



Dr Peter R. G. Trumper:
Biblical Verses in Remembrance
Tim J. R. Trumper
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Dr Trumper's funeral took place at Bethany Free Church, Clarboston Road, Pembrokeshire, Wales on Saturday, July 18, 2015, and was followed by a memorial service in Holywell Evangelical Church, Holywell, North Wales, on the following Tuesday evening, July 21. The funeral bulletin may be read. The following is a written version of the briefer extemporary versions of the "Biblical References in Remembrance" delivered at the funeral and memorial services.

To know anything of Dr Peter R. G. Trumper (July 28, 1934–July 5, 2015) would be to know that he was enthralled with the Holy Scriptures. He believed, with the apostle Paul, that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16), and therefore he was utterly committed to the teaching of the Bible.

Scripture thrilled him not simply because of what the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) calls its "many incomparable excellencies" (1.5), but because the *written Word of God* afforded him, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, an encounter with the *living Word of God*. In this encounter, he experienced the Lord Jesus Christ, and gained access to God the Father. He discovered thereby that the grace of the Father, working through Christ, turns God's righteous throne of judgment into a throne of grace. Given this, Dad's delight in Scripture could never remain a private matter. He reveled in the words of Jesus in John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

To read entire passages which meant so much to Dad would be too much on an occasion like this. We settle instead for a medley of biblical references he cited most, making use of them to explain how his encounter with the living God came about, and how the relationship which ensued developed over the following 61 years of his life.

I. BIBLICAL REFERENCES PERTINENT TO HIS EARLY YEARS

Dad's earliest years, so far as they relate to his spiritual journey, knew two phases—

Phase 1: His Days of Formal Religiosity.

As Dean Scholar of the choir at Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, he experienced much emphasis on outward religion to the detriment of the state of a person's heart. Reflecting on those early years, he resonated with the indictment of the Lord in Isaiah 29:13: "... this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do they honour me, but have removed their heart far from me" (cf. Matt. 15:8).

Phase 2: His Days of Cynical Atheism.

Understandably tired of the formal and empty religion of a mere ritualism, Dad turned atheist by his late teens. Although his time in the ranks of the unbelieving was brief, it was sufficiently intense to warrant a Christian reaction during his student days at the College of Music and Drama at Cardiff Castle. Due to play the part of Jesus in a college production, fellow student Maureen Jenkins (later Maureen Gilmore, missionary to Sicily) threatened a boycott. This led to the shelving of the play. Dad recalled storming out of the college, asking "Who is this Jesus?" Through Maureen's witness, Dad was brought to prayer: "God, if you are there, help me!" He often recalled how the one day he was ringleader of Maureen's mockers, and the next day he found himself saying to them, "Don't ask what has happened to me. All I know is that Maureen is right!"

Dad never turned back. Years later, he would reflect on the opening of Psalms 14 and 53: "The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*" He knew from experience the Psalmist to be spot on. We can, as finite creatures, neither shrink God to our understanding, nor stand in judgment on him. "Note," Dad would say, "The fool says not in his head that there is no God, but in his heart. His problem is not intellectual, but spiritual. The problem is not that he cannot believe in God, but that he will not."

II. BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO HIS PROFESSION OF FAITH

Once Dad came to realize that the eschewing of a formal ritualism did not require atheism, the stage was set for his appreciation of three other truths.

The first truth: Theism is not enough.

Theism, Dad knew well, means little in and of itself, for "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). What is required is not simply data about God, but a personal relationship to him. Such knowledge only comes



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through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These two elements of the doctrine of conversion he discerned in the Old Testament. The words of Isaiah the prophet are but one example:

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (55:6-9).

The call to repentance and faith continues in the New Testament, wherein Christ becomes the specific object of our trust. Indeed, Dad has directed us to cite Acts 20:21 on his gravestone, where Paul says to the Ephesian Elders that he kept back from them nothing that was profitable to them, showing them and teaching them publicly, and from house to house, testifying “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The second truth: Christian Words are not enough.

Dad had little time for the attempt to accept Christ as Savior but not as Lord. Although he joked that he had “set out for Hollywood but got only as far as Holywell,” his abiding sentiment was that of the apostle Paul: “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. . . . I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3: 7-8). His wit bespoke, then, no regret, for he had grappled with the force of personal ambition in light of Jesus’ question: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). Thus, he hid away the scrapbook of his accomplishments as an actor. To this day I have only seen it twice, and have not had the chance to go through it completely. His heart’s desire was that we should follow Christ.

