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**The Life  
and Ministry  
of Theodore  
Austin-Sparks**



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# **The Life and Ministry of Theodore Austin- Sparks**

*by various authors*

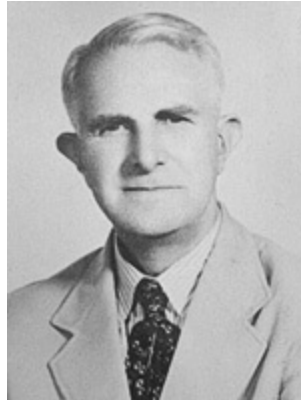
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## **Contents**

[\*\*About Theodore W. Austin-Sparks\*\*](#)  
[\*\*The Life and Ministry of Theodore Austin-Sparks\*\*](#)  
[\*\*Explanation of the Nature and History of "This Ministry"\*\*](#)  
[\*\*An Appreciation of T. Austin-Sparks\*\*](#)

# About Theodore W. Austin-Sparks

*by LKW*



Theodore Austin-Sparks was born in London, England in 1888 and was educated in both England and Scotland. At the age of 25 he was ordained as a pastor, however, a few years later his "career" took a decidedly different direction when a spiritual crisis brought him to a place of brokenness. He left the denomination with which he was involved and dropped the title of "Reverend". He wrote:

Years ago I was unquestionably stretched out to the full for God's best (as I trust I am now), and there was no doubt whatever as to my devotion to the Lord. I was right in the full tide of every kind of evangelical activity, and especially in conventions everywhere for the deepening of spiritual life. I was a member of many Missionary Boards and Committees, and was greatly in demand because it was believed that I was a man with a message. This is putting into very few words an immense amount of truly devoted activity and concern for the Lord's interests. Being a man of prayer, I was open to the Lord for all His will, I believed. But there was a certain realm of things against which I was deeply prejudiced. It was really the very essence of the original "Keswick" teaching, but I would not have it at any price. I fought it and those who taught it. To make a long story short, the Lord took me seriously in hand along another line, and brought me into great spiritual distress. The very thing that proved my emancipation was that which I would not formerly have touched for anything. That proved the key to a fuller life and a worldwide ministry. I came to see that my judgment had been wholly wrong, and that I was blinded by prejudice. I believed that I was honest and right, and seemed to have evidence of it; but, no, I was in my ignorance shutting out something which was of great value to the Lord and to myself. Thank God for the grace to be perfectly honest when the fact of prejudice was

brought home to my heart.... No man is infallible, and no one has yet "apprehended" nor is "yet perfect". Many godly men have had to adjust in the presence of fuller light given when a sense of need made such necessary.

*(From an Editor's Letter first published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1946, Vol 24-4).*

Based in Honor Oak, London, TAS (as he was affectionately known) was not lacking in opposition and rejection to himself and his ministry in the denominational circles of the day, but he felt he should neither defend himself nor promote himself. His son-in-law Angus Kinnear wrote:

*From his early years he had believed in the power and significance of the spoken Word of God, and that all developments of its exposition and application should be vitally related to the actual and growing needs of the spiritual life of representative bodies of God's people. Through His Word God would meet His own, but His way of giving to His servants was not merely through bookish, cloistered or studied matter. Rather it was made necessary, drawn out and given meaning by the call and answer of living conditions. Its value - if it was to be anything more than words - lay in its being able to touch the Lord's people at the point of experience and need which had been the occasion of its original calling forth. Such was the special calling of T. Austin-Sparks, a man ploughing a furrow perhaps a little apart from his contemporaries, but always true to Christ Jesus his Saviour and Lord, and committed to a vision of spiritually fruitful harvests throughout the whole field that is God's world.*

Something which becomes clear when reading the writings of T. Austin-Sparks is that very little information is given about himself or his personal life; instead the focus is consistently upon Christ as his (and our) Life. Your attention is continually directed away from the messenger to the One Who is the Message (2 Cor. 4:5).

Mr Austin-Sparks published a bi-monthly magazine called "A Witness and A Testimony" from 1923 until his death in 1971. In the July 1966 issue of the magazine, he wrote the following:

*It is only occasionally that we write personally. Our desire has always been to avoid drawing attention to persons and things in the ministry, and to occupy our readers with the Lord and the ministry of His Word. But from time to time we have felt it to be both wise and important to remind our readers of the purpose that definitely governs this ministry - and has always done so...*

*What, then, is this ministry? We must go back. The name of this little paper, which has been the printed expression of the ministry for the past almost forty-four years, embodies the meaning — "Witness and Testimony." "Witness": the instrument or vessel used. "Testimony": the ministry in and through the vessel. The Testimony has ever been - but growing as light has increased - to the greatness and fullness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man. This greatness has been centered and unfolded in:*

*(1) His Person*

*(2) The immensity of God's eternal purpose as centered in and exclusively related to Him*

*(3) The greatness of His Cross as basic and essential to the greatness of His Person and work both for and in believers*

*(4) The greatness of The Church which is His Body as essential to, and chosen for, His ultimate self-manifestation in fullness and government in the new heavens and the new earth*

*(5) The necessity that all the people of God should know, not only of salvation, but of the immense purpose of salvation in the eternal council of God, being brought to "full growth" by the supply of Jesus Christ in ample measure.*

*We feel that the New Testament contains a tremendous urgency in this matter; such urgency is summed up in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Admonishing every man and teaching every man.... that we may present every man perfect (complete) in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). We believe that all the sovereign activities of the Holy Spirit are directed to and dictated by this end and object.*

*There may be different aspects, but the end is single and one. The great evangelizing and missionary efforts, in so far as they are governed by the Holy Spirit, have this end in view...*

The cry which comes through his messages again and again is for believers to grow up into the full knowledge of Christ, to know Him as the One Thing, the All in all, the Head of all. As believers heard and responded to his cry, TAS was requested to speak at conferences in Europe, Asia and the USA, many of which were tape-recorded. The audio messages from these conferences are still available today, as are many of his books and articles which have been republished.



*Mr Austin-Sparks (centre) with DeVern Fromke and Stephen Kaung at the Wabanna conference, Maryland, USA in 1966.*

Mr Austin-Sparks was insistent that his writings and tapes should not be copyrighted. In spite of his desire that they not be copyrighted, he was particular about his messages being reproduced word for word as originally spoken or written by him.

Some of the messages on Austin-Sparks.Net have been transcribed from audio messages, others are reproductions of his written messages. Some of his messages he published as books and these were available at cost from the Witness and Testimony Publishers in Honor Oak. However, most of these books were first published chapter by chapter in his bi-monthly magazine, "A Witness and A Testimony". TAS frequently called it: "This little paper". There was no subscription charge for this magazine which was sent freely to all who requested it. It was stated in the magazine that, "This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it."

On the first page of the magazine was this statement:

*The object of the ministry of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians 4:13 - "...till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (literally - full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children...."*

*It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the*

*Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment', the Church may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.*

TAS was the editor of this magazine until his death in 1971. A similar style of magazine named "Toward the Mark" was then published by a colleague, Harry Foster, from 1972 until 1989. After T. Austin-Sparks' death in 1971 Harry Foster wrote:

*Perhaps one of the earliest of his books can best give us a real clue to his whole life and ministry. It is called "The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ". This was where he began, and this was where he ended, for it became noticeable in his closing years that he lost interest in subjects and concentrated his attention on the person of Christ. Christ is central! None of us will claim always to have been "on centre", and he certainly made no such claim, but it was his life's objective and the aim of all his preaching and teaching to recognize that centrality and bow to that supremacy. At his funeral service there were hundreds who responded wholeheartedly to the suggestion that brother Sparks had helped them to get to know Christ in fuller and more satisfying ways. If anyone can make men realize something more of the worth and wonder of Christ, so that they love Him more and serve Him better, then such a one has not lived in vain. Many worldwide can truthfully say that through the spoken or written words of 'T. A-S.' this is what happened to them and, especially with those who first trusted Christ as Saviour through his ministry, they will be his rejoicing in the day of Jesus Christ. Moreover, some of the truths, which were by no means accepted when he proclaimed them years ago, have now become widely accepted among evangelical Christians, so it is possible that in the long run his ministry may prove to have been more fruitful than at the time appeared to himself or to others. It is the steward's business to be faithful, and that he sought to be: only the Master is competent to judge of his success.*

TAS deliberately made no provision for the continuing of his magazine or ministry following his death in 1971. Harry Foster wrote: "Mr. Austin-Sparks had left word that there should be no automatic continuation of the magazine ministry". Mr Austin-Sparks believed that what was from God and of God would be taken care of by Him, he wrote: "God only takes responsibility to supply and to carry on that which is essentially heavenly, and in the measure in which a thing is heavenly, and only in that measure (but surely in that measure), God takes responsibility for it". Time has proven that his trust was not misplaced as God has indeed preserved what is His own.



Mr Austin-Sparks wanted his messages to be made widely available to all, but also insisted that they should not be changed (edited). He wrote, "It has always been our desire to make the ministry through this little medium available to all of the Lord's people; not regarding it as our personal property. 'Freely ye have received, freely give' has been our principle."

Mr Austin-Sparks left behind a treasury of messages filled with the Wisdom, Life and Revelation of Christ. Many of these messages are available online at [Austin-Sparks.Net](http://Austin-Sparks.Net), for the further establishing and strengthening of the Body, that in all things CHRIST might have the preeminence!

# The Life and Ministry of Theodore Austin-Sparks

*by Lance Lambert*

*This message was given by Mr Lambert to a Chinese-speaking audience with an interpreter. The spoken form is retained verbatim.*

I would like to read a few verses in the Philippian letter, Philippians and chapter 1. We will read from verse 21:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh, if this shall bring fruit from my work, then what I shall choose I know not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake."

Shall we just have a further word of prayer.

Lord, we want to thank You together that we are found in Your presence this evening. And we thank You once again for that anointing which You have given us and by faith we want to stand into that anointing this evening, for the speaking, translating, and hearing. Lord, will You fill this time with Yourself and use it to glorify our Lord Jesus, we ask it in His precious name, amen.

