

Lecture for The Metropolitan Tabernacle - July 2015

Our subject today is 'Reverence, the Pathway to Power'.

This is a massive subject. My task is to illustrate from history the fact that the high and most blessed periods of church history were those times when men looked upon God with reverence and holy fear.

We can right away say that this is a most vital subject and one of the most pressing needs in our churches today. The Royal preacher, Solomon in the Book of Proverbs begins his sermon Ch1:7 with these words, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. (wisdom and knowledge are not distinguished here).*

William Arnot says,

He intends to discourse largely on knowledge and wisdom in all their aspects, and he lays his foundation deep in" the fear of the Lord."

No knowledge fulfils its purpose unless through it we are brought to reverence God.

Or as another put it *"The gates of knowledge and wisdom are opened only to the knock of reverence. (R.F. Horton. Expositors p. 17). reverence is the only appropriate attitude in the presence of God.*

William Arnot defines this fear of the Lord as follows:

"The fear of the Lord", is an expression of frequent occurrence throughout the Scriptures. It has various shades of meaning, marked by the circumstances in which it is found; but in the main it implies a right state of heart toward God, as opposed to the alienation of an unconverted man.

Though the word is "fear," it does not exclude a filial confidence, and a conscious peace. There may be such love as shall cast all the torment out of the fear, and yet leave full bodied, in a human heart, the reverential awe which creatures owe to the Highest One.

There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Oh, fear the Lord, ye his Saints; for there is no want to them that fear him?

What God is, inspires awe; what God has done for his people commands affection.

God's way of morally ordering the world on the one hand holds the creature at a reverential distance while on the other hand drawing and attracting and embracing the child of God in the arms of everlasting love. See here the two complimentary

characteristics of God's moral ordering of the world, holding the creature reverently distant from the Creator, yet compassing the same about with everlasting love.

The whole of this complicated and reciprocal relation is often indicated in Scripture by the brief expression, "The fear of God."

We may remember every time we read the words "fear" in the Bible as it pertains to God we are really talking about this kind of filial reverence. Reverence is the result of attributing a great value to something. It is the realization that someone is holy, good, and to be treated with great respect.

Though it does have an element in it of being afraid of God, it also very much includes love of God and the realization of how wonderful he is in such a way that motivates our conduct and our thinking.

*My God how wonderful thou art,
Thy Majesty how bright!
How beautiful thy mercy-seat,
In depths of burning light.*

*Oh how I fear thee living God,
With deepest tenderest fear.
And worship thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears.*

Reverence is an aspect of adoration, it is the true response that leads to worship. Reverence is a very important factor in regard to how we relate both to God and others. Reverence and respect have similar meanings. However, reverence has more of the meaning of worship, and pertains to God.

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There has been a catastrophic erosion of reverence in the way that we worship God and serve God in recent decades.

We can begin to address this by very obvious examples of,

- 1. The way we dress when we come to worship, the whole idea of Sunday best has slipped out of many people's thinking.**
- 2. The way we speak to God and refer to God is clearly far too familiar, far too casual, and does not sound as if we appreciate who God is, and what sinful and fallen creatures we are.**

3. Neither do we honour or reverence God with our first-fruits, that is giving of our best to God in terms of service and priorities or giving due place to his Word in our lives.

Just to see and compare how far we may have wandered on the subject from the practices of our forefathers, let me quote from a book published by the Congregationalists in 1950 on the subject of conducting public worship.

The primary element in Christian worship is the adoration of God recognizing him as our Father in heaven and the august Lord of all worlds. Every service should begin by setting men before him. A sentence of Scripture, a prayer, or a hymn which confronts us with God in his Majesty, his righteousness, his compassion, and evokes reverence, penitence, gratitude, devotion – this is a fitting start for an appreciation of God in a glad solemnity. Worshipers must become engrossed in him. Victor Hugo says of his bishop Bienvenu: "he did not study God: he was dazzled by him."

The more completely we are taken out of ourselves and become oblivious to our problems, our feelings, even our desires, the better. At the outset of worship it is inappropriate to dwell on our needs or on our obligations, much less on our awareness or forgetfulness of the divine presence. God, as he has revealed himself, should grasp and absorb our attention.

Worship of the living God is well begun if an impression of his over whelming greatness and mystery, along with his graciousness, in Christ is conveyed. This is an essential part of the tradition of our Reformed Churches in their approach to the Sovereign Father.

If there be one characteristic more than others that contemporary public worship needs to recapture it is this awe before the surpassingly great and gracious God.

The Public Worship of God H. Sloane Coffin p. 17

Going into this subject more deeply we need to be aware of, and face up to the fact that the church of the 20th and 21st centuries has imbibed theological and cultural elements which are utterly contradictory, alien and destructive of the Biblical concept of reverence. If we really believe that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and at this point we could add two other quotations of the Proverbs i.e.*

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.

Proverbs 14:27.

The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Proverbs 19:23

If we really believe this then we are saying without this reverential loving fear of the Lord, without this sense of the awesome greatness and loving kindness of God, without a due sense of and acknowledgment of the transcendence of God, we cannot make progress as churches, we are not honouring God, we cannot fulfil the great commission properly, we cannot expect God to bless our churches or build them up. It will mean that we are unwise, it will mean that our theology is distorted, it will mean that we will be spending our time on things that do not really matter, it will mean that we will ultimately so lose our way, that we are not Christian churches anymore. If the fear of the Lord brings wisdom and the fear of the Lord brings life, then without it the opposite will be true.

We might remind ourselves that Protestant liberalism in the 20th century particularly in the latter part of the century lost the concept of the transcendence of God and at the same time attempted to make a synthesis between the Christian faith and the surrounding 20th century culture. The consequences of this have been devastating and far-reaching, their effects continue to this present time.

We might also go so far as to say that many who call themselves evangelical, now have no real sense of the transcendence of God, and have indeed also been invaded by an alien worldly culture that some have aptly described as modernity.