The important distinction Dad made between conversion and discipleship I learned by experience. As an eight-year old, I entered the vestry one Sunday evening following the worship service to tell him that I had become a Christian. Expecting him to be overjoyed, to my great deflation he responded very calmly, “We will see.” He was right to be cautious, for I was mistaken. Only at the age of 15 did I finally come to know the Lord. I

also recall in 1999 the invitation to come to America, and the three weeks it took to weigh the respective responsibilities to my parents and to my calling. Offering Dad a cup of tea one morning, he received the drink with a “thank you,” and then, without commentary, added Jesus’ words: “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and yea, his own life also, he CANNOT be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, CANNOT be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, 27). His emphasis on the word “cannot” will forever remain with me. In it lay his understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. One cannot claim to do so authentically without maturing from a convert into a single-minded disciple.

The third truth: A lopsided positivity is not enough.

For much of Dad’s ministry there seemed to prevail in ministerial circles the view, “Just preach the gospel!” Dad loved preaching evangelistically, but he also took seriously Jude’s injunction that we should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Although his wit and sense of fun could make him mischievous on times, especially with those he deemed enemies of the gospel, he made a twofold distinction when contending for the faith.

On the one hand, he distinguished between the blind leaders of the blind, and those who were led by them into their blindness (see Matthew 23, for instance). He had no time for the former, but every sympathy and patience with the latter, and sought to deal with those in need of spiritual help with Christlike grace and truth (John 1:14). On the other hand, he distinguished the need to contend within the professing church against theological liberalism at one end of the spectrum and High Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism at the other end, from the need to speak up for the truth outside the church, especially given the rise of the new atheism and the spread of Islam. In this contending, he was likely influenced by both the expression of Christianity on offer at Llandaff Cathedral and the atheism it encouraged in his late teens.

III. BIBLICAL REFERENCES PERTINENT TO HIS SUFFERING

The word “suffering” is used cautiously, for Dad consistently said that he did not consider himself to be a sufferer. The first time he said this, I recall remarking in a jocular but mildly sarcastic fashion: “You are not a



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sufferer? Really?!" We could dismiss this denial as mere bravado, but to do so would be to underestimate the value he put on the cross of Christ.

Over time I came to understand that Calvary explained why he viewed the development of his Multiple Sclerosis so lightly. "Who could possibly fathom," he would ask, "what Paul meant by his two small words 'made sin' in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'" His twenty-five years housebound gave him plenty of time to meditate, and in his reading of Scripture and prayer he concluded that the social, physical, and especially spiritual nature of Christ's sufferings, questioned the validity of describing his MS by use of the same category. In this regard, the distinction of the Puritan, Thomas Watson, comes to mind: "Christ's sufferings are expiatory, ours are castigatory." In other words, Christ's sufferings cover our sins, whereas ours are the result of sin. That is not to say that he or we understood Dad's MS as a direct result of personal sin, but the disease was certainly a result of his living in a fallen world. Dad nevertheless found peace in his condition, by viewing it through the lens of the gospel. Especially relevant is what Martin Luther called "the wonderful exchange": Christ gets my sin and he dies, I get his righteousness and I live. This is beautifully expressed by Augustus Toplady (1740–1778) in a hymn which meant so much to Dad:

A debtor to mercy alone, Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with thy righteousness on, My person
and offering to bring.
The terrors of law and of God With me can have
nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood Hide all my
transgressions from view.

Dad chose this hymn a number of years ago for his funeral but changed his mind. He felt it was one of a number of hymns which needed to be hidden away in a draw for ten years, so that we would learn afresh to appreciate its meaning.

¹ In the order in which they were sung: "Immortal honours rest of Jesus' head" (William Gadsby); "O thou who camest from above" (Charles Wesley); "Nearer,

Yet, for all Dad's focus on the gospel, he *was* a sufferer. Pay very close attention to the hymns we sing today.¹ They express not only his fascination with Christ, but his realization that his MS was divinely intended to bring him into intimate fellowship with his Savior. In this sense, his MS took away, as he admitted, any temptation to trot out flippantly the words of 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon thee." He learned he had to live the text, and not simply to read it to the six people he knew who had received the diagnosis before him. Accordingly, toward the end of his ministry in Holywell he preached, I believe it was, thirty-nine sermons on Paul's words in Philippians 3:10: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." He cautioned us against flippant expressions of desire to know Christ. "Don't proclaim a desire to know him," he said in effect, "unless you are as prepared to fellowship with him in his sufferings as in his resurrection power."