Now, I have been asked to share something with you about the life and ministry of our brother Theodore Austin-Sparks. And I would say something first about his life, and then a little about the emphases in his ministry, and then some of the qualities in his life.

Our brother Mr Sparks was born in the 1880's in a Scots town called Dunoon. He was born of a Scots mother and an English father, but he always considered himself to be Scots. His father was an impresario and therefore Mr Sparks was born into a family that had much to do with culture, with theatre, with concerts. I am not sure that his father ever had a real experience of the Lord Jesus, his mother, however, was a truly godly woman. She knew the Lord, she was a woman of prayer, and she was one hundred percent devoted to the Lord Jesus. She belonged to a group within the established church in England, the Church of England in England, and the Church of Scotland in Scotland, that have come to be called 'Irvingites'.

These 'Irvingites', as people called them, were those who were greatly influenced and blessed by the ministry of a brother called Edward Irving. Edward Irving was, in fact has often been called, the father of the charismatics. He believed that the church was the body of the Lord Jesus. He believed in apostles, he believed in the gifts of the Spirit. He believed in an experience that he called 'the baptism of the Spirit'. And this movement began in Britain, in England, and Scotland in the 1860's or 1840's. Mr Sparks grew up in a home in which his mother often had prayer meetings. It was a home that believed that the Word of God was the Word of God and that it was the final authority on all matters. And it was a home that believed that the Lord's coming was near. His mother had a very great influence upon Mr Sparks.

Brother Sparks came to the Lord in his teens and from the moment that he came to the Lord, he was one hundred percent for the Lord Jesus. He saw the truth of believer's baptism and as a result, of course, he got baptised and he left the Church of Scotland. He became an ordained minister in the Baptist and Congregationalist churches; that is, in both these denominations he was a recognised and ordained minister.

He became one of Dr Campbell Morgan's young men. Dr Campbell Morgan was probably one of the greatest Bible teachers in Britain and the English-speaking world in the early part of this century. He was minister in Westminster Chapel in London. And he used to have a group of young ministers, and he used to get them to do a lot of the work on Bible study that finally came out in his various books. Mr Sparks was one of the brightest of this group of young men and ministers, and as a result, he was very much in demand all over Britain as a conference speaker, especially in teaching the Bible: outlines of the books of the Bible, an outline of the whole Bible, a bird's eye view of the whole Bible. This was something quite new and he was very much in demand for this.

Whilst he was minister of Honor Oak Baptist Church, he saw tremendous change come over the whole congregation. One after the other, these nominal Christians became born again: the church secretary, the various deacons, one after the other they found the Lord, and this turned the church inside out.

But Mr Sparks, in spite of being a nationally wanted conference speaker, and being one of the young men asked to Keswick with a view in the end to becoming one of the speakers, and in spite of being the pastor of a Baptist church that was absolutely thriving, he himself felt a *terrible* need within his life. He felt that he was proclaiming things that were not really his experience. That he was born again, he had no doubt. That God had saved him, he had no doubt. That God had justified him, of this he had no doubt. That the Holy Spirit was the Holy Spirit, he had no doubt. That Christ was Christ, he had no doubt. But within his own heart he felt he was preaching things that he was not

experiencing; that he was *professing* much, but *possessing* little.

Now, Mr Sparks by nature was a one hundred percent person. He was never sort of in-between. He was black or white; there was no grey. And gradually there built up within him a tremendous tension. He came to feel that he was a failure, that what he read in the Bible wasn't his experience. And it all came to a head one day.

On this day he said to his wife, "I'm going into my study. I don't want *anyone* to disturb me, no matter what happens. I shall not come out of that study until I have decided one way or the other." When he went into the study it was his determination that either the Lord met him in a new way, or he would resign his ministry. *He was at an end of himself.* He spent much of the day just quietly, and then he began to read Romans, the letter to the Romans. Nothing happened. He knew it very well. He had taught this letter again and again. He had given outlines of this letter, so it was not new to him, until he came to Romans chapter 6. And then he himself said, it was as if heaven opened, and light shone into his heart and for the first time he understood that he was crucified with Christ and that the Holy Spirit was within and upon him to reproduce the nature of the Lord Jesus. It *totally revolutionised* Theodore Austin-Sparks. He often used to say that his whole worldwide ministry, *any* authority he had, *any* influence he had, *all* stemmed from that day.

When he emerged from that study, Theodore Austin-Sparks was a changed man. Now he began to preach Christ, he began to magnify the Lord Jesus, and the church came into an *altogether* new experience. He couldn't explain the Cross of Christ to begin with, but a little while afterwards he began to teach "the way of the Cross", as he called it. It was at this time that he came into touch with Jessie Penn-Lewis.

God raised up Mrs Penn-Lewis as one of the most remarkable teachers in the last century and the beginning of this. She had also had an experience of the Cross and of the Spirit of the Lord, and she had been used by the Lord to bring servants of the Lord *all* over the English-speaking world into a new experience of the Lord Jesus. Of course you will be interested: Margaret Barber came into great blessing through Mrs Penn-Lewis. [*Margaret Barber was a British missionary to China, mentioned often by Watchman Nee. This was relevant because the message was being spoken to a Chinese audience.*] Now, Mrs Penn-Lewis saw Mr Sparks as the heir to the whole work that God had given her. And Mr Sparks became a very greatly loved and popular preacher and teacher in the "Overcomer Movement" as it was called.

But the experience that Mr Sparks had, instead of opening every pulpit in the land to him, *closed* most of the pulpits. They all became *very* afraid of Mr

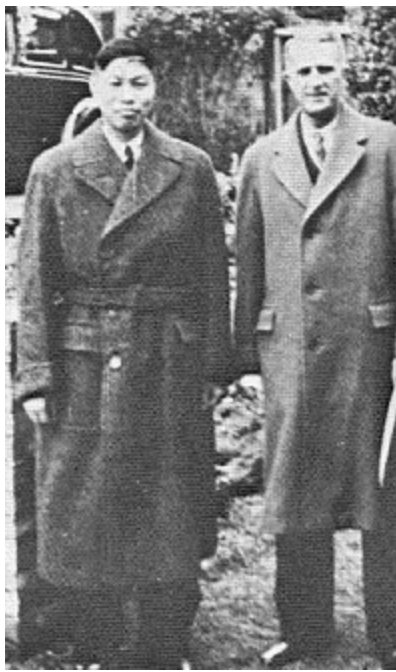
Sparks. They felt that something strange had happened to him; that he was dangerous, unbalanced - something... wrong. And so there began an antagonism toward Mr Sparks in the Christian world.

Then came a great crisis in the Baptist Church of which he was pastor. By this time nearly all the deacons had become believers, and not only believers, they had come into a real experience of the indwelling Christ and of the way of the Cross. At that time, in about 1920... in the middle of the 1920's, the World Baptist Federation launched a year that they called: "Make More Baptists Year". Now, this Baptist Church of which Mr Sparks was pastor, they had no interest in making more Baptists! To bring more people to the Lord Jesus, *that* they would have been one hundred percent for, but to make more Baptists... they didn't feel at all happy. So they wrote to the Baptist Union and said that they could not be part of this "Make More Baptists Year". Then the Baptist Union said, "We have the title deeds to the church property and the title deeds to the house that you live in. If you do not fall in step with us, we'll put you out!" And so came a clash. Then Mr Sparks was put out in one week! I think at that time there were four children, and he was put out with his furniture on the road, and the church was shut out of the church premises.

At that time a titled lady, who had been greatly blessed through the ministry of Mr Sparks, and who was serving the Lord as a missionary in India, she was in England at the time and she heard that there was a big school, a boy's school on the top of Honor Oak hill and that it had been vacated. And she bought the whole property and gave it to the church. And thus there came into being the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship and Conference Centre.

This was the place where all these conferences were held three or four times a year, to which people came from all over Britain, and indeed the English-speaking world. Mr Sparks' ministry went from a local ministry, to a national ministry, to an international ministry.

It was in 1937-38 that our brother Watchman Nee first came into touch with brother Sparks. He had read some of brother Sparks' ministry and had been greatly blessed. He believed that there was an identity of outlook and of understanding. And in 1937 he came to Britain and Scandinavia with a special objective of meeting brother Sparks. He came to Honor Oak and he met with brother Sparks and they fellowshiped together. Brother Sparks by nature (I will explain in a moment) was a very British person - very, very superior and reserved - and he kept brother Watchman Nee waiting for two days before he finally had fellowship with him. It was an amazing time.



*Mr Austin-Sparks with Watchman Nee, Honor Oak, 1938*

The Exclusive Brethren, who had invited brother Watchman Nee to come to Europe, were *horrified* that Watchman Nee went to Honor Oak. And after challenging him, they then had a special meeting and withdrew from him. In other words: they expelled him, they excommunicated him. Many years later I met one of the brothers who was at the meeting that excommunicated brother Watchman Nee. He didn't understand at the time, but he said to me, "I had a feeling that it was the end of the Exclusive Movement." And so it turned out to be.

Mr Sparks then, of course this whole work that was so amazing, in those early days of the conferences, people used to have *tremendous* experiences. I met with many of those who had those experiences. I remember Dr Thornton Stearns, who also had come, actually come to know the Lord through Marie Monsen in China. He went out as a missionary to China, and he wasn't even *saved*! And through Marie Monsen he came to know the Lord, he and his wife, and then, as you know, they became co-workers with brother Watchman Nee. But you know, Dr Thornton Stearns, he told me that when he went to one of these conferences, after one of the meetings the Lord would not allow him to sleep. "All night long", he said, "the Lord wrestled with me". And he said, "It was just like Jacob, when the sun came up, I was a different man." This could be multiplied thousands of times! People had *tremendous* experiences of the Spirit of the Lord and of the Cross of Christ. It wasn't just *preaching*, something *happened* through the preaching.

