that especially combat sin for the following reasons. Firstly, in prayer the believer is brought to an awareness of the secret workings of sin, because in prayer he faces his spiritual weaknesses and needs, and discovers the deceitful work of sin in his own heart.

The Spirit in this duty is as the candle of the Lord unto the soul, enabling it to search all the inward parts of the belly. It gives a holy, spiritual light into the mind, enabling it to find out the subtle and deceitful imaginations of the law of sin therein - - And what can possibly be more effectual for its ruin and destruction? (6:226).

Secondly, in prayer and meditation the heart gains a full sense of the vileness of sin.

He that pleads with God for sin's remission, pleads also with his own heart for its detestation - - And hence it is that oftentimes in this duty the heart is raised to the most sincere, effectual sense of sin and detestation of it that the soul ever obtains in its whole course of obedience (6:227).

Thirdly, prayer is the way appointed by God to receive strength against sin.

Prayer is the way of obtaining from God by Christ a supply of all our wants, assistance against all opposition, especially that which is made against us by sin (6:227).

Fourthly, prayer undermines sin, because in prayer the believer unites himself with God against all sin. The heart desire of every believer is to obey God and to spurn sin.

The inmost parts thereof engage themselves to God, to cleave to him in all things, and to oppose sin in all things. He that cannot do this cannot pray. To pray with any other frame is to flatter God with our lips, which he abhorreth (6:227).

Having noted how effective prayer is against sin Owen now turns to consider how sin attempts to be effective against prayer and meditation. First, sin takes advantage of the fact that the flesh gets weary of the private duty of prayer. The flesh has a complete dislike for communion with God. Private duties performed in secret, do not receive the applause of men and so the



'carnal part of the soul' is not satisfied in them, unlike public duties, where others may see and applaud us. So there is a league formed between our physical and carnal nature to oppose prayer and if we do not continually consider this duty to be indispensable, and stir up our hearts to be engaged in it, we will be drawn away from its performance. Second, sin seeks to deceive us into thinking that if we give ourselves to private prayer and meditation we will have no time for other important responsibilities. It is a version of a 'I'll become so heavenly minded that I won't be of any earthly good' argument. But God gives us enough time for all the duties he requires of us and so normally we are not called to choose between 'robbing God of that which is due to him and our own souls' and neglecting earthly responsibilities (6:230). Third, sin seeks to influence our mind by 'corrupt reasonings', or what we would call rationalisation, to think that it is not necessary to give ourselves to private prayer because we can make up for this lack by giving ourselves to other duties like family or public prayer. This was Saul's rationalisation who thought he could 'compensate his disobedience by sacrifice'. These public duties do not deal a blow to the deceit and power of sin the same way that private prayer does. Finally, sin seeks to draw our minds away from prayer through procrastination. It promises the soul that there will be 'a more diligent attendance unto this duty when occasions will permit'.

By this means it brings the soul to say unto its convictions of duty, as Felix did to Paul, 'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.' And by this means oftentimes the present season and time, which alone is ours, is lost irrevocably (6:230).

These are the ways that sin seeks to draw us away from the duty of prayer, to divert us from what we know to be our duty as we live for God. Knowing about the deceitful ways of sin will help us to 'discern where lies the beginning of our declensions and failings in the ways of God'. This is a great advantage to us. When the beginnings of a disease are known, then we can get an early start on directing ourselves toward a cure (6:231).

We close this heading with an exhortation from Owen to those who have become slothful or negligent in the duty of prayer, a call to renew our mind, that we might be diligent in prayer.

By one way or other your minds have been made heedless, regardless, slothful, uncertain, being beguiled and drawn off from their duty. 'My careless, my deceived mind, hath been the *beginning of sin* and transgression unto my soul.' And this discovery will direct the soul unto a suitable way for its healing and recovery; which will never be effected by a multiplying of particular duties, but by a restoring of the mind, Psalms 23:3 (6:231-232).

### 3. *Prayer as a Means of Growing in Grace*

We now turn to consider some of Owen's thought on the positive aspect of prayer in sanctification, growing in grace or putting on righteousness.

Very simply, prayer is the means by which we ask God for supplies of grace

that we need in order to be obedient to him, and to become like Jesus Christ. The following quotations will suffice to support this point:

We *act faith* in prayer and expectation on the promise for supplies of grace enabling us unto holy obedience (3:385).

Let not those who can omit proper and due seasons of meditation, prayer -- and the like, at their pleasure, on the least occasions, excuses or diversions, ever think or hope to have the ways of obedience smooth, its paths pleasant or its duties easy (3:500).

-- It is required of us that we endeavour diligently, in the whole course of our lives, after these continual supplies of *grace*. If we are negligent in prayer, meditation, reading, hearing of the Word, and other ordinances of divine worship, we have no ground to expect any great supplies to this end (3:554).