God in the Wastelands David F. Wells

Could Add Some saw this Coming

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We need also for a moment also to try and briefly set out the characteristics of this worldly culture, this anti - God culture, which is all around us, that often goes by the name, Modernism. (Modernization is not the same as Modernism).

We can concur with those who say that the essence of modernity is the death of the spiritual. The modernist seeks to negate the spiritual at every turn. To express this in stronger terms we may say, modernity is anti-- Christian.

One has put it like this.... A modernist is someone who is more concerned with air

pollution than soul pollution. A modernist is someone who wants clean air so that he can breathe dirty words. A modernist cares about big things, like whales, more than little things like unborn children, big things like governments more than little things like families and neighbourhoods. Big things like states rather than little things like souls.

Peter Kreeft

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Some of the Characteristic Elements of Modernism.

A Denial of Moral Absolutes and the Delusion that you can have Moral Standards without Christian Belief (In any culture the source of law is the god of that society. If man's reason the source of law, then reason is the god of that society, if it is a secular power, a government or a monarch, then that secular system is the god of that society.)
The Institutes of Biblical Law, Rushdoony p.4

1...We may say Modernism believes that we can have morality without true Christianity. The speed of moral collapse in society today bears testimony to this. When issues like Abortion, Gay marriage, euthanasia are discussed by the man in the street we see the utter lack of moral compass or principle underlying or guiding his opinions on such issues. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones waxed eloquently against this misconception in one of his famous sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians, he said:

In this Epistle the apostle.... is asserting here in chapter 4... That you cannot have morality without godliness. If we go back 100 years and more we find that the great emphases was upon godliness, but then a generation came which said in effect morality is very good and it is most essential for the country, but of course we do not want this godliness any longer; we no longer believe in the supernatural, we do not believe in miracles, we do not believe that Christ is the Son of God - He was no more than a great moral teacher- or so, of course, we must shed all this godly part of it. And they did so. They thought they could preserve the morality without godliness. But you see what is happening.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones of course was not the only one to point this out. Dostoevsky also spoke out saying, "morality without religion is impossible". A morality of mere convention, man - made morality, or man - revisable rules, is not morality at all, only mores, only synthetic, man-made, pseudo-morality, transitory and unsubstantial.

There is no morality without moral absolutes. There can be no moral absolutes

without God. An absolute law can only come from, and only be reinforced by, an absolute will. No civilization can stand without morality. This should be exceedingly obvious, both from common sense and from history, but it does not seem to be so obvious to many today. It is a fact that without morality there can be no survival of civilization. And history and logic stand as firm unchallengeable witnesses to this truth.

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In the 1970s faced with the growing rise of this kind of modernistic outlook Paul Johnson wrote, in his book, Enemies of Society, that the first, and perhaps the most important need of our times is to reassert our belief in moral absolutes..

Our is shallow and superficial age which rejects God and his truth, and seeks to build a relative, changeable adaptable moral consensus of its own is sleepwalking into a cruel totalitarianism. The fear of the Lord is certainly the safeguard of just and equitable law.

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2.

A Denial of the Concept of Return

Another feature of this so-called, Modernity or lack of reverence, or fear of the Lord is that it resists the concept of return. It's belief in "progress", through the influence of Darwinian evolutionary philosophy modern man foolishly believes that everything is slowly getting better naively, believing any kind of return, is inevitably retrograde.

The unfolding history of the Old Testament, illustrates the fact that many times in the nation of Israel's long history, it lost its way, turned its back on God, believed it could manage very well without God. Time after time the prophets call them to repent to turn back, to forswear their foolish ways. When they did return, they found new life, real progress, safety and sanity, reverence and seriousness, and real understanding of the purpose and point of life. They found and discovered man's true relationship to God, and man's true end and purpose i.e. to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Many have depicted revival as a digging out of the old wells, as Isaac did in Genesis Ch. 26. Another example would be the Old Testament saints brought back from Babylon and with sword and trowel in hand rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and indeed the Temple of the Lord.

The Reformation in the 16th century is a glorious illustration of the same thing, a spirit of repentance and turning back to God. It was a recovery of what had been lost,

cutting off the accretions, overlays and distortions of the later medieval papacy and getting back to God's Word.

Not many people read Wylie's History of Protestantism these days but they should.

It speaks of the effects of the Reformation as follows...

"Their mind opened out into an amplitude of faculty, a largeness of judgment, a strength and subtlety of reason, and a richness, boldness, and brilliancy of imagination, of which the world has seen no similar example, and which paled even the brightest era of classic times.

Had not the Reformation gone before, Bacon would never have opened the path to true science; Shakespeare's mighty voice would have been dumb forever; Milton would never have written his epic; Nor would John Bunyan have told us his dream; Newton would never have discovered the law of gravitation; Barrow would never have reasoned, nor would Taylor, Baxter, Howe, and many more ever have discoursed; not one of these deathless names would have been known to us, Nor would England or the world ever have possessed one of their immortal works.

"Christ brings us out of bondage into liberty," said Calvin, "by means of the Gospel." These words contain the sum of all sound political philosophy.

In returning to the right road as respects religion, England found that she had returned to the right road as respects government, as respects science, and letters, in short, she had discovered the one true path to national greatness.

History of Protestantism page 465-6

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3.

The Modern Man Centred Irreverent Outlook Steals from us the Nobler and Loftier View of Life.

The modern world has of course clearly brought some material advantages. Some astounding, magnificent and undreamed of success has been made in the understanding of and the harnessing of the forces of nature.

Someone born before the time of the Renaissance would stand utterly amazed at the progress that has been made in science and technology. There is no doubt about this though some would argue that these are not actually the fruits of Modernism at all, but that they are the fruits of the Reformation and of course of the Christian worldview in general from before the Reformation and after.

But whatever the source of these benefits, modernism claims them as its fruit and its influence, and it promises more benefits, in the future.

While the fruits of this kind of progress are self-evident, there is however a backward current that we can trace out in the tide of events.

While Modernism might rightly or wrongly claim to have brought some benefits to mankind, it cannot be denied that it has also brought multiple and profound losses to mankind.