Then the war came, the Second World War, and this brought an end to the conferences. The whole of Europe and the world was in turmoil. Mr Sparks went to Scotland, and his closest co-worker, brother Patterson, he stayed in

Honor Oak. At the end of the war they came together and then they had perhaps one of the most blessed periods in the history of that work and ministry. From 1946 until 19... I would say about 50 or 51, again very powerful conferences.

Now, Mr Sparks, as I have said, was a very, very reserved man. He was what we'd call a dour man; economic in words. He could sit with people and not say a word for an hour; not one word and he was perfectly at peace, but the others were not at peace! You know, they went, "*Why* doesn't he speak?" He was a very extraordinary man in this way. He was also a very suspicious man, he did not *easily* trust other people. He was a very gifted man; very good to look at: tall, very good-looking, very wonderful bearing.

Brother Patterson was *altogether* different: he was very *warm*, he could talk and talk and talk and talk. Anyone could talk with him. He loved everybody; he trusted people and when he and brother Sparks were together, it was a *marvellous* partnership. They were quite different and they trusted each other. And therefore, in the work and in the fellowship, there were many problems, some of them due to Mr Sparks' temperament, but brother Patterson *always* explained brother Sparks to the people and explained the people to brother Sparks. Thus there was a very good relationship. But then, suddenly, brother Patterson went to be with the Lord and his place was never taken. Others tried to take it, but it was not the same. This began a whole period of unrest and problem within the fellowship and the work.

Now I must also tell you something else about brother Sparks. He looked marvellous, but actually he suffered very much from ill-health. I think because he was outwardly a very reserved man, and very quiet man, *inwardly* much happened. The result was he had a certain kind of condition that meant that the whole of his stomach lining was covered by ulcers. This meant he had very great indigestion and much pain and he always looked a kind of yellow-green colour. Some of the greatest conferences were actually given at his greatest point of pain and trouble. One of them, now in a book called "The Battle for Life", he actually gave sitting in a chair.

Many years later, when I was in Switzerland and sharing a conference with brother Sparks, an old couple came into the meeting. They were German missionaries. They hadn't seen Mr Sparks for something like forty years. They had been serving the Lord in Brazil. And then they came in, and I shall never forget, brother Sparks spoke no German, so they spoke to me: "*Is* it brother Sparks?" they said. "Of course it's brother Sparks!" "But," they said, "he looks thirty years younger than he did forty years ago! When we saw him, he looked so *old*, so green, so thin, so weak." Mr Sparks had a very remarkable operation, where they take the whole inner lining of the stomach and pull it

up, and peg it up, and give you like a new stomach, and when that happened, Mr Sparks did not have the same problems. He always had to be careful.

The *enormous* hostility towards Mr Sparks was something unbelievable! It was *everywhere* in Christian circles: books were written against him, pamphlets were written against him, he was spoken against from pulpits, he was named as the great trouble-maker, as a divisive element, as an erroneous and false teacher. There were *unbelievable* stories about Mr Sparks. I remember one brother coming to me, a good brother from the United States, and he said to me, "How can you *possibly* work with Mr Sparks?" "No problem," I said, "I have never seen anything but Christ in him and I have never ever heard him teach or preach anything than what is in the Word of God." "Ohhh," they said, "he has four wives." Four wives?! Poor Mr Sparks! I mean, if you knew Mr Sparks, one wife was enough for him. I mean, he could not... it was *laughable*! I said to the brother, "If you want to damage Mr Sparks, don't say this kind of thing; everybody who knows him, *knows* it cannot be true. Talk about his authoritarianism, talk about his suspiciousness of people. Don't talk about this, you will never damage him this way..." [*laughs*].

This alienation of Mr Sparks, this, this total isolation of him in many ways was the hardest thing that Mr Sparks ever bore. Year after year he went to Keswick. There, across the platform, it said: "All one in Christ" and then he would go up to those men he used to work with and put out his hand and they would turn away. They wouldn't shake his hand; they wouldn't speak to him. They would have nothing to do with him. This, brother Sparks found the *hardest* thing of all to bear.

The problems in the fellowship at Honor Oak grew. The conferences ceased. You will remember that our brother Mr Sparks came to Taiwan, twice to Taiwan. He was so thrilled on that first visit. One of the reasons was there were so many people and they wanted to hear, and they didn't have hostility, and they would take in every word. It meant a tremendous amount to brother Sparks. But then in the second visit came this terrible problem with our brother Witness Lee.

Now, Mr Sparks, his strong point was the spiritual nature of everything. His weak point was the practical earthly expression of those spiritual principles. And it was on the whole matter of locality that was the problem. Our brother Mr Sparks said to me, "There *is* such a thing as a local church, there is." But he said to me, "The way our brother [Lee] is teaching it, it will be like a denomination, with a Vatican and a Pope. This is how it will end." I'm afraid he has been proved right. That is *precisely* what has happened. He said to me, "We can take the church, which is the Body of our Lord Jesus, joined to the Head at the right hand of God, and reduce it to something earthly, make it a



human organisation." This division in many ways was tragic. Of course, there were many other things too.

At the end of our brother's life he really was very much like the apostle Paul in his last letter, or one of his last letters, the apostle Paul said, "All the churches in Asia are turned away from me." At the end Mr Sparks was alone. There really were very few people with him. When it came to the end, he insisted on moving from Honor Oak, where his home was. His home was still there, but he insisted on being taken by car to Richmond into the home of his daughter, Elizabeth. And there he went to be with the Lord.

Now, there were some very real influences in Mr Sparks' life. There was Dr Campbell Morgan. I think he gave Mr Sparks very much in Bible outline, if you like, almost the technology of the Bible. Then there was Dr F. B. Meyer. Now, F. B. Meyer meant a lot to brother Sparks. He, really in many ways, brought Mr Sparks into a much deeper way with the Lord. And there was Mrs Penn-Lewis. She was an enormous influence on Mr Sparks. And then there was A. B. Simpson. You sing quite a few of the hymns of Mr Simpson. Mr Sparks used to say, of all the preachers on the American scene, of all the preachers he ever knew when he was young, A. B. Simpson was the most spiritual and the most powerful. It is interesting.

My estimate of Mr Sparks (I almost dare not to say too much) but my estimate of Mr Sparks is that he was a lone, prophetic voice in a spiritual wilderness. When you take Europe, Scandinavia, Britain - basically the English-speaking world from 1920 to 1960 - it was a wilderness. Very little happened. Of course, it was a period of almost two world wars of tremendous turmoil and very much institutionalisation and traditionalisation of the churches. The voice of brother Sparks was like a voice, a prophetic voice calling God's people back to reality, calling God's people back to the genuine, calling God's people back to the Lord Jesus.

It is very interesting that much of the phraseology of Mr Sparks at the time seemed almost unique to him. For instance, he spoke about the "body"; the Body of the Lord Jesus. I can remember thinking, "The body? The *body* of the Lord Jesus? What is he talking about? *Nobody* talks about the body of the Lord Jesus! Nobody talks about it!" - then he said, "This is the church. We're the church!" The church is somewhere you left your umbrella, or you lost your handbag! Who understood the church as the Body of Christ? Yet *now* this term 'the Body' is a household word everywhere over the whole world, much due to the charismatics. Nevertheless, something has happened and it's quite amazing.

Or take these other words: authority and submission. Whoever thought or

talked of authority and submission? Now, oh it's everywhere, of course sometimes falsely. What about "body-life"? Body-life! Whoever talked of such a thing as "body-life"? This was one of Mr Sparks' favourite phrases: "body-life". "Are we experiencing body-life?" It's now everywhere. Or I think of another little word: "relatedness", *belonging* to one another, being *related* to one another, being members of Christ and members one of another. Do you know, all these things were thought to be so strange! *No one* spoke about these things.

You know, in the Christian world you talked about conversions, you talked about Bible studies, you talked about prayer, you talked about witnessing, you talked about missionary challenge and call. And if you went very high, you talked about the victory life. That was it! You never talked about the church; you never talked about the Body; you never talked about authority; you never talked about relatedness. That was all something unknown. Now, what I'm saying is this: since 1960 these things have gone all over the world. Brother Sparks was a lone prophetic voice. And I think, like all real prophets, he was alone, isolated, spoken against - basically, rejected.

Now, what are the emphases in his ministry? I took five of the titles of his books. The first one is this: "The Universality and Centrality of the Cross". For Mr Sparks, *everything* began with the Cross and came through the Cross, and nothing was safe apart from the Cross. This emphasis in his ministry was one of the *most powerful* emphases. He said, "No child of God is safe till he has laid down his life. No servant of God's service is safe till that servant of God has laid down his life. No fellowship of God's people is safe until they have laid down their lives. *Everything* comes back to the altar." This was one of the emphases of his ministry.

Then a second emphasis was: The Pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus. This was something... well, you had to know Mr Sparks to really appreciate this. For him, the Lord Jesus was the beginning and the end of everything. He was the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He saw *everything in* Christ. He believed the whole new creation was *in* Christ. The new man was *in* Christ. *Everything* was in Christ. This was a tremendous emphasis in his ministry. "Where was the Lord?" he would say. "Where is the Lord in this person's life? Where is the Lord Jesus in this person's work? Where is the Lord Jesus in this person's ministry?" He used to say, "If you and I want to come right through to the throne of God, there is only one thing we need to do: *Give the Lord Jesus the place the Father has given Him. This* is the way to be preserved from error, from compromise, from backsliding, from beginning in the Spirit and ending in the flesh."

Then there was a third emphasis: "God's Spiritual House". He saw the church

as God's *spiritual* House. He saw the church as the *Bride* of Christ and the *Wife* of the Lamb; as the *Body* of the Lord Jesus. His understanding of the church was *overwhelming*. Anyone who heard brother Sparks expounding the church from the Word of God was left almost, you would say, breathless. It was *such* a vision, *such* an understanding. He believed that the House of God, God's spiritual House of which you and I are living stones built together, we are to grow into a holy Temple of the Lord, a Home of God in the Spirit. "This," he said, "is the heart of history. This is the heart of redemption." This is where he used to say, "There is something bigger than salvation". Ohhh! People used to get so *angry* with him! "How could he say there is something greater than salvation? That is un-evangelical! It's not right! It's not Biblical!" Mr Sparks always said salvation is not an end, it is a *means* to an end. The end of the Lord is His dwelling place. The end of the Lord is His spiritual House. The end of the Lord is His Home in the spirit. And our salvation is a means to put us into that: God's spiritual House.