That said, he had great compassion for those who suffer, beginning with Mum. "I am the one with the walking stick [then wheelchair], but it is really Mag who is suffering." He found sentimentality nauseas but had a listening ear and a compassionate response to those in real trouble.

IV. BIBLICAL REFERENCES PERTINENT TO HIS FAMILY LIFE

The Lord gave Dad a family. Although he became in time its most physically weak member, he was spiritually the strongest of us. Thus, the role of family patriarch came to him naturally, such that when he cited Scripture he had no need of putting on an air of authority. His life may have ebbed away over these last months, but his God-given *gravitas* remained.

The last conversations.

Our Friday morning conversations by telephone became a shadow of what they were. Initially, it became difficult for him to keep upright in his wheelchair and to hold the phone, yet he continued to ask the sort of

still nearer, close to thy heart" (Leila Morris); and "Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine" (Frances Jane Van Alstyne). For the hymns in full click on "Bulletin."



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questions which looked for substantive and spiritual conversation. Since he no longer had the strength to endure lengthy answers, I would mainly listen and let him say what he could in the time that was manageable for him. One memorable sentiment ran as follows: "I believe 'The dew of heaven' is falling on our family." He repeated this in person on our visit in June.

Now there are a number of references in Scripture to which Dad could have been alluding. There is Isaac's patriarchal blessing of Jacob in Genesis 27:28, or the closing of Ps. 133, but in all likelihood he was referring to Moses' words at the end of his life, which are recorded in Deuteronomy 32:2: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers on the grass." Whichever reference Dad had in mind he was excited about what he discerned was happening. Not simply because he sensed spiritual changes were occurring in the family, but because these were answers to specific prayers. That said, he did not rest satisfied. There were still others for whom to pray. He entered into unconsciousness with two names on his mind and lips. We await to see how the Lord will answer!

The last reading.

The last time Brenda and I saw him was on the evening of June 17—his and Mum's fifty-fourth wedding anniversary. Having sensed that morning from the reading of John 17—a chapter on the theme of the general resurrection—that we would not see him alive again, I asked Dad in our last hour together what he would like us to read. He chose Psalm 90. As a new octogenarian he was of course familiar with verse 10: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." But I was intrigued by the fact that verses 16 and 17—our motto text that year at Seventh Reformed Church—would be the last words we would read together: "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Although Dad had no interest in raising a dynasty of clones—"Be your own man in Christ" was his advice in life and in ministry—we prayed that the mighty working of God in his own weakness might display God's glory to his children, and to theirs in

turn. Indeed, how wonderful it would be if, by the grace of God, the foundation of gospel truth and witness established by Dad and Mum were to continue until the family line fizzles out, or until Jesus returns in power and in glory. Were Dad among us, he would love to quote the words of the apostle John of which he was so fond: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

The last Scripture.

Following June 17, Brenda and I never spoke to Dad again. He was just too ill to speak and too deaf to hear our voices on the telephone. He died within three weeks. At the point at which we returned to Grand Rapids he was still of a mind that the Lord might raise him up again. Certainly, he could have survived with Multiple Sclerosis, but his Multiple Myeloma proved too much. The week after we left a change in his breathing led to some open conversations about his dying. He was truly surprised to begin with, saying to the doctor, "Before too long, you'll be telling me I have three months to live!", when those around the bed wondered about three days. But, never wanting truth to be camouflaged, he accepted the fresh update from Mum, and, as my sister put it, prepared from then on to die. In a tribute Ceri penned, she records asking him whether he was concerned. To this he replied, "No, no, no. My times are in HIS hands." He was quoting Psalm 31:5, 15: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. . . . My times are in thy hand"—words which he preached on when closing his pastoral ministry on the last Lord's Day of 1986, which, unbeknown to us, he had already chosen for the front cover of his funeral bulletin, and with which he prepared to meet his Savior and his God.

Dr Peter Trumper is now with the Lord, but the witness of his life goes on. May God glorify his own name through this witness, strengthening us who live and using it to draw to Christ those yet in their sins! Amen.



" . . . God shall redeem me from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me." (Psalm 49:15)

"Jesus said . . . I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26).