We could list these losses – and compile quite a long catalogue.

For example..... Silence, time to reflect, self-control, sense of awe and wonder, humility, modesty, chastity, respect for authority, obedience, tradition, honour, chivalry, simplicity of lifestyle, holiness, loyalty, gentlemanliness, manliness, womanliness, propriety, cosmic justice, i.e. a sense that there is a higher justice than mere human justice, God's justice, pure passion, sacrificial spirit, respect for old-age, a recognition of the spiritual benefits of suffering, gratitude, fortitude, fidelity, real individuality, courage, absolute honesty and integrity, love of truth for its own sake, and obviously faith in God, and seriousness of life reverence, grasping of the meaningfulness of life, a sense of noble purpose.

A sense that...

*Life is real and life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal,
Dust thou art to dust return was not spoken of the soul.*

H. W. Longfellow

It is also true that we could profitably spend many hours, even days exploring each one of these lost virtues and qualities. We could add to the list other things like conversation, debate, meditation, Bible reading and prayer, deep friendship or imagination and even meaningful family life, on all these things modernism has taken its toll.

Modernism has certainly taken away things that are of the very essence of the Christian life and indeed all real life itself.

There is an emptiness in modern life, a lack of real purpose, lack of understanding, loss of perspective, shallowness, lack of depth, and significance, loss of seriousness, awe, wonder worship, reverence of loss of God.

A more sinister side of it is that man's will, man's purpose, man's aims, man's ideas, become the dominant force. Man believes he is the master of things. And with contempt and with little thought he begins to steamroller into absurdity the theological teachings of God, human sin, Christ and salvation, resurrection and eternal life, and all the Christian graces. In this secular man centred world such parochial virtues as compassion and self-sacrifice as Christianity produces, hardly deserve his glance or his notice. Without God life becomes baffling, and modern man closes his mind to the bigger picture, often allowing his mind to become absorbed in a daily round of entertainment and sports. He loses touch with the transcendental, he loses the capacity of moral evaluation, and allows things to happen just because they at that time appear to work well or give passing pleasure.

This world's empty glory is truly costing us too dear.

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4.

Sadly the modern church has succumbed to and embraced modernity in a big way. David F. Wells has summed this up under two points, in his book, God in the Wastelands.

1. A therapeutic culture... The new *therapism* as it has been called extols openness, frankness and emotional self absorption, people are taught that they should share all their feelings and guilt complexes, so that they can be dealt with by, "*trained counsellors, professionals* (often and dangerously a young man or woman with - thus far - very little experience of life).

This line of reasoning leads to the belief that feelings of guilt and anxiety are illnesses in need of a cure. This way of looking at life clearly has no real concept of sin, or wrongdoing, but merely treats badness as a disease, that presumably the trained counsellor can put right. This is the first characteristic of modernism that has invaded many churches and become part of their ministry, obscuring in some cases altogether the message of the Gospel, masking the true problem of man and failing to speak of its true remedy in Christ.

It is a shallow and unwise diagnosis of man's condition, it manifestly lacks the

depth, thoroughness, and seriousness of the analysis and remedy offered in the Gospel.

2. Another characteristic of modernism of course is that of consumerism. Consumer culture as some call it has to do with lifestyle. It emphasizes again the false and shallow belief that possessing material goods can help us attain happiness and satisfaction in life. This sort of outlook has invaded the church in so much as its methods of orchestrated, manipulation techniques, are widely used. Ministers assume the position of managers, worship becomes a form of entertainment, or leisure activity. The message of the church becomes one of providing a superficial feeling of well-being and distraction from the realities and pressures of daily life. Its message is very much influenced by the modern media of glossy magazines, the empty clichés and hollow comforts served out by the day long radio and TV advertisements.

Congregations have become consumers, they are no longer soldiers fighting the good fight, no longer strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Love so amazing, so divine that demands my soul, my life my all, is a concept far away from the me centred generation.

In short so many churches today have imbibed that which is not serious, not true, is without depth, without serious analysis of man's condition, and certainly without any true vision of God, clarity of Gospel message or reverence to God and his Word.

David F Wells further comments...

At the very moment when the modern world is mangling those whom it professes to be blessing, disordering their inner lives even as it smothers them in plenty, and rubbing its own nerves raw in its bumbling efforts to address its most painful and destructive problems – at this very moment, evangelicalism has bought cultural acceptability by emptying itself of serious thought, serious theology, serious worship and serious practice in the larger culture. And it appears that many evangelicals are completely obvious to the sell out or least unconvinced that the deal is a bad one.

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In many significant ways modernism has twisted evangelical faith. We must all face up to the fact that this kind of shallow irreverence as described above is one of the major problems if not the most serious issue facing our churches today.

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Part II

Let us try and trace out some historical examples of how the people of God were delivered from such times of darkness and apostasy in the past, and then move on to contrast the serious character of the lives of such people, and the radical difference of their outlook on life, their Christian outlook, and the outlook of many today who profess and call themselves Christians.

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First we may identify a sense of need.

Seriousness of longing and aspiration for better things

This certainly characterized the period prior to the Reformation, as well as the period prior to the 18th Century Revival, and indeed all true revivals of the church and all personal conversion.

There was undoubtedly a period before the Reformation in which there was a growing sense of need, a serious longing for spiritual reality, spiritual truth, spiritual surety, spiritual understanding, and a genuine closer walk with God.

Among those we could mention, would be devout individuals like Robert Grosseteste Bishop of Lincoln, (appointed Bishop 1235)

Grosseteste (1175-1253) studied Scripture at Oxford University, in their original languages, very rare at that time. He seems to have spent many years even as a churchmen searching for truth, and probably was not genuinely converted until he was in his 50s. The great desire and aim in life was that his own life and the life of the church would be ruled and brought into conformity with Scripture. He was not afraid to speak out on these matters.

Others such as **Thomas Bradwardine** (1290- 1349) chaplain to Edward III, and later to become Archbishop of Canterbury, A man clearly in the evangelical succession, who kept the lamp of truth burning in a dark age. He saw and believed the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and preached it to King Edward's troops during the time of his campaigns in France. He also and deeply disturbed by the corruptions of the papacy both theological and moral and was in a man who longing for better times.