And then, fourthly, there was another emphasis in his ministry: "The Battle for Life". He used to say, "If there is spiritual life in you, all hell will come out to extinguish it. If there is spiritual life in your ministry, all hell will come out against it. If there is spiritual life in our fellowship, all hell will come out against it. We have to learn how to fight the good fight of faith and *lay hold* on eternal life. We have to learn *how to keep in Life!*" He used to say again and again, "*Everything* to do with God is Life, Life! Life, and more Life, abounding Life. Not death. Life! Even the death of the Cross, is to bring us into Life, and the more we know the death of Christ, the more we shall know the Life of Christ! Therefore this battle for Life." This was a very real emphasis in our brother's life. Many of us probably owe more to him on this matter than anything else: *how* to stand; *how* to overcome; *how* to lay hold; *how* to press on. It is a *battle* for Life, but the *Lord* is well able.

And then lastly, there was yet another emphasis. It is in a little book called "In Touch with the Throne". This is all to do with intercession. Our brother Mr Sparks used to say, "The real calling of the church is to intercession. Intercession is far more than prayer. Anyone can pray - only those who've grown up can intercede. You cannot travail if you're a baby. You have to have a certain minimal maturity, and *then* you can conceive, *then* there can be travail, and *then* there can be burden." This emphasis on intercession, he believed that real overcomers are nearly *always* intercessors. They know *how* to intercede. And then he would say, "Intercession doesn't require your lips, it requires your whole; *all* of you: spirit, soul and body. It doesn't require ten minutes of the day or an hour, nor even an hour in the week, nor even an hour in the month. It requires *you*, twenty-four hours of *every* day, of *every* week, of *every* month, of *every* year. This is *unceasing* prayer."

These were the emphases in our brother's ministry.

Now, our brother had some... more than a few, faults. I said to the folks in Taipei once when I was talking with Miss Elizabeth Fishbacher, I said to her, "Did brother Watchman Nee have any faults?" And I remember Elizabeth Fishbacher looking at me and saying, "Faults? Brother Watchman Nee have *faults*?" and I thought, "Oh, she's going to crush me." And then she said, "Brother Nee was a *great* man with *great* faults. The greater the man, the greater the faults." Our brother Mr Sparks was a truly great man, and he truly had great faults.

I've spoken of his suspiciousness. This was a real weakness. Mr Sparks just did not trust people. And then another weakness was he was totally British. Now, you Chinese will understand that this can be a weakness, to be totally British! The British (like the Chinese) the British always felt that the temperament of the kingdom of heaven is basically British, and that to be changed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus means that you must be changed into the likeness of the British! Basically, it was a real weakness.

Mr Sparks was so thankful that he was born British. With it came a kind of imperialism. It was a weakness. He felt that the Latin peoples had very great weaknesses, and that the Asian peoples had very great weaknesses, and that the Jews had enormous weaknesses. He was British! It's very hard for us in the world we live in now to understand that there were people who really believed that this was the most tremendous thing: to be British. This was another weakness in our brother.

Then our brother had another weakness: he was a very isolated man. And it is very interesting: he *loved* America and the Americans. And for us in Britain it was always a cause for amazement. He was as different to Americans as it was possible to be! He always wore a tie. He always wore a suit. He was *always* immaculately dressed. He always had certain manners from which he never departed, certain regulations; and you know, the Americans to us were quite different! He would never sit with his legs stretched out. *Never!* He would never lie on the floor! He would never stretch out over a whole sofa! He would never say, "Hi!" NEVER! It was just not Mr Sparks, yet he loved the Americans. And the reason was this: because he was so reserved, he found the Americans with their warmth and their openness, and their sort of... total... I can't explain it... he found he could be himself, he could actually be himself amongst Americans. Whereas amongst the British, he couldn't really be himself. He always had to be, you know, the gentleman. This was a weakness.

Mr Sparks had yet one further weakness and that was his authoritarianism. It was natural to him. It was totally natural. He was a total individual authority

and this was the problem very much in the work and in the fellowship.

These were the weaknesses in our brother. They were swallowed up in the Lord Jesus. The abiding impressions of our brother Mr Sparks were not these weaknesses. If anything, these weaknesses only threw into greater relief what God had done in him - this is how I always will remember him.

I have, I think, received more from our brother Mr Sparks than any other person. I remember him like this: he *always* magnified the Lord Jesus - not just by word, but by life. His very presence brought in something of the Lord Jesus. *Every* time he came, the impression left with you was, "How great is the Lord!" When he spoke, when he spoke you were left with this: "How great is the Lord Jesus." He *always* magnified the Lord Jesus. This is something so special. So few who minister leave this impression of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. It is something that God did *in* him, so that his very presence brought the Lord Jesus in, and his ministry glorified the Lord. This is the first abiding impression. If I was only asked to give the one impression, this is the impression I would give. His favourite hymn was that hymn with the refrain, "How Great Thou art!"

The second abiding impression was: he was *always* pressing on, always you got the feeling with brother Sparks, he was always reaching out, always moving forward, never stationary, *always* going on. You got this feeling with his very presence, as well as his ministry. One of his favourite hymns... I can't find it in your book... I'm so sorry you don't have it... it's based on one of the great statements of one of the leading Puritans: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." He used to *love* this hymn. We sang it so often in conferences. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word" and this Puritan leader said, "Let us not stop with Martin Luther or with Ulrich Zwingli, or John Calvin or the others. There's always more, always more, always more." Mr Sparks used to say, "Let us go beyond John Wesley, Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, George Fox, J. N. Darby, and then George Mueller, Anthony Norris Groves... Let us go on beyond!" He used to say, "I hope people will go beyond me." Some never did. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word" he used to say, "You know, there's not just a second blessing, there's a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, and an eighth, and a hundredth, and a thousandth. Go on! Go on into everything the Lord has for you! There's more, and more, and more." This was the second abiding impression.

And then a third abiding impression to me is: he *always* seemed to minister under the anointing. I don't think I *ever* heard our brother minister other than under the anointing. Now that is something! Some people never minister under the anointing. Some people minister sometimes under the anointing and

mostly not under the anointing. Some people minister a lot under the anointing and sometimes not. It's very rare to find someone who ministers under the anointing at all times. That is a secret, a secret that our brother had. He knew how to abide under the anointing, not to give dead food, not to give what he thought, but *always* to give what God gave him. This was how he ministered under the anointing.

If I were to give one last impression, I would say it was a kind of dogged determination to fulfil what God had given him. I remember on one occasion, (I was not there, but some of my friends were there) in India, in one of the big meetings of brother Bakht Singh. There were 16,000 people present. No air-conditioning, no fans, unbelievable heat, unbelievable humidity and unbelievable dirt. And whilst our brother was speaking, he told me, he said, "I saw a shadow coming across the whole congregation." He said, "I began to think I was ill. What is this black shadow that is slowly coming across all the people?" And then when it got near, suddenly he saw people brushing off, it was an *army* of cockroaches, great oriental ones! An *army* of them! There had been a flood a little way away and millions of these creatures moved, and they went over the whole congregation! And you know, our brother never stopped. Now, like many people, he had a great horror of cockroaches, and the Lord sent him a little saviour. As they came nearer and nearer a little chameleon came down and climbed up on his shoulder. It's a very slow moving creature. He went and sat up on his shoulder. Not a cockroach came near! And he fulfilled his ministry. Can you believe such a thing? This is dogged determination, the best thing about the British!

And then I remember another time when I was present, our brother got up to speak and suddenly something happened to the lighting. It went OFF/ON OFF/ON OFF/ON OFF/ON. All in the whole conference centre went OFF/ON OFF/ON OFF/ON OFF/ON OFF/ON for three-quarters of an hour. And our brother just went on preaching, right the way through the whole. I don't remember what he said, because of this ON/OFF ON/OFF ON/OFF. I mean, it was impossible to take in what he was saying, but I came away with such a blessing. It was the amazing tenacity, the dogged determination! Satan was *not* going to win in this meeting. He was going to fulfil the Lord's purpose for this meeting. Interestingly, I don't think the Lord's purpose for that meeting was the word He had given our brother, for none of us can remember it! And the tape-recorder went ON/OFF ON/OFF ON/OFF ON/OFF for three-quarters of an hour, *but* the amazing thing: everyone was blessed, because it was the 'Battle for Life' illustrated.

These are the abiding impressions of our brother Mr Sparks. I thank God that I knew him, and I thank God for what I've received from him. I only pray that

we might be as faithful as he.

Thank you.

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# Explanation of the Nature and History of "This Ministry"

*by T. Austin-Sparks in 1956*

With the expanding and strengthening of this ministry there is an increasing enquiry and request for some concise statement as to its spiritual history and nature. This need seems also to be accentuated by a growing misunderstanding and misrepresentation of it. Under considerable pressure, therefore, and with the desire to help all concerned, I am seeking, in as small a compass as possible, to make available this explanation.

"A Witness and a Testimony" is a small paper in which we seek to minister to the Lord's people every second month such spiritual food, light, and instruction as He gives. At the time of writing, the paper is nearing the end of its thirty-third year of issue. Very much ground has been covered in that extended period, and what we write here can be but a very brief intimation of the main features of the ministry.

Behind the written and printed ministry there is a body of people which has grown from a small company to a very considerable family. This is true locally and world-wide. Most of what has been published has first been given in spoken ministry, either to the local company or in the periodic conferences held usually five times each year. Some books, however, have been written direct.

It is necessary to say this, because we want it to be understood that everything is vitally related to the actual and growing need of the spiritual life of a representative body of God's people. Indeed, it is the people who have made it necessary, given meaning to it, and drawn it out. This is surely God's way of giving! This, then, is not just booky, cloistered, or studied matter, but ever the call and answer of living conditions.