#### 4. *The Holy Spirit as the Enabler of Prayer*

In keeping with the balance that Owen seeks to maintain between the agency of the Holy Spirit and the agency of the redeemed sinner, in prayer, Owen asserts that it is the believer who prays, but it is the Spirit who enables him to do so. The Spirit does this by giving us gracious inclinations, dispositions, ability, by exciting gracious affections in us (faith, love and delight) and by enabling us to express those affections in vocal prayer (4:259, 268).

The Spirit enables us to pray according to God's mind in three important ways.

First, as to the matter of prayer (the content of what to pray for) the believer is ignorant as to what his needs are. The Spirit works in conjunction with the Word, showing us, by way of commands and promises, what our real needs are, and thus what we ought to pray for. The spirit of God makes us aware of two principle matters of prayer, our lack of faith and our lack of holiness.

I cannot think that they ever pray aright who never pray for the pardon of unbelief, for the removal of it, and for the increase of faith. If unbelief be the greatest of sins, and if faith be the greatest of the gifts of God, we are not Christians if these things are not one principal part of the matter of our prayers (4:277).

The darkness and ignorance that is in our understandings; -- the stubbornness, obstinacy, and perverseness of our wills by nature, with their reluctancies unto and dislike of things spiritual -- all keeping the soul from a due conformity unto the holiness of God, -- are things which believers have an especial regard unto in their confessions and supplications. And to give over treating with God about them -- for mercy in their pardon, for grace in their removal, and the daily renovation of the image of God in them hereby, -- is to renounce all religion and all designs of living unto God (4:278).

No man can pray as he should because he fails to know his needs. Only the Spirit can give us insight into the things we should pray for. The Spirit also acquaints us with the grace and mercy that are in the promises of God, so that we pray not only according to the commands of God, but also according to his promises. Both command and promise reveal our real needs.



As to how he does this, the Spirit does not work prayer in us in an immediate, supernatural way, as he did with the Old Testament prophets who often did not understand what they were saying. Rather he works through Scripture to teach us our needs and he moves us to pray according to those needs. When a believer begins to pray with spiritual insight into the commands and promises of God, seeing God's mercy and grace in them, when he begins to acknowledge his deep spiritual needs, his lack of holiness and when he begins to desire to increase and grow in holiness, he gives evidence that the Spirit of God has been graciously working in him because no natural man is concerned for these things. These 'desires and requests - - for the matter of them, are far above their natural contrivances and invention' (3:398).

Secondly, as to the goal of prayer ('the right and proper ends') the Spirit guides the believer, keeping his mind on two goals, without which prayer is corrupted and made vain 'by an application of it unto false or mistaken ends'. The first goal is that all the success of his petitions may have 'the immediate tendency unto the glory of God'. Without the Spirit's help, we

*aim at self only and ultimately* in all we do. Our own profit, ease, satisfaction, mercies, peace, and deliverance, would be the end where unto we should direct all our supplications; whereby they would be all vitiated and become abominable (4:286).

The second goal of prayer is that the result of it might be the '*improvement of holiness*' in the believer, bringing him into a closer conformity to God.

Thirdly, as to the manner of prayer or having a proper valuation, and love for the things prayed for, the Spirit works in us to have a supernatural desire to possess and enjoy the things prayed for, to delight in God as the majestic merciful, fatherly object of prayer, and to be intent on Jesus Christ as the only means of our approach and acceptance before God (4:287-297).

### *5. Prayer as A Test of Sanctification*

We now turn to prayer as a test of sanctification.

All men are prone to have a low view of the significance of progressive, inherent sanctification. There is first a tendency to confuse evangelical holiness with morality and religious devotion, failing to see that gospel holiness is the work of the triune God, implanting spiritual life within an undeserving sinner. Any work that requires the wisdom, power and working of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is no ordinary, common work but a great, excellent and glorious work.

It is a greater matter to be truly and really holy than most persons are aware of - - It is so great a work that it cannot be wrought by any but the God of peace himself (3:481).

Sanctification is not only a progressive work but it is a certain work. God certainly will preserve the work of grace that he has begun in one of his own children.

A river continually fed by a living fountain may as soon end its streams before it comes to the ocean, as a stop be put to the course and progress of grace before it issue in glory (3:397).

The fact that he preserves spiritual life within us, even when it is so weak and infirm, due to the fact that it is 'in us' and even in the face of great opposition, should be a cause of the believer's great admiration for the wisdom, power and watchful care of God.

Among all the glorious works of God, next unto that of redemption by Jesus Christ, my soul doth most admire this of the Spirit in preserving the seed and principle of holiness in us, as a spark of living fire in the midst of the ocean, against all corruptions and temptations wherewith it is impugned. Many breaches are made in and upon our course of obedience by the incursions of actual sins; these he cures and makes up, healing our backslidings and repairing our decays (3:397, 398).