O great and wonderful Lord, our God, thou only Light of the eyes! open, I implore thee, the eyes of my heart, and of others my fellow- creatures, that we may truly understand and contemplate thy wondrous works! And the more thoroughly we comprehend them, the more may our minds be affected, in the contemplation, with pious reverence and profound devotion!.....

Joseph Milner's History of the Church p.104

Others such as **William Langland** (c.1330 – c.1386)

the author of the famous Vision of Piers Plowman, a book some say which anticipated and possibly influenced Pilgrims Progress certainly in its use of allegory.

Langland was deeply grieved by the corruptions of the church of his day and longed for purer and better spiritual times, and these longings and yearnings he expressed and sought to pass on to others in this visionary work.

Even **Chaucer's** Canterbury Tales, were a veiled commentary and protest on the corruptions and worldliness of the church of his day.

Thomas Malory in Le Morte d' Arthur was longing for better purer and more godly days as he romanticised the history of King Arthur and his Knights..

Time fails me to tell of John Wycliffe and the Lollards, William Tyndale and so many other spiritual Giants and Reformers at that time whose lives were sacrificed, striving for, longing for, toiling for a new out pouring of the Spirit, and the reforming and reviving the churches of their day.

What was all this but a new and deep desire for seriousness in the things of God. A reaction against the nominalistic rationalism that had that invaded the church of that day, a reaction against the sacramentalism or sacerdotalism as we say, coming from another direction that had invaded the church, a reaction against the mummery of the travelling friar's, their jesting and play acting, as it was against the gross idolatry and superstition which was so prevalent, not to mention the sheer hypocrisy, worldliness and ignorance of many of the so-called church leaders.

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In the early 18th Century the Religious Societies were formed by people, looking and longing for better times and a closer personal walk with God. Such as the famous Holy Club at Oxford. Some like The Society for the Reformation of Manners formed by those alarmed and disturbed at the collapse of public morals.

Very significant were those groups who gathered to pray for revival. We can mention The Concert For Prayer for Revival

In 1748 Jonathan Edwards wrote a book, the fruits of the series of sermons delivered to his people at Northampton (North America), bearing the title..

" An humble attempt to promote explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in

extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on t earth pursuant to Scripture promises and prophecies concerning the last time."

I have no time to say more about this movement but it certainly represented a great humbling, amongst the people of God the great desire to turn back to God and to earnestly seriously seek his face.

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2.

Next we Consider the General Serious attitude to Life which characterized believers a former generations.

We know a great deal about the desires of the Puritans to enlarge the church and to deepen it in the things of God.

The Puritan sought to put God first in every aspect of life. Their high view of God also produced in them a high ideal of human life. The chief object of their lives was service and not pleasure. (How different from today). The Puritans were known for their mature and serious view of life. (Their view of life open maliciously caricatured, as being morose, dull, hardhearted, humourless, difficult to get on with. This is a distorted view, and when we speak of Puritan maturity and seriousness of life we mean something quite different.)

James Packer in his *Among God's Giants*, put it like this:

Maturity is a compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity. The Puritan exemplified maturity, we do not. The Puritans by contrast, as a body, were giants. They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear headed passion and warm hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal orientated and methodical, they were great believers, great hoppers, great doers, and great sufferers..

*Spiritual warfare made the Puritans what they were. They accepted conflict as their calling, seeing themselves as the Lord's soldiers – pilgrims, just as in Bunyan's allegory, and did not expected be able to advance a single step without opposition of one sort or another. Wrote John Geree, in his tract, *The Character of and Old English Puritan or Nonconformist* (1646): *The cross his banner and his word (motto), Vincit qui patitur, (he who suffers conquerors).**

Among God's Giants 24 - 25

Now 17th century literature abounds with examples of this serious outlook on life.

Jeremy Taylor

There was amongst Christians at that time as we know, (and not all of them Puritans) a high and reverential view of life. One example of this not often quoted from these days would be the Anglican, Jeremy Taylor. *Not a Puritan in his theology but certainly a Puritan in his way of life.* He was perhaps not as warm in the Gospel as we would have liked, but he certainly is an example of the outlook and manner of life that was so characteristic of the age.

Here he is speaking on the use of time.

He that is choice (careful) of his time will also be choice of his company, and choice of his actions, lest the first engage him in vanity and loss, and the latter, by being criminal, the throwing of his time and himself away and that going back in the accounts of eternity.

God hath given to man a short time here upon earth, and yet upon this short time eternity depends: but so, that for every hour of our life (after we are persons capable of laws, and know good from evil) we must give account to the great Judge of men and angels. (by the way, the man who lives in the belief of the Last Judgment always has a sense of purpose in his life, every action taken has some significance. My addition). And this is it which our blessed Saviour told us, that we must give account for every idle word, not meaning that every word which is not destined to edification, or is less prudent, shall be reckoned for sin; but that the time which we spend in our idle talking and unprofitable discoursings, that time which might and ought to have been employed to spiritual and useful purposes, that is to be accounted for.

For we must remember that we have a great work to do, many enemies to conquer, many evils to prevent, much danger to run through, many difficulties to be mastered, many necessities to serve, and much good to do. Many children to provide for, or many friends to support, or many poor to relieve, or many diseases to cure, besides the needs of nature and of relation, our private and public cares, and duties of the world, which necessity and the providence of God hath adopted into the family of religion.

God have given every man work enough to do, that there shall be no room for idleness; and yet have so ordered the world that there shall be space for devotion.

This is indeed looking at the whole of life as a Psalm of praise to God.

Praise in the common things of life,
it's going out and in,
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

Horatius Bonar

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B.