During the years there have been changes and developments in measure and form, in emphasis and presentation, as there should ever be where there is life and growth, provided that the essential foundation remains true and unchanging. Adjustableness in the presence of fuller light or better understanding is an essential to true and proper growth, and we have ever sought this grace, and shall seek it to the end. It is not for us to speak of the appreciation which has grown and been given such wide expression, but we may speak of the help which we have received from the Lord and by which we



have been enabled to continue to this day. When we say that, we say very much, for, had it not been so, we could not possibly have survived the many-sided effort of Satan to end this ministry, and the so great antagonism of many who have thought that they were doing God service in opposing it and us.

Before proceeding to outline the message, may I make this further emphasis. It is not truth in any merely technical or doctrinal sense that we are wanting to propagate. We can truly say with Paul, *although now only in a secondary sense (that is, through the Scriptures)*, "I received it not from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ." It has been by being taken into deep and painful experiences that we have come to see God's Son in the greater fulnesses of His significance, and that we can truly say that every fresh ray of living light has been born out of dark and bitter travail. So we would have it; for if there is one thing more than another from which we would be saved, it is from having our teaching not in vital relation to our experience. God forbid that we should ever decline into a mere 'teaching'! We desire to know no more truth than is experimental. It is an axiom or fixed principle that spiritual and eternal values can only be ministered as they have proved to be living power in those who minister. We can only comfort others with the comfort wherewith *we ourselves* have been comforted of God. Others can only really be helped by what has been the power of life in the would-be helper. Information, by itself, however correct and orthodox, however strongly held in conviction and passed on in passion, will lack an essential and indispensable quality or value for spiritual constitution. Hence it has ever been God's way to raise up a vessel, personal or corporate, in which His message has been wrought by fiery ordeal. The messenger must not only have the message in him, but he must be in the message: not only in mind and feeling, but in experience and being.

This being the way of life, in setting forth the nature and content of this particular ministry I shall follow the course of our own spiritual history and growth, rather than work backward from the present position. As we have said, the various books which have come into being through the years have been but the expression of the progressive and many-sided emphasis in our hearts, and these embody the history of God's dealings with us in experience and illumination. Their value will only lie in their being able to touch the Lord's people at that point of experience and need which was the occasion of their being produced. Unless there is such felt need, they will be nothing more than words.

No one should imagine that we think of what follows here as a 'special revelation', or regard our experience as unique. *We positively repudiate the charge that we claim to have a special revelation.* Nothing that we may set

forth is new in itself, but all of it can be found in the Word of God. It is only new as things are new when they come with all the impact of a revelation *to those concerned*, although others may have seen them long before. It is not the things in themselves, but the power and life with which they break upon us *as if by revelation*, that constitutes a ministry. Therefore, no one will expect to find here a new 'revelation', but it may be that what is here will come to some - as it came to us - like a new revelation. (*In using the plural, 'we' and 'us', in this statement, I refer to the company, here and scattered world-wide, of whom I know these things to be true.*)

It was after years of Bible teaching, evangelical ministry, missionary enterprise, and varied Christian activities that the Lord brought us, in His own effective way, to see, as we had not seen before -

### **The Fuller Meaning Of The Cross**

This was the first stage in an altogether new life under an open Heaven. As we came to see subsequently, the Cross (*or its type - the Altar*) was ever God's new starting-point in the realization of His full thought. Starting-point, we say; for Calvary is not an end in itself, but the beginning of everything. As to the objective meaning of the Cross, there was no need for any adjustment. The great values of the Lamb slain, as related to the first stage or phase of Christian experience, were there, thank God. Deliverance from the judgment resting upon the world; deliverance from condemnation and death; deliverance from the tyranny or the bondage of an evil conscience - all in virtue of the righteousness which is by faith in that Righteous One who offered Himself without spot to God for us: this was where we stood, by His grace. What Christ by His Cross was and is *for* us was our anchor-ground. The apprehension and appreciation of all that has never ceased to grow, and is deeper, fuller, stronger to-day than ever.

Moreover, we know quite well that this basic position is an object of Satan's unending assault and bitter antagonism. And it will be so to the last. He knows quite well that everything else is jeopardized and frustrated if he can shake a believer's position as to what Christ is *for* him or her. Who is of any use to God or men, in eternal values, who is not settled as to his or her acceptance in the Beloved? Who can count in any realm spiritually who has not a settled assurance that *in Christ Jesus* they are accounted righteous, whatever they may be in themselves? Every fiery dart of the evil one will get home if the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of this faith is not firmly apprehended and appropriated. Yes, the objective meaning of Calvary - Christ crucified - is of unspeakable importance in the matter of a believer's standing, and we can never cease to keep this in full view and hammer it home.

But, when we have taken account of this and have it well settled, it *may* only relate to deliverance from "Egypt". For it is clear that all that we have said and referred to so far is connected with *ëtranslationí* (or *transference*) out of the power of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. It was a mighty thing that happened in Egypt, in virtue of the slain Lamb and shed and sprinkled blood, and it had abiding elements and values. But there was much more needed. While an outward bondage was destroyed, that is, the bondage which meant being involved in the doom of the world, there still remained an inward bondage. Israel in the wilderness represents the dominion of the natural life, the self-life, the "flesh". God's people, yes! Redeemed, yes! In the Kingdom, yes! Heirs of promise, yes! But not getting very far; ineffective, unfruitful, up-and-down and round-about: and always at the mercy of the life of sense. They even, sometimes, imagined that they might have a better time back in Egypt. A strangely contradictory state for those who, in their better moments, were so sure that they had been redeemed by God! This wilderness life represented much expenditure of energy, much laborious effort, much longing and aspiration, much service and much religious devotion and activity, but it never got through, and it was one big circle, coming back, in effect, to where they were before.

Well, it was at some such point that the fuller meaning of the Cross was made to break upon our greater need. It is a part of the nature of things that we never learn in a vital way by information. We really only come into the good of things by being "pressed out of measure". So the Lord has to take much time to make spiritual history. When at length our eyes are open, we cry, O, why did I not see it before! But everything else had to prove insufficient before we could really be shown, and that takes time. Thus it was that we were turned in that dark hour to Romans chapter six, and, almost as though He spoke in audible language, the Lord said: *ëWhen I died, you died. When I went to the Cross I not only took your sins, but I took you. When I took you, I not only took you as the sinner that you might regard yourself to be, but I took you as being all that you are by nature; your good (?) as your bad; your abilities as well as your disabilities; yes, every resource of yours. I took you as a "worker", a "preacher", an organizer! My Cross means that *not even for Me can you be or do anything out from yourself*, but if there is to be anything at all it must be out from Me, and that means a life of absolute dependence and faith.í*

At this point, therefore, we awoke to the fundamental principle of our Lord's own life while here, and it became the law of everything for us from that time. That principle was: "nothing of (out from) Himself", but "all things of (out from) God".

*The Son can do nothing of (out from) Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, then the Son also doeth in like manner' (John 5:19).*

*"I can of Myself do nothing: as I hear I judge" (John 5:30).*

*"My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me" (John 7:16).*

We saw that this explains so many strange and - naturally - perplexing things in His behavior: acting and refusing to act; going and refusing to go; speaking and refusing to speak. Later, we came to see that this is the whole meaning of life in the Spirit, and that it is an altogether different life from the natural ways of men, even of Christian men (*more on this later*). At the time of this seeing, it was a matter of this law becoming basic, absolute, and ultimate, and it was something totally different from what had been in all our ideas and activities in Christian life and work.

Such a revelation, if it is to be a staggering and breaking thing, so that there is no strength left in us, requires a background of much vain effort. But then, it carries with it a great implication. While an end is written large in the Cross, and while that end is to be accepted as *our* end indeed, so that there *can* be no more of *anything* so far as *we* are concerned, Jesus Lives! and that means boundless possibilities.

Thus we came to see that the Red Sea and the Jordan are but two sides to the one Cross. Both symbolize the spiritual death and resurrection of the believer, but the latter carries it into another realm. Jordan sees the deliverance from judgment, death, and doom, carried on to deliverance from self; it is the *practical* disconnection of what is dead from what is risen. In the first it is my sins; in the second it is my self. At the crossing of the Jordan a monument of twelve stones, a type of the Israelites themselves, was left buried in the bed of the river, as if to signify that the self-life of the wilderness was to be henceforth reckoned as judged and ended as absolutely as was the bondage to Pharaoh. And then another memorial of twelve stones was taken *from* the bed of the river and placed on the Canaan shore, as a type of themselves, as risen not only to newness of life, but also to a perpetual and practical separation from their dead and buried selves. All this is as by union with Christ crucified and risen: for the priests stood in mid-stream with the Ark and its blood-stained Mercy-seat on their shoulders, type of Christ as in death, yet triumphing over death in virtue of His Blood: for the first set of stones were laid in the exact spot where the priests' feet had stood.

Israel after the flesh in the wilderness, and Israel after the Spirit in Canaan, while both having known the blessing of salvation from judgment, are like two

different peoples. So it was with us. The difference is unspeakably great. Someone who had been prominently in Christian work for many years described the difference - when at length he knew it - as even greater than when he first knew salvation, and that was great. We will not attempt to set down all the differences, but there is one phrase that puts so much of it all into expression - 'an open heaven'. How the life of nature blocks the way to the life of the Spirit! How doing, or attempting to do, work for God in our own natural energy closes the way to the energies of the Spirit! How our mental strivings and intellectual labours to apprehend spiritual truth lock the door to illumination by the Spirit! Yes, we know something of this, but, blessed be God, we know something of having that "natural man" put away, and Christ in greater risen and ascended fulness taking his place.

There is a double tragedy that may be associated with this subjective or experimental meaning of the Cross. On the one side, there is the tragedy of the ignorance of so many of the Lord's people, leading to or resulting in a wilderness history in life and service. A tremendous amount of energy, expenditure, effort, and strain, with *spiritual* results so incommensurate. The wilderness is ever a bounded place; limited by the horizons of sense; never characterized by the realization of the limitless fulnesses of the heavenly emancipation from nature.