The reality that God will preserve us is no excuse or reason for us not to persevere. Since prayer is one of the key means of our perseverance, Biblical prayer becomes a test of sanctification.

Now, consider what it is that in your prayers you most labour about? Is it not that the body, the power, the whole interest of sin in you may be weakened, subdued, and at length destroyed? Is it not that all the graces of the Spirit may be renewed daily, increased and strengthened, so as that you may be more ready and prepared for all duties of obedience? And what is all this for, but that holiness may be gradually progressive in your souls, that it may be carried on by new supplies and additions of grace, until it come to perfection? (3:398-399).

Owen is saying that if the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us, he is also working in us to pray for our sanctification. If we have no concern for holiness then we must question whether God has begun a work of grace in us at all. If this is the case then we must call upon God to do that work of grace. But all who are confident of a work of grace begun, are strongly exhorted by this passage. We do well to ask ourselves two questions, 'What do I pray for?' and 'How do I pray?' If our prayer lacks fervency and consistency, if our requests are selfish and short-sighted, if our desire to know and glorify God and to grow in holiness is weak, then Owen motivates us to persevere in prayer calling on the Spirit to do his work within us.

#### *6. Stirring up the Gift of Prayer*

Owen does not leave us without guide lines as to how we may persevere in Biblical prayer and thus grow in holiness. His instruction as to aids for stirring up prayer is covered in six observations. First, constant consideration of our own hearts, our spiritual condition, will give us the content of our requests to be made in prayer. Second, constant searching of the Scriptures motivates prayer,

Who is it who almost at any time reading the Scripture, with a due reverence of God and subjection of conscience unto him, hath not some particular matter of prayer or praise effectually suggested unto him? And Christians would find no small advantage - if they would frequently, if not constantly, turn what they read into prayer or praise unto God (4:322). ☐☐☐





From left to right, Wilfred Kuhrt and Achille Blaize co-pastors (see RT57, p. 14 for comment). Steve Dray and William Smith of Zion Baptist Church, New Cross, London.

## Editorial

This brief editorial appears on the last page to show that there is no significance in the order that the articles appear. Possibly the most soul nourishing contribution is that by John Owen as presented by David Eby. The previous two articles on the all important subject of sanctification being preparatory to it.

### The Carey Conference – Swanwick, 13th-16th January 1981

Rich material is anticipated from John Waite, principal of the Barry Bible College, South Wales, as he opens up the principles of interpretation for the psalms. Before taking up the pastorate of the Send Evangelical Church, Richard Brooks was a curate in a large Anglican Church in Sheffield. He will present practical materials related to the minister and his wife and home. Wilfred Kuhrt has the advantage of 40 years experience of missionary work in India as well as pastoring among immigrant communities in London. Stephen Turner is a young pastor from New Zealand who has been engaged in historical research at Aberystwyth and assisting Geoff Thomas who is scheduled to be in America next January. Stephen will share the practical lessons emerging from the life of William Williams and the Welsh revival. The other speakers need no introduction.

### Carey book

Held over for RT59 is a precis of David Kingdon's booklet of 16 pages, *The Gospel of Violence?* Also with the printer is an enlarged and updated work by Bob Sheehan, *Which Version Now?* Included will be the materials described on page 23.

### Building upheaval at No. 5

While Lyn is away in South Africa visiting her ailing parents and the editor is ministering in Canada and America, major building repairs will be going on at the manse. Many of the files will not be accessible. Andrew and Iris Symonds will do all they can to maintain an efficient service but if there is delay or difficulty we plead that you will be patient with us.

### Steve Dray and Martin Holdt

By mistake Steve Dray's name was omitted as the reviewer of that important book, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, by Richard Gaffin (RT57). One review we saw was an opinion on that book and no review at all. We do not have a news page this time but must report the move to Pretoria from East London of Martin Holdt. He is to lead a new church in partnership with Lynnwood Reformed Baptist congregation (see new address on back cover).

### The Carey Conference Swanwick, Derbyshire 13th-16th January 1981

		Stephen Turner <i>William Williams and the Welsh revival</i>	Guest speaker from abroad
John Waite <i>Interpreting the Psalms</i>	David Kingdon <i>'New Covenant Children'</i>	<i>Prayer time and sharing</i>	Simo Ralevic of Yugoslavia <i>(if he can come)</i>
John Waite <i>The Messianic Psalms</i>	Richard Brooks <i>'Keeping the vineyards'</i>	Wilfred Kuhrt <i>Asians in East London</i>	Herbert Carson

Further details from: John Rubens, Carey Conference, P.O. Box 65, Bedford.

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