Now to look at a serious and reverential attitude to life from another perspective:
Living with heaven and eternity in view

Richard Baxter *Saints Everlasting Rest*

We are still in the 17th century and looking now at Richard Baxter, and again there are really volumes and volumes of material that we could bring out on this matter, I am just here giving some of his reflections from his great work *The Saints Everlasting Rest*. Some say it was written in a field, an army encampment on the borders of Derbyshire whilst he was serving as a chaplain to the Parliamentary Forces under Oliver Cromwell. It was a time of sickness.

I quote.

"I have found," he says, "by reason and experience, as well as Scripture, that it is not our comfort only, but our stability, our liveliness in all our duties, our enduring tribulation, our honouring God, the vigour of our love, thankfulness, and all our graces, yea, the very being of our religion, and Christianity itself, that dependence on the believing serious thoughts of our rest. (That is heaven).

The end directeth to and the means. To know what is indeed your end and happiness, and heartily to take it to be so, is the very first stone in the foundation of religion. Most souls that perish in the Christian world, do perish for want of being sincere in this point. In a word, we can neither live safely, profitably, piously conscientiously, or comfortably, nor die so, without believing serious considerations of our rest."

And now I follow with a Victorian comment on Baxter's view of life. It is taken out of the preface of the *Saints Everlasting Rest* with introductory remarks by John Morison D.D. 1864 p.XIX

It was not possible for him, after having dwelt upon the realities of eternity, to be absorbed by the frivolous concerns of time – after having tasted the business of angels, to enter with zest into the trifling businesses of men. Man's bustling life appeared to him but like children's games where all is done in jest, and which wise men count not worthy of their observance.

Not that Baxter's heavenly mindedness made him of no earthly use, on the contrary.

We observed the devotion of Baxter was practical.

1. It not only promoted the purity of his own heart, and served as an antidote to the trials of his lot,

2. But it also led him with more intense eagerness to desire the good of others.

3. He was taught by his exercises on the everlasting rest to feel the worth of the soul, and a heavy grief pressed upon his mind, when he thought that this invaluable possession might in any case be lost.

4. There was not a grain of selfishness in his nature. He retired to commune with God, that he might be better fitted to contend with man. No man ever had more reason to inscribe over the door of his closet the words of Peter, – "it is good to be here;" yet that closet was but the spirits resting – place where he recruited his energies and prepared anew for the course of duty.

Baxter's Saints Everlasting Rest.. Preliminary essay. pp. XIX, XXII

Reverence for God, life, eternity
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3.

Next we consider Reverence in Worship and in this we can include personal devotion and public worship.

Personal Devotion

There are on record the written prayers of 19th Century politicians, we might compare these expressions of devotion with the decadent leadership of the early period of 18th century i.e. days of Walpoles' administration with the day's after the revivals of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

A prayer of the Earl of Shaftesbury

O God, the Father of the forsaken, the Help of the weak, the Supplier of the needy, who

hast diffused and proportioned thy gifts to body and soul, in such sort that all may acknowledge and perform the joyous duty of mutual service; who teaches us that love towards the race of man is the bond of perfectness, and the imitation of thy blessed self; open our eyes and touch our hearts, that we may see and do, both for this world and for that which is to come, the things which belong unto our peace. Strengthen me in the work I have undertaken; give me counsel and wisdom, perseverance, faith and zeal, and in thine own good time, and according to divine pleasure, prosper the issue. Pour into me a spirit of humility; let nothing be done but in devout obedience to thy will, thankfulness for thine unspeakable mercies, and love to thine adorable Son Christ Jesus. Amen.

p. 68 Devotional Classics

Or William Ewart Gladstone, who wrote in his diary at the age of 22...

One conclusion theoretically has been much on my mind – it is the increased importance and necessity and benefit of prayer – of the life of obedience and self-sacrifice. May God use me as a vessel for his own purposes of whatever character and results in relation to myself.

He later prayed *that he might work an energetic work in this world, and by that work (whereof the worker is only God), I might grow into the image of my Redeemer... It matters not whether the sphere of duty be large or small, but may it be duly fulfilled. May those faint and languishing embers be kindled by the truth of the everlasting Spirit into a living and life-giving flame.*

Page 242 Private Prayer in Christian Story Jane T. Stoddart

2. Seriousness in public worship

We have seen in our introduction that all services were marked by a spirit of reverence, but times of revival were marked by a renewed and powerful sense of the presence of God in public worship. This might be illustrated by many examples. These are from Tyler's Accounts of New England Revivals, where we read sentences such as, *this awakening was not in a single instance attended with outcry or noise. The subjects were all it appeared very solemn while attending public worship, and conferences.*

This is a report by Isaac Backus of the revival in Connecticut 1797. He recorded.. *Non-manifested high confidence of their conversion. They felt themselves bound to confess*

Christ before men; but were afraid lest they should be deceived by a false hope, and should not live agreeably to covenant bonds. It was common for them to say, when conversing about joining the church, "we know not how to refrain from publicly appearing on the Lord side; but we would tremble at the thought of reflecting dishonour on his name, in the eyes of the scoffing world. Yet unworthy as we are, we desire to give of ourselves to God, and to attend on all ordinances of his appointment. We know that he can enable us to live to his glory, and we pray that we may always feel our dependence on his grace.

p. 20

Or again..

On the following Sabbath, the work was visible in the house of God; the conference in the evening was full and very serious.

He goes on to, to comment that where there had formally been a hearing with indifference, there was a hearing with rapt attention.

Or take another example, from the revival in Middlebury Connecticut 1799, the Rev. Ira Hart being the minister noted,

For several months, it was a very serious time among us. The mind of almost everyone was struck with an unusual solemnity. The attention of many were taken up with the momentous concerns of eternity. The number of 30 have been added to the church. Others retained their serious impressions and still give evidence that they are friendly to Christ and his cause, yet neglect publicly to profess his name, through self-diffidence and jealousy over the deceitfulness of their own hearts, lest they should proclaim that to the world, which they have never done heartily to the Lord. I cannot however, but hope that ere long the darkness will be dispelled, and their doubts removed, which at present seem to obstruct their way, and coming forward publicly to profess Christ before this adulterous generation.

p. 277-8

3. The elements of serious worship

A very large part of the Reformation, was indeed the Reformation of worship. The emphasis was on restoring the elements of worship to the Biblical pattern. There was certainly an emphasis on removing the theatrical, from the conduct of worship, as there was a desire for the presence of God in worship, and for the mind as well as the heart to be engaged, and enlightened in that worship.

