

MARTYRS

of the Faith

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CONTENTS

Foreword	3
1. The Life of John Foxe	5
2. An Overview of John Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i>	10
3. Polycarp	16
4. John Hooper	20
5. John Rogers	25
6. Joyce Lewes	28
7. George Wishart	32
8. Wang Zhiming	37
9. Wang Mingdao	45
Bibliography	58

FOREWORD

Philippians 1:29

*“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ,
not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”*

“Martyr” is a word that conjures feelings of passion and sacrifice. The word in Greek is “martur.” This word occurs 34 times in the New Testament. It is translated in the King James Bible as “martyr” three times (Acts 22:20, Rev 2:13; 17:6), twice as “record” (Phil 1:8; 2Cor 1:23) and the remaining 29 times as “witness or witnesses.” A martyr is basically a witness. There are many types of martyrs. There are people who would die for a cause for the good of the country and he is called a martyr for his country! There are those who die as a witness for saving the earth or environment and he is called by his family members and friends as a martyr for the earth! These martyrs are noble people who believe in their causes for the good of others. But the Bible speaks of martyrs as children of God who die for the cause of Christ!

How can a sinner be considered a martyr for Christ? What makes him worthy? Would Christ accept such a witness that is unto death? One of the passages from the Bible that encapsulates this teaching or rather calling to be a martyr for Christ is Philippians 1:27-30 *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you*

it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” All believers are to be martyrs, i.e. a witness for Christ! This is part of every believer’s calling. Believing in Christ includes suffering for Christ.

The emphasis on Reformation Sunday 2016 in Calvary Pandan is on martyrs. These were martyrs who are less well known. Their deeds and testimonies for Christ are exemplary. They will encourage every believer's hearts because these were ordinary believers. They were not super Christians. They were ordinary Christians like all believers who desire to obey God’s Word and be faithful all the days of their lives. They had to make hard choices in their lives that tested their witness for Christ. They were faithful even unto death. May all believers who are going through difficult times in these last days be encouraged to stay the course! Be faithful to the very end. 1 Peter 4:12-14 *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”*

THE LIFE OF JOHN FOXE



The year 1517 marked the birth of the Protestant Reformation. It was the year that Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses, challenging the long taught, but false and dangerous doctrines of indulgences and salvation by works. Just a year before that, in 1516, John Foxe was born. It was a momentous time - in that same year Erasmus had published his New Testament in Greek which would stoke a great controversy within the Roman Catholic Church. More importantly, it would provide the platform for the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of the common people. These events would exert great influence on him.

John Foxe is often remembered for his publication “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs,” but little else about him is remembered. Who was this man? And why did he publish this work of great historical and spiritual significance? He was a man of great faith and courage; a Puritan and Reformer.

HIS EARLY LIFE

John Foxe was born in 1516 in Boston, Lincolnshire, England. His father died when he was very young and he grew up under the care of his step-father, Richard Melton, who was a wealthy yeoman.¹ As a result, Foxe’s growing years were relatively comfortable. He was recognised to be

¹ A yeoman describes a social class above a farmer.

a studious and intelligent boy, with an “indefatigable zeal and industry.”

YEARS IN OXFORD

In 1534, when he was only sixteen, he entered Brasenose College in Oxford. Friends who recognised his abilities paved the way for him to study in Oxford. He was tutored by John Hawarden, a fellow of the College who would become the principal of the College later. John Hawarden seemed to have played an influential role in advancing Foxe’s university career. It was also at this college where he met and became good friends with Alexander Nowell, an English Protestant theologian and clergyman who was to become Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral during the reign of the Protestant Queen, Elizabeth I.