On the other hand, there is the tragedy that this meaning or application of the Cross is positively refused and rejected by so many of the Lord's people. There is a very large body of Christians who just will not have the Cross on its subjective or experimental side. This amazes us, but it explains very much. If the "natural" man (*not the unregenerate man, necessarily*) still exerts an influence in the realm of Divine things, there is bound to ensue a static system of teaching, a fixed horizon of vision, a legal bondage to tradition, a fear of man, a deadening domination of the "letter" as separated from the "spirit", and many other unhappy situations of spiritual death, endless divisions, and spiritual pride. Paul's remedy for traditionalism and legalism in relation to *Christians*, was Christ Crucified, as see *ëRomansí* and *ëGalatiansí*. The same remedy was resorted to for all the painful fruits of carnality amongst believers, as see *ëCorinthiansí*.

Perhaps the repudiation of this application of the Cross is due to the fear of a too great subjectivity: that is, a turning of people in upon themselves. It is true that introspection is a sign of weakness and can lead to certain paralysis - indeed, it can breed very many evil things; but introspection is a *misapprehension* of the subjective side of the Cross. It would indeed be unsafe and disastrous for anyone to 'take up' such 'teaching', were they not already settled and established in that objective aspect, which settles once and for all

the question of "all righteousness" and acceptance in Christ through faith in His perfections as for us. No; Israel in Canaan did not represent introspective self-occupation and morbid engagement with how much more they personally had to be crucified. They were free, *and free to do the Lord's business*. The 'Jordan' meaning of the Cross, carrying, as it does, the 'Red Sea' aspect into the realm of self-life, means freedom from self, and it is only a contradiction of the Cross to be still engrossed with self-crucifixion. But 'Jordan' is a big crisis, with an abiding application and progressive outworking.

The crisis is like the touch upon the sinew of Jacob's thigh. The strength of nature is definitely and permanently crippled, so that "Jacob" will carry that veto to his last day, when he will still be "leaning upon the top of his staff". The progressive outworking will be in the discovery of how much there is that we *cannot* do - are not allowed to do - *of ourselves*, because of that basic forbidding of the Cross. This may take us as far as it took Paul, who in one unparalleled experience said:

"We were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life" ("*despaired*" here means *there seemed no way out for life*): "yea, we... had the sentence of death within ourselves, **that we should not trust in ourselves**, but in (*upon*) God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

The working of the Cross here is a subjective-objective matter, and has nothing to do with our standing or acceptance, but rather with the *fulness* of Christ. Because the importance of this crisis and process has to be emphasized to Christians, many have allowed it to enter into the wrong realm and almost carry them back into 'Egyptian' bondage. If the Lord brings us to the despair of Kadesh-Barnea and then shows us Romans 6, or Galatians 2:20, we must capitulate to our death position with Christ as to *ourselves*, just as we did as to our sins; and we must have a faith understanding with the Lord, firstly that the thing is so, whether we immediately realize it or not; and then that He is going to take us by the way that will reveal what the new position is and implies. We shall undoubtedly discover that there was far more included in the 'death' than we had any idea of; but the new position will mean enablement to acquiesce.

We have said that this 'Jordan' experience of the Cross is a crisis - and what a crisis it is! It is not only the end of one realm, it is the opening up of and entering upon a new one. So it proved to be with us, as with Israel. Through this experience we entered into a great expanse of spiritual life, light, and liberty. But then several major things began to come into view. Of course, the first of these was -

## Life In The Spirit

We do not mean that there was no knowledge or experience of the Spirit before this. As with Israel, the very deliverance from Egypt and government in the wilderness was by the Pillar of Cloud and Fire; so we had known that sovereignty and grace. But Jordan marked a development in this matter. Joshua stands for ever as a type of the *energies* of the Holy Spirit in relation to the *full* thought of God. These energies stood over against the poor fruitless energies of man's own soul.

For us this had a definite subjective meaning: it meant that the Spirit's sword or knife cut clean in "to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit". There came about the recognition of the fact that the soul is one thing and the spirit is another, and that it is the latter through which the Holy Spirit realizes all the purposes of God. The soul *is ourselves* in intelligence, will, feeling and energy. It is not in our souls or ourselves that the Holy Spirit dwells, but in our spirits, and the renewed and indwelt spirit is the organ of Divine knowledge, purpose, and power. Life in the Spirit is only possible as this distinction is made. We have covered the ground of this distinction in a book entitled "What is Man?" and our object now is only to indicate the steps of spiritual progress. This life in the Spirit, then, means a new realm of spiritual knowledge and understanding, which is closed, very largely, even to Christians, if they have not known the meaning of death and resurrection union with Christ in its relation to the natural man, man in his natural constitution. Such may have the information which is given by the Scriptures on all matters, and even teach these things - so did we; but there is all the difference of life and death between this and being in the living good of the truth. Life in the Spirit, then, means another life, another knowledge, another energy, another capacity.

Then, of these outstanding features of the new sphere, one that very quickly came into view was the inclusive fact that life was thenceforth "in the heavenlies", and this was nothing abstract and mythical. It was to involve us in the most practical issues.

Once again, Israel's history was in the course of being repeated spiritually. In their case there was a development, even with Joshua. True, he represented - and continued to represent - the energies of the Holy Spirit, but now another feature appeared as peculiarly associated with the new place. This is described thus:

*"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a Man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand: and Joshua went unto Him, and said unto Him, "Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries?" And He said, "Nay; but as Captain of the host of*

*the Lord am I now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, "Put off they shoe from they foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And Joshua did so" (Joshua 5:13-15).*

The new feature which is brought in at this point is that of Sovereign Headship in the heavenlies in relation to spiritual warfare. The "Lord's host", the "Captain", and the "sword drawn" are very significant words. What is signified is that the Holy Spirit is not just abstract or unrelated power, neither is He present in His own name. He and His energies are related to, and are the servants of, a Sovereignty, a Throne. The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He is said to have been given that place till His enemies shall have been made the footstool of His feet. All authority has been given unto Him in heaven and on earth. There is a mighty hierarchy of evil occupying the heavenlies and making war in countless ways against that heavenly Kingdom of God's Son. Paul's well-known description is:

*"Principalities... powers... world-rulers of this darkness... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 6:12).*

It is precisely in relation to the destruction and ultimate casting out of this system of evil powers and intelligences that the Holy Spirit is here. He and God's Son are one in Godhead, and therefore in Divine Person, and He is here as Christ in the captaincy of the Lord's host. He is the mighty energy of that "all authority", that Throne. His it is to lead and energize the people of God against the spiritual opponents of God's purpose.

Thus, it was not long after our coming into the fuller meaning of the Cross, as to the self-life, that there broke upon us this great fact that life in the Spirit is life in the heavenlies and life in the heavenlies is meant to be a life of reigning and dominion. Again, this is a life of warfare; but in *this* realm and in *this* work it is a case, not of appealing to the Throne, but of operating or functioning as from the Throne. It is bringing that Throne to bear upon the enemy in his hold and his devices.

Whenever the Lord has brought in livingly something of His heavenly order, either initially or by recovery, He has done so with such evident tokens of it being of Himself that you never forget. For us, when this broke upon us, there was a period in which the tokens were so clear and many as to keep us in a state of wonder. The impact of the Throne was brought - through prayer - to bear upon all kinds of situations in which the enemy was very definitely implicated, and those situations were released. We are concerned now with spiritual principles, not with examples. Through the years there has been



much spiritual education, and the battle has been carried into deeper realms, more and more away from the surface to the great ultimate spiritual issues of life and death, but the truth and principle remain the same, and we remain there in the positive testimony to the absolute Lordship of Christ in the universe.

But we were to learn more yet of the Divine mind, and so, in keeping with the Scriptures, we found the Lord bringing a further matter to bear upon us. Each fresh step included what went before and carried it further. The next thing, into the spiritual value and significance of which we found ourselves being led, was:

The Heavenly Nature, Vocation,

And Destiny Of The Church

As The Body Of Christ

That which the Lord had done in us through the deeper work of the Cross had, among other things, resulted in a strange detachment *in spirit* from the earthly aspect of things religious. We found ourselves lifted spiritually from the forms and systems, the titles, designations, divisions, and orders of Christianity as here known amongst men; and our concern was for "all saints" without discrimination. But the Lord very definitely took us in hand to show us in a positive way the meaning of what He had done. We saw later how much this was in keeping with His Word throughout. The Altar always leads to the House; pointing on to the fact that Calvary leads to the Church. There can be no Church until there has been an Altar, but the very *object* of the Altar - the Cross - is the Church. And so, with steadily increasing clearness and fulness, there opened to us the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. Its aspects or meanings are various.

Firstly, there is the fact that Christ's exaltation and reign is not just a personal matter where He is concerned. When, at length, Satan and his hosts are dispossessed of the heavenlies and cast down, it will be done through and by the Church in union with Christ as its Sovereign Head, and it will be that Church - Head and Members - that will take the place of that deposed kingdom to fulfil the governmental purpose which they have usurped and evilly exercised in God's universe. The Lord Jesus will reign and govern *through His Church* in that age to come.

Then, as being all-of-a-piece with this inclusive purpose, several other things became clear to us.

It is the *Church* which is of primary concern to the Lord in this dispensation. Everything is related to that in His mind and activity. This means, among other things, that all unrelatedness and independence, all that is merely personal, sectional, exclusive or separate must certainly fail to reach God's full end or to have His seal upon it beyond a certain point. It must inevitably stop short and be spiritually limited. Every *Divine* provision is unto the securing and perfecting of the Body (Eph. 4:14), and individuals can only reach fulness in a related way. If this is true then other things follow.