I haven't read anywhere yet that the people of that day were concerned to see things rearranged and re organised in order to please and satisfy human beings. Nobody was really thinking about making the services lively and loud so that young people will enjoy them. To me it's a complete misconception any way to think that young people only enjoy shallow, "lively" noisy services. The great concern at that time was to make the services God honouring, and to be such services that would feed and nourish the souls and indeed the minds of the people of God, and of the same time warn sinners to repent and to turn to Christ.

We all of us believe in the freedom of public worship, but it would do us all going to study some of the great orders which came out of the Reformation such as The Book of Common Order, the Westminster Directory for Public Worship, and even elements of the Book of Common Prayer, to teach us, something about how worship should be ordered, structured and conducted, in a reverent and scriptural manner, remembering at all times that it is public worship, and that it is the ministers task to lead in public worship, not to put on a performance before the people, even a performance of worship.

One book I have at home speaks about good manners in public worship. It speaks of silence before worship begins, not chatting with our neighbour, a silent prayer upon entering the service, Concentrating our thought upon God, quiet after the service, stewards only ushering late comers into the service at appropriate moments. Such devout manners need not diminish friendliness. There is time for conversation after the service. (p.67 *The Public Worship of God*).

The Sermon the climax

We say everything leads up to it, the hearing of the Word of God, the climax of worship. Handel and Daniel Rowland, Haverford- West.

Much of the following time will only allow me to summarise

Seriousness in Preaching

Wilbur M Smith in his very perceptive and insightful book, *Therefore, Stand*, a book which challenges the scepticism of the 20th century, and describe some of the

fundamental failings of the modern church had this to say about 20th century preaching.

Quoting from an article in The Times newspaper for May 22nd, 1943. He notes the article as saying, "*rightly or wrongly, men are not afraid of God as they used to be, and have cast off the restraints which fear imposed.*"

Wilbur Smith goes on to comment that, only recently has this truth being frankly knowledge by one of the bishops of the Church of England, the Bishop of Chelmsford. (Church of England Newspaper 1943) "The Christian Faith seems to be dying out. In the days of our grandparents there was a gravity, a solemnity about religion which has completely vanished. This was due to the emphasis laid upon the sterner side of Christian teaching: the fear of God, the guilt of sin, the judgment of man by God, and the consequent punishment or reward in the public mind - these facts are completely discarded. God has become a tolerant easy-going deity who is certainly not "extreme to mark what is amiss," but can always be relied upon to let everybody off in the long run, and if there is a heaven - of course there is no truth whatever in hell! - We shall all muddle into it somewhere."

Therefore Stand p.462

Now if we were to turn to John Gillies work, *Historic Accounts of Revivals*, we certainly discover this was not the case in former days. Gillies in his introduction speaks of the pre-preachers of those revival times as being, "*men of solemn deportment and spirituality of soul.*"

He describes Mr. Tennent's preaching as follows: Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764, New Brunswick Presbyterian Church, New Jersey, Philadelphia.)

He seemed to have no regard to please the eyes of his hearers with agreeable gesture, nor their ears with delivery, nor their fancy with language; but to aim directly at their hearts consciences, to lay open the ruinous delusions, show them their numerous, secret, hypocritical shifts in religion, and drive them out of every deceitful refuge wherein they made themselves easy with a form of godliness without the power. And many who were pleased in a good conceit of themselves before, now found, to their great distress, they were only self deceived hypocrites.

Introduction page XII

Nothing of the slick professional clever master of communication technique here, but a man passionate for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

To emphasize the tremendous moral awareness that pervaded society here in the

West, not so many years ago I take an example from the 19th century.

I take an example from the Expositors Bible, the late 19th century production, which except for a few outstanding exceptions, was not on the whole standing firm on evangelical principles. This said we can recognized see and feel, even in these volumes something of the serious and high moral tone of that period.

The exposition is of Isaiah chapter 33. Which we may take as a prophecy of the scattering and disappearance of the Assyrian army from the walls of Jerusalem. The armies of Sennacherib.

The picture is of Rabshakeh i.e. the spokesman of King, Sennacherib demanding the surrender of the city; the disappointment of the ambassadors of Israel who had been sent out to negotiate with Sennacherib, and believed they had negotiated a settlement. (v.7); the treachery of the great King who went back on his word, broke the covenant made with Hezekiah and swept his armies back into Judah (v.8); the disheartenment of the people of the land under this new shock, (v.9); and the resolution of the Lord now to rise and scatter the invaders. (vv 10-12).

Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted: now lift up myself.

Ye shall conceive chaff, you shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire.

The Assyrian army is destroyed. They melt like the snow at the glance of the LORD.

The rest of the chapter records the stunned population awakening to the fact that they are free.

Is the Assyrian really gone, or do the inhabitants of the city dream as they crowd the walls and see no trace of him? Have they all vanished – the Rabshakeh, who stood and called with his loud voice, where is he? And the scribes to whom they paid the tribute money, and who prolong the agony by counting it under their eyes; where are they? (v.18). And where are the scouts the engineers who insolently walked about Zion and mapped out her walls and counted the number of her towers for the assault? (v.18).

They have vanished!

verse 20

Now here is the point for us.

The people had seen the fire of the Lord (Ch 33:11, Ch. 33:12). They had seen the armies of Sennacherib burned in the fire as it were. They had seen it with their own eyes, the burning justice of God. And the sight solemnized them as to their own guiltiness before God, and they said to themselves, *who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*

What Isaiah saw here and what evidently the people came to see, was the ceaseless activity of the divine righteousness in the life of the world.

Isaiah is comparing the holiness of God to a universal and constant fire. (We are reminded of the text in Hebrews, "our God is a consuming fire."). To Isaiah, the whole of life was penetrated by the active justice of God. Righteousness was not mere doctrine to this prophet: it was the most real thing in history; it was the presence which pervaded and explained all phenomena, all events.

In his commentary George Adam Smith here says, and we certainly couldn't describe Smith is a great evangelical, but he certainly has a tremendous high moral sense and concept of God working in the world, a concept which we have almost entirely lost.

We shall understand what Isaiah is seeking to say to us if we can imagine looking at a great conflagration through a lens of coloured glass which allows us to see the solid materials - stone, wood and iron - but prevents us from perceiving the flames and shimmering heat. (We are looking through the lens of coloured glass to prevent our eyes being blinded or damaged by the brightness of the flame or the heat of the fire.) To look in this way is to see pillars, cross beams twist and fall, crumble and fade; but how inexplicable the process seems! Take away the glass, and everything is clear. The fiery element is filling all the spaces, that were blank to us before, and beating upon the solid material. The heat becomes visible, shimmering even where there is no flame. Just so had it been with the people in Judah sinning and rebelling against the Lord these 40 years.

Their society and politics, individual fortunes, personal and national habits - the home, the Church, the State - the common outlines and shapes of life - open to every eye, but no man could explain the constant decay and diminution, because all were looking at life through a glass darkly. Isaiah alone faced life with open vision, which filled out for him spaces of experience and gave terrible explanation to what was going on.

It was a vision that nearly scorched the eyes out of him. Life as he saw it was steeped in flame, the glowing righteousness of God. Jerusalem was full of the spirit of justice, the spirit of burning.

And there is another aspect that I would like to mention under this heading of seriousness in preaching. How often in our preaching do we actually raise and seek to answer some of the issues which perplex the minds of our hearers, influenced as they often are by Enlightenment or Modernistic thinking.

Take the issue of forgiveness. It is often said these days that good people forgive one another, and therefore if God is good why can he not forgive and overlook our transgressions and misdemeanours.

One Twentieth century preacher gave the following deep and serious answer, which I think is very relevant.

"Good people forgive one another how much more then must the good God be ready to forgive! The fallacy is not perceived. Good people forgive because they remember their own sin, because they know that they have no right to judge others. they know that they ought to forgive. It forms part of the moral man's idea of duty that he ought to forgive. He ought, just because he is under the sway of the divine world order, which cannot be annulled. Precisely because God must be taken seriously, men ought to forgive each other, thus we ought to forgive just because God is not mocked. The intense moral reality of God, however, is seen most plainly in the fact that disobedience to him must inevitably be self-destructive; it dashes itself to pieces against an immovable rock. It is quite ethical to say: "man ought to forgive," but it is in the highest degree non-- ethical to say: "God also ought to forgive." "God will pardon me. It is his job." These words were attributed to Heinrich Heine. There is no more impious saying. But only expresses the thought of all who have been influenced by the Enlightenment: "Of course God will do it... How could he do otherwise, since you so kindly!"

As soon as anyone regards the forgiveness of God as a matter of course he is as audacious as Voltaire. This impiety is not modified if we say: "God forgives if we repent," for this simply amounts to a denial of guilt. What has my present repentance to do with my previous guilt? And it also amounts to a denial of sin; for the sinner can never repent in proportion to his sin. There are no human conditions in which we have the right to expect that God will forgive us as a matter of course.

The Mediator p. 447

Where there is forgiveness with God it is indeed all, all of grace.

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3. Seriousness in Giving

There are so many elements to this subject of seriousness and reverence time fails us. Another issue that we may just touch on is seriousness in giving.

Victorian nonconformists invested an incredible amount of money into their Gospel work. In the 1870s, for example, Primitive Methodists, perhaps the poorest of the four largest denominations, spent £1, 057, 511 on 897 new chapels. In the 1880s the Congregationalists spent £3, 628, 300 on a new denominational headquarters in London. The Congregational churches were raising just over 1,000,000 pounds per annum at this period. When we remember that these figures should be multiplied by many thousands of pounds to take into consideration the vast inflation that has taken place since that time, we see what an enormous sacrifice believers at that point were willing to make in order to maintain the Christian presence.

In the last decade of the 19th century Baptists, Wesleyans and others spend on average just under 11,000,000 pounds on home missions, ministerial education, building and foreign missions.

We can also mention the famous 20th Century Funds which all the mainline denominations set up, for Gospel work in the new century. It is estimated that amongst them they raised in the region of 2,000,000 pounds. (Bringing this into modern valuation we are possibly talking about a figure of 100,000,000 pounds.), This is indeed serious giving, and I would think stands as one of the greatest fund raising efforts in British church history.

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Part III

The fruits of Reverence the pathway to power as illustrated since the time of the Reformation.

1. We have already touched on the mighty fruits that came out of the Reformation.

2. The Puritan period it is often said completed that which England's Reformation began. Through its teaching it established evangelical faith into the mainstream of the churches, and a love and respect of the Word of God throughout the nation. (Queen Victoria was later to describe the Bible as, "The secret of England's greatness."). It certainly brought a sanctifying effect upon the arts, sciences, and world of literature. It made a massive contribution to the democratic spirit, and the exercise of genuine toleration. It made Britain respected throughout the world. Not forgetting the massive amount of extremely high quality spiritual literature the Puritans bequeathed to subsequent generations.

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3. The fruits of reverence the pathway to power as illustrated by the 18th Century Revival

The period of the 18th century revival it is often said saved Britain from the horror and devastation of a French style Revolution. Likewise the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution could never have been accomplished without the 18th century revival.

On a more personal level effects of the revival are well summed up in Canon Overton's well-known work, The Evangelical Revival in the 18th Century.

Of the faith which enabled a man to abandon the cherished habits of a lifetime and to go forth ready to spend and be spent in his Masters service; which nerved him to overcome the natural fear of death, and, indeed, welcome the last enemy as his best friend who would introduce him to the better land he had long been living for; which made the selfish man self - denying, the discontented happy, the worldling spiritually - minded, the drunkard sober, the sensual chaste, the liar truthful, the thief honest, the proud humble, the thriftless thrifty and the god-less godly. We can only judge by the fruits which it bore. That such fruits were borne is surely undeniable.