The Church must be on heavenly, not earthly ground. Earthly ground will provide contradictions of some sort. Anything which is, by its position, interest, relationship or *title*, on earthly ground, as distinguishing between the Lord's people, is a contradiction of the Church as the Body of Christ. None of this obtains in the heavenlies, and its existence here means spiritual weakness in face of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies. It was borne in upon us with increasing clearness and strength that consistency with this light demanded that we must forsake all partisan or sectarian ground - indeed, all ground other than that of Christ universal in all born-again children of God - and take the position, with all artificial barriers down, that all such are "one new man in Christ". How could we honestly stand upon and for that affirmed fact and then expect people to *ëjoiní* some particular *historical* section of Christians, when *the* Church is not historical but eternal, issuing from the eternal counsels of God and continuing unto "the ages of the ages"?

The change of position involved us in immediate and misunderstandings, misconceptions, misrepresentations, ostracism, and "evil report", being "everywhere spoken against". The first thing said, and which cost us the loss of some valued friends, was that the way that we were taking put all those who did not take the same course in the wrong. This was, of course, rather a superficial and cheap way out of a difficulty, for the same could be said of anyone or anything that departed from tradition or common acceptance in any realm whatsoever, and not least of the Lord and His apostles.

For many years we adhered to an imposed silence and refusal to try to explain, lest such a course should seem like self-vindication or self-defense.

As time has gone on and the ministry has spread so extensively, making us so widely known, the mis-apprehensions have gained in measure and strength. Hence, largely in response to the appeal of friends and the necessity of the situation, we are seeking herewith at least to clarify the position, and, if possible, correct mistaken conclusions to which some have come, either by reason of their own inability to grasp the true situation, or, maybe, because of the way in which we ourselves have put some matters.

So we return to, or pursue, this matter of the Church. Taken out of the general or immediate context certain paragraphs in our books could be made to mean quite the contrary to our intention. To begin with, we have always made the comparative the basis of any statement. That is, we have always made the matter one of comparison and contrast with what God would really have if He had His full way. Few would contend that the situation in Christianity is as God would have it. If He had His mind expressed, what so many Christian leaders call "our unhappy divisions", and what the "World Council of Churches" has described as "these man-made divisions" and "man's disorder", would not exist.

We have pronounced this situation as wrong and not according to God's mind, and have said - and do say - that these denominational divisions are a menace to spiritual fulness and a hindrance to the full purpose of God. They mean positive spiritual limitation. We believe that this situation would never have come about but for a low and weak level of spiritual life. When the tide is full the dividing 'breakwaters' disappear and lose their meaning. When it is low, they stand out stark. The difference between the natural and the spiritual is that in the one they are a necessity, in the other an exposure of tragedy. If, for some reason - an evangelistic campaign, or a spiritual-life convention - the tide rises, then we forget, *for the time being*, our divisions. When Christ becomes the all-dominating Object, then "things" lose their importance. We have said that this is how it ought to be normally and not extraordinarily.

But when we have said this, and all that we could say of this kind, there remain some other points which call for explanation. They mostly come under and out of the matter of Church order.

We have intimated that behind this ministry, and largely as the occasion and *venue* of it, there is a company of the Lord's people who regularly meet at Honor Oak, London. We believe that the 'order' of gathering, procedure, and ministry is as near to what the Apostles sought to have as our present light permits. We do not claim to have "yet attained", neither do we account ourselves as "yet perfect", but, being open to the Lord, we are adjustable to any further leadings of the Holy Spirit. But here again is a matter which to us is of great importance, although it denotes another difference.

We have never followed a pattern discovered on earth. Either we were in culpable ignorance, blissful blindness, or providential innocence, but we knew not of the same order obtaining already. So far as we were concerned it seemed as though the Lord was beginning *with us* at zero. Neither had we studied the *New Testament with the object of trying to formulate a New Testament church or its order*. We have since come to believe that the New Testament does not give a full and final pattern for reproduction and imitation.

Thus, having set aside all the former system of organised Christianity, we committed ourselves to the principle of the organic. No 'order' was 'setup', no officers or ministries were appointed. We left it with the Lord to make manifest by 'gift' and anointing who were chosen of Him for oversight and ministry. The one-man ministry has never emerged. The 'overseers' have never been chosen by vote or selection, and certainly not by the expressed desire of any leader. No committees or official bodies have ever existed in any part of the work. Things in the main have issued from prayer. We are very conscious that mistakes have been made, but the result of these has only served to re-emphasize the above principles.

Baptism of believers by immersion has clearly become the only way by which testimony to union with Christ in death and resurrection can truly and rightly be given. The Lord's Table is seen to be the combination of all the Christian testimonies, i.e., Christ's death for us; our death *in* Him; the oneness of all believers in and with Him as "one loaf" (I Cor. 10:17); and the "blessed hope" of His coming again.

We also feel that the Spirit's way of bearing testimony to the oneness of the Body of Christ is by a simple act of 'laying-on of hands' by representative members ('elders') of the Church, particularly in the case of the newly baptized. This is what we believe the Scriptures mean in this connection.

Reverting to the matter of 'Church' association or connection, let two things be said with strong emphasis. One: we sincerely recognise the sovereignty of God over all that we do not believe to be His first and full will. While the 'sects' and denominations, 'missions' and institutions are a departure from the Holy Spirit's original way and intention. God has undoubtedly blessed and used these in a very real way and has sovereignly done great work through faithful men and women. We thank God that it is so, and pray that every means possible of use may have His blessing upon it. This is not said in any patronizing or superior spirit; God forbid. Any reserve is only because we feel that there has been much delay, limitation and weakness due to the departure from the first and full position of the first years of the Church's life, and because of a heart-burden for a return thereto. We cannot accept the present 'disorder' as all that the Lord would or could have, and this may involve us in the charge of being 'reactionary'.

A second thing is that, believing so strongly, as we do, that everything must proceed from the Lord by the Spirit and not be of man, we could never advise or influence people to leave their 'church', 'mission', or connection. This we have never done, but have carefully avoided doing. Some have mistakenly felt that we meant that they should do so, and have done it. Others have acted under very definite exercise before the Lord. We feel very strongly that this

matter *must* be one which involves the spiritual life, and that it should have no less an issue at stake than the walk with God. On the same principle we have never felt that it was our business to try to duplicate or reproduce this spiritual 'order' by bringing into being churches in other places. This could easily have been done, but we have held back. Churches, we believe, must be the spontaneous result of a work of the Spirit and must be *ëborní* just as the individual believer is born from above. We may yet have to have clearer light and further leading on this matter, but this is as far as we have seen at present.

One other practical point must receive a mention. It is true that we have always believed that *the main* purpose for which *this ministry* was raised up was the feeding, instructing, and helping of the Lord's people, so that they might do His work more effectively. This has proved to be true, and the Lord has wonderfully enabled and supplied unto this. But let it be clearly understood that, however true this may be, we recognize without question that a great and essential part of the Church's business is that of bringing Christ to the unsaved. If unsaved ones were not continually being brought *ëinto* the Kingdomí among us and through this ministry, we should be most distressed, and should seek earnestly that the Lord would show us the reason why. Hence we do seek, by very definite ways and means, both at home and in other lands, to bring souls to the Saviour. Many have gone from us, during the years, into many parts of the world with this specific burden on their hearts. But, even so, evangelism is a related matter and not an end in itself. We repeat: It is the Church which is the primary and inclusive concern of the Lord in this dispensation.

As the years have passed we have found that, without premeditation, we have been increasingly occupied with God's one end - the fulness of Christ, and the ministry in all its aspects has had this as its focal centre. What an immense range and wealth there is in that clause: "to sum up all things in Christ"! Yes, it is Christ and His fulness! An adequate apprehension of Him will emancipate us from all smallness, earthboundness, and time-serving.

There are other aspects of this ministry which have given rise to misapprehension, but I trust that this much that has been written here will - *at least* - show that there is a meaning to it which is not that given by some, and a meaning of no small importance to all who seek the truth.

To sum up, we feel very strongly and positively that the Word of God throughout shows that God would have that at the end which corresponds with His thoughts at the beginning. There is ever and anon a call-back to "first love", "first works" and *ëbeginningsí*. With Israel this is the clear burden of the Prophets. Before the Apostles had gone they were under obligation to re-

emphasize first principles and to warn regarding departure. This, surely, is the burden of so much that they wrote. It is impossible to read John's letters and the first chapters of the Revelation, and to miss this meaning. The Lord never finally abandons His first position and revealed full mind. He may, in sovereignty, use all that He can as fully as He can, but if what obtains is other or less than that which He has shown to be His mind, there will be severe limitations and weaknesses.

Such limitations should give deep exercise of heart and lead to serious enquiry, and we believe that there are in fact many indications of such exercise and concern at this time. If the Bible is to be our guide, and if we are to take Church history seriously, then both of these make one thing clear. It is that, however long the Lord may bear with or sovereignly use the less, He at length forces the issue of the absolute by suffering and shaking and overthrowing, and by compelling to the essential, the spiritual, the intrinsic, and the full. This may be the great lesson that China should teach, and it will - at the end - be much more far-reaching. The *fulness* of Christ; the full and accurate thought of God; the true way of the Spirit - these are not ultimately optional. The vindication may await the time of the big testing and shaking, but it will as surely come, as did that of Jeremiah, Paul, and others; some even in our own generation.

What we have written above has been but our testimony. We do not give it as a Statement of doctrine, 'Principles and Practice', to which we expect anyone to conform, or as a basis of fellowship. The Spirit of God must bear witness to the truth in any unprejudiced and open heart, and we are quite content to have it so.

*First published as an Editor's Letter and then reproduced by Witness and Testimony Publishers as a booklet in 1956.*

# An Appreciation of T. Austin-Sparks

*by Harry Foster in 1971*

After forty years of active association with brother Austin-Sparks in the things of God, it fell to me to lead the praiseful funeral service on April 19th, 1971 when a large number gathered at Honor Oak to magnify the Lord for our brother's long life and fruitful service. During most of those years I have been a contributor to A Witness and A Testimony, so I have gratefully accepted the opportunity of writing a short appreciation of our brother and his work for God.