The revival prayed in people a sense of personal obligation and a responsibility to live life in a way pleasing to God.

The historian John Richard Green wrote in regard to the Methodist revival.... It unleashed a new philanthropy which reformed prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into all penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.

Revival also gave birth to numerous beneficial societies, such as, The Religious Tract Society, 1799, The Society for Distribution of Religious Tracts amongst the Poor, 1782.

The Naval and Military Bible Society, 1780, the British and Foreign Bible Society 1807, the Baptist Missionary Society 1792, the London Missionary Society, 1795, the

Church Mission Society, founded 1799, and numerous other societies which we could name.

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4. The fruits of Reverence the pathway to power illustrated in the Victorian period.

Quoting here from H. F. Lovell Cocks little book, *The Nonconformist Conscience*:

The monolith of Victorian ethics had been reared by the evangelical revival; for the despised preachers and practitioners of personal holiness had succeeded in transforming private conviction into public conventions. In this they were helped by universal reaction against the squalid licentiousness of the Regency period, and later they found a powerful ally in the Prince Consort, Prince Albert. Vice became disreputable, virtue the badge of social respectability. It was said that conduct was three fourths of life. Evangelical morality concluded that literature and the arts must work their passage as instruments of ethical "up lift" or be disregarded as mere trimmings and trifles for which serious persons have no time.

Many of the smaller manufacturing towns of the North of England it was said often became compact nonconformist communities. Mrs. Sidney Webb writing of Life in Bacup, Lancashire in the 1880s wrote.

Living with these people has given me insight... Into higher working-class life - with all its charm of direct thinking, honest work and warm feeling; and above all, taught me the real part played by Christianity in making the English people, and the role of dissent in teaching them the art of self - government, or rather serving as a means to develop their capacity for it.

My Apprenticeship, p. 195 Quoted by Lovell Cocks *The Non-Conformist Conscience* p. 49

We can only mentioned in passing that this was the age of the, Nonconformist Conscience. A force for good that all politicians had to take note of, and without whose consent many bills passed through Parliament would never have succeeded.

C of E very strong at this time 1814 Parliament provided sum of 1Millon pounds for the building of new parish churches.

Figures for nonconformist growth in the 19th century.

According to Horace Mann's calculations in 1851, the number of Wesleyan places of

worship increased nearly six-fold between 1801 and 1831; the number of Independent/Congregational places doubled, and the number of Baptist places nearly trebled. Membership figures are only available for Methodists: Wesleyans grew from 89, 529 in 1801 to 249,119 in 1831. The Methodist New Connection grew 4,851 to 11,433 in the same period. Primitive Methodists grew from 16,394 in 1821, to 37,216 a decade later.

The 1851 census, reveal that over half the population were in church or Chapel on that day.

Moral influence

British rates of crime fell as markedly in the latter part of the century as they have risen since. The overall incidence of serious offenses recorded by the police in the 1890s was only about 60% of what had been recorded in the 1850s and, given that the efficiency of the reporting and recording of crime was improving at that time, the real crime rate was probably far greater than that indicated by official statistics. Thus, in 1900, Britain was not only a less violent and dishonest countrymen today, but also less violent and dishonest limited been in the earlier part of the 19th century. It is worth noting in passing that "progressive" opinion in the 19th century was unwilling to accept the crime rates were falling, just as their successes of today are unwilling to accept that they are rising.

By 1888, about three out of every four children in England and Wales attended Sunday School, a remarkable proportion. There is a clear link between the rise in Sunday school attendance and the fall in the crime rate.

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Summary

It is one of the remarkable features of contemporary church life that so many are attempting to heal the church by tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face etc. This is clear evidence that modernity has successfully palmed off one of its greatest deceptions on us, convincing us that God himself is secondary to organisation and image, and the church's health lies in its flowcharts, its convenience, its accessibility, and its offerings rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral intentions, or its understanding of what it means to have God's Word in this world,.

Those who do not see this are out of touch with the realities of life, mistaking changes on the surface for changes in deep waters that flow beneath. An inspired group of marketers might find a way of reviving a flagging business by modifying its image and offerings, but the matters of the heart, the matters of God, are not susceptible to such cosmetic alteration. The world's business and God's business are two different things.

The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organisation, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the churches resources by concerning themselves with such things will do nothing to staunch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds.

The fundamental problem in the Evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace too ordinary, his judgement is too benign, his Gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.

Wells p.30

We might be so bold as to say that the fundamental problem with the church today is that we have lost sight of the transcendence of God, the otherness of God, the holiness and majesty and all powerfulness of God. It is this loss that has provided modernity such an easy access to our churches.

It is time to recover again the Biblical emphasis on the fact that God in his very essence is holy.

Moses at the Burning Bush

When God revealed himself to Moses as Israel's God, he spoke first to Moses from the Burning Bush. *Take off thy shoes from thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.....*And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look on God. This was the beginning of the return of saving power, It was the vision of the holiness of God that called Moses to go and stand before Pharaoh and demand in the name of the all holy God, the God who is indeed a consuming fire...Let my people go. Thus began that great deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery and bondage of Egypt, anticipating and typifying as it did the deliverance won by Christ on Calvary. It is the all holy God who is the deliverer of his people. We like Moses must bow reverently before God's almightiness, we need to recapture a true vision of God before we can have any part in the deliverance our age so desperately needs.

The transcendent holiness of God is the majesty of a righteous and loving Person. In that unity, all the deeper religious realities of the Old Testament find their source.

In the church today, where such awe is conspicuously absent and where easy familiarity is the accepted and studied norm it is vital that we go back to recognising the holiness of God.

That God is dangerous in his holiness should not be dismissed as if it were a primitive idea, beyond which we have now evolved. It is, in fact, the reality we need to regain our awareness of for in the end God's holiness will prove to be the final line of resistance to all that is wrong, and all that is evil in the world.

*Come almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy grace receive;
Suddenly return and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above.
Pray and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.*