Those who are familiar with his books will recollect that one of them is entitled The School of Christ. The very words suggest his conception of what the Christian life is all about, for He taught that God's principal purpose for us all is directed towards eternity and directed to conforming us to the image of His Son. Brother Sparks was able to help so many of the disciples in Christ's school because throughout his many years of service he was ready to occupy the place of pupil as well as teacher.

His discipleship began when, at seventeen years of age, he walked dejectedly down a Glasgow street on a Sunday afternoon and stopped to listen to some young people witnessing in the open air. That very night he committed his life to the Saviour, and the next Sunday found himself standing with the same eager young Christians in their open-air meeting. He continued with them, and before long opened his mouth to speak some simple words of testimony, so entering on a life of preaching the Gospel which lasted for sixty-five years.

Those years were filled with many activities for God, but preaching was his greatest gift and his chief joy. He read widely in his desire for spiritual understanding, and above all he studied his Bible, always in an eager quest for the treasures new and old which can be found there by those who are instructed in the kingdom of heaven. One of his first choices for the supplementary hymn book which he prepared for use at the Honor Oak Christian Fellowship Centre was the hymn which carries as its refrain Pastor John Robinson's famous reminder to the Mayflower pilgrims that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word". How often we sang those inspiring words at the beginning of an Honor Oak Conference! And how often they proved true to the appreciative listeners!

Brother Sparks always set great store on "revelation", by which he meant not the original disclosure of truth by inspired writers of the Scriptures, but Spirit-

given illumination and insight into what the Word really teaches. For this reason most of his books, and almost all the articles published in this magazine were transcriptions of spoken messages which had been given with some real sense of divine enabling: they seemed to him to be more likely to have a spiritual impact if they came not only from studying but also from involvement in some practical situation. Probably his greatest helpfulness was when he was speaking of his own experiences, drawing lessons from what he had learned, not from study only, but from what had happened to him in Christ's school, where the Father treats His children with that chastening, or child-training, which alone can prepare them for true sonship according to the pattern of the perfect Son. He was often able to interpret to people the meaning of what they had been going through, showing them the significance and purpose of God's dealings with them.

Especially in his earlier years, brother Sparks used to lay great emphasis on the need for the inward application of the Cross to the life of the believer. He preached a Gospel of full salvation by simple faith in Christ's sacrifice, but he further stressed that the man who knows cleansing by the blood of Jesus should also allow the same Cross to work in the depths of his soul in order to release him from himself, and lead him into a less carnal and more spiritual walk with God. He himself had gone through a crisis of self-undoing by his acceptance of the Cross's verdict on his old nature, and had found this crisis to be the introduction to an altogether new enjoyment of Christ's life so great that he could only describe it as "an open heaven". In the church life of the people among whom he ministered he had also seen a striking transformation produced by this message of the Cross to the believer: it was no wonder, therefore, that he took every opportunity of affirming that there is no other way into the full experience of the will of God than by union with Christ in His death. Again and again he would revert to the teaching of Romans 6, not just as a favourite topic, but out of a conviction that such union was the sure means of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

The Cross is always painful, so we can appreciate that brother Sparks often found God's dealings with him hard to bear. Until 1950 he was frequently prostrate with pain, and unable to continue his work; yet again and again he was raised up, sometimes literally from a sick bed, and no one could fail to recognize the added spiritual impact which came from such a background. We prayed much for him during those years, but with no lasting relief, until he was able to have the surgical treatment which proved to be God's gracious means of answering our prayers, so that from then on he had a further twenty years of activity in many lands, and until his last illness was a remarkable example of how divine life can energize the mortal body.



For various reasons many other sufferings came into his life, but this was consistent with his own teaching that in the School of Christ one learns more by suffering than by study or listening to messages. If, however, the Cross involves suffering, it is also the secret of abundant grace, as he certainly proved. His last annual motto, prepared for this year of 1971, was devoted to the theme of the sufficiency of God's grace. In November he wrote an editorial in this paper, recording the fact that for him 1970 had been a year of unusual pressure and difficulty. Perhaps as an onlooker I may be permitted to comment that in the eyes of those nearest to him it was also a year of new and fuller evidence of the grace of God, and that for my part I have been left with blessed memories of fellowship in conversation and prayer which could never have been possible between us without the triumph of divine grace. To God be the glory!

The Cross is not only painful, it is unifying. Brother Sparks believed and preached that by it the individual believer is not only led into an enlarging personal enjoyment of resurrection life, but also into a true integration into the fellowship of the Church which is Christ's body. He could never think of himself as an isolated Christian, nor of assemblies as isolated groups, but he tried to keep before him the divine purpose of redemption, which is the incorporation of all believers into vital membership of the one body. It has sometimes happened that Christians most anxious to express this oneness have yet contradicted its spirit by being betrayed into an attitude of superiority towards other Christians, so allowing themselves to be wrongly divided from their fellows in Christ. We here have had to confess our own failures in this respect, realizing that our very eagerness to be faithful to the Scriptural revelation of what the Church ought to be may have unintentionally produced something of a separateness among the people of God. If brother Sparks at times tended in this direction, he certainly moved farther and farther away from it as he came nearer to eternity, being growingly careful to show a proper appreciation of all true believers, whatever their connection.

He must have been tempted at times to move away from practical fellowship with the church here at Honor Oak, for perhaps we limited him and we occasionally irked him, but God gave him grace never to succumb to this understandable temptation: he stayed with us to the end, keeping the bond of fellowship intact, showing a loving interest in the coming generation, and taking his share with us in worship and prayer so long as he was physically able. We owe much to his prayers for us, and he was deeply appreciative of the prayer support which we were able to give him, especially in his conference ministries in many places. His last messages to the church, entrusted to me from his sick bed, were of great gratitude for our prayers. In the final days of great weakness, when he often seemed unable to cope with

any other sort of communication, he never failed to give a whispered "Amen" when prayer was made, showing that when everything else was growing increasingly unreal, he could still respond to the great reality of prayer "in the name".

In fact, prayer had been his life, even more than preaching: in this matter he laid a foundation for the work and set a standard which by God's grace we will seek to maintain. While he was still pastor of the local Baptist church he used every Tuesday to travel up to spend the lunchtime praying with his two colleagues, George Paterson and George Taylor, who both worked professionally in town at that time. After the church had moved into the present premises in 1926, first Mr. Paterson and then Mr. Taylor resigned their posts in order to be fully free for spiritual work, which left still more opportunity for the united prayer which became a prominent feature both of life in the church and also in the adjoining Guest House.

To brother Sparks prayer had many aspects, as is shown by his book *In Touch with the Throne*. He set us an example of the prayer which is adoration, not requesting or interceding, but just offering to God the worship and love which are His due; he constantly stressed the importance of what he called "executive prayer", by which he meant not just wishful thinking with the tag of "Amen" at its end, but the bold claiming of God's promises in the name of the Lord; he introduced many of us to the reality of "prayer warfare", for he knew that only by getting to grips with the unseen enemies of God's will can the Church apply Christ's victory to actual situations. Because prayer is a battle he was sometimes saddened when our prayer meetings tended to flag, but he would rally us anew to the fight, and was always ready to rejoice when we seemed to break through into the victory of faith and to get "in touch with the throne".

Perhaps one of the earliest of his books can best give us a real clue to his whole life and ministry. It is called *The Centrality and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ*. This was where he began, and this was where he ended, for it became noticeable in his closing years that he lost interest in subjects and concentrated his attention on the person of Christ. Christ is central! None of us will claim always to have been "on centre", and he certainly made no such claim, but it was his life's objective and the aim of all his preaching and teaching to recognize that centrality and bow to that supremacy. At his funeral service there were hundreds who responded wholeheartedly to the suggestion that brother Sparks had helped them to get to know Christ in fuller and more satisfying ways. If anyone can make men realize something more of the worth and wonder of Christ, so that they love Him more and serve Him better, then such a one has not lived in vain. Many worldwide can truthfully say that

through the spoken or written words of 'T. A-S.' this is what happened to them and, especially with those who first trusted Christ as Saviour through his ministry, they will be his rejoicing in the day of Jesus Christ. Moreover, some of the truths, which were by no means accepted when he proclaimed them years ago, have now become widely accepted among evangelical Christians, so it is possible that in the long run his ministry may prove to have been more fruitful than at the time appeared to himself or to others. It is the steward's business to be faithful, and that he sought to be: only the Master is competent to judge of his success.

The very first message which I heard him give in 1924 was an appeal to those present to press on towards the mark for the prize, and it concluded with a reference to the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom which is promised in 2 Peter 1:11. Now, after forty-seven more years of the joys and trials of living for Christ, he has finished his course, and we trust that his entrance has indeed been rich and abundant. Although he has gone from us, his message still brings its challenge to us who are left behind, and although his lips are now silent, his prayers for us will still be answered.

There seemed something significant in the fact that he went to be with Christ immediately after the Easter holiday, for the closing service of our Easter Monday Conferences was always a highlight, as many who were present will agree. Brother Sparks could give long messages, and often did so, but his closing message then was invariably brief and to the point. The point was so often the Second Coming of Christ, and as we gathered in large numbers around the Lord's Table and concluded with a triumphant song about "The hope of the coming of the Lord", truly heaven came down and glory filled our souls. On this Easter Monday there was no such meeting, but early on the following morning our brother passed peacefully into the presence of Christ, to await there the moment when the hope will have become a glorious reality and we shall all together meet the Lord "in the air".

Brother Sparks' voice is no longer heard among us, but at the funeral service the voice of his Lord and ours seemed to ring through our halls, crying "Surely I come quickly!" As one man the whole concourse answered together: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." On this note we went out into the sunshine to lay our brother's body to rest and to sing triumphantly round his open grave: "One day He's coming, oh, glorious day!"

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*Mr Austin-Sparks in 1964.*

"This is the word of the Lord . . .  
Saying, Not by might, nor  
by power; but by my Spirit,"  
saith the Lord of Hosts."

Zech: iv. 6.

J. Austin Sparks

March 1964.