Foxe earned his B.A. in 1536 and became a probationer fellow of Magdalen College in 1538. He became a full fellow in 1539, was a lecturer of logic, and earned his M.A. in 1543. Oxford was a predominantly a catholic school at this time. The Mass was conducted and fellows had to take holy orders within seven years of their appointment which required them to remain celibate for life. By this time, the Reformation Movement had already taken root in England.² It was also during this time that he became an intimate friend of William Tyndale and Hugh Latimer, both of whom would later become martyrs of the faith. Through his study of theology, Foxe found that the Roman Catholic Church had departed from the faith of the Scriptures. He renounced his Roman Catholic faith and adopted the convictions of the Protestant faith. His convictions led him not only to refuse to participate in the daily Mass but also to oppose various long-established unscriptural practices in the College.

In 1545, because of their Protestant convictions, Foxe and five other fellows resigned from Magdalen College. Upon his resignation, driven by the need to earn a living, Foxe wrote to his friends for help. He found temporary employment as a tutor to Thomas Lucy of Charlecote whose father was a friend of Hugh Latimer. It was while tutoring Thomas Lucy that he met Agnes Randall whom he married in February 1547.

IN LONDON

In that same year, Foxe moved to the capital, London, to seek for work. Simeon Foxe, John Foxe’s son recounts the story of how his father was “sitting destitute” in St Paul’s Cathedral when a mysterious stranger approached him, gave him some money and assured him that he would be employed within a few days. Sure enough, three days later he was invited by Mary Fitzroy, the Duchess of Richmond to tutor her brother’s children, including Thomas Howard.

At this time Foxe had begun to write tracts and translate the sermons of Reformers, including Martin Luther’s.

He was ordained as a deacon of St Paul’s Cathedral in 1550 by Nicholas Ridley. Meanwhile, his circle of friends amongst Protestant Reformers continued to grow, in particular his friendship with John Bale. Bale was a Carmelite priest who had renounced his clerical vows and became a Protestant. He would have great influence on John Foxe. Various sources for the writing of Foxe’s book of Martyrs were in fact provided by Bale. During his time as a Carmelite priest, Bale had access to the Carmelite library which had compiled valuable collections of historical

² It was in 1534 where King Henry VIII was made the head of the Church of England, ending the power and influence of the Pope in England.

documents. One such document described the history of the Lollards. John Bale was also instrumental in piquing Foxe's interest in martyrologies and church history, which eventually led him to write his book on martyrs, based largely on Bale's research.

EXILE FROM ENGLAND

After the death of King Edward VI in 1553, Queen Mary I took the throne. Mary I, also known as Bloody Mary, restored Roman Catholicism in England and began persecuting Protestant Christians. During her reign of terror, about 280 protestant Christians were tortured and executed for their faith, with many others being imprisoned. In the same year, Foxe lost his tutorship and, being pursued by Bishop Gardiner, who was Queen Mary's chief persecutor, fled for his life. In 1554, he had fled England for Strasbourg, France.

Having begun working on his book of martyrs in 1552, he published a small Latin version of *The Acts and Monuments* in Strasbourg by 1554. The *Acts and Monuments* was the original title of the book which became commonly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. This first edition primarily focused on the lives of John Wycliffe and John Huss, as well as various Protestant Reformers of the 1500s.

Later that same year, Foxe moved to Frankfurt where he met John Knox, the great Scottish theologian and one of the illustrious pioneers of the Reformation. In 1555 he moved to Basel, Switzerland, where while struggling with poverty, he found work as a reader for a printer which published Protestant books. While in Basel, Foxe often received reports of the persecutions against Protestant Christians in England, including men such as Bradford, Ridley, Latimer and Cranmer;

many of whom were his friends. It was based on these reports that he expanded on his earlier work to include those who had suffered under the persecution of Mary I.

RETURN TO ENGLAND

After the death of Queen Mary I in 1559, Foxe remained in Basel to finish his work while closely watching the situation in England with deep concern. As much as he would have liked to, he did not have the means to return to England. In that same year, he completed and published the first proper Latin edition of his book.

After the death of Mary I, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn ascended the throne. One of the first things she did was to establish the English Protestant Church, with herself being the Supreme Governor.

While still struggling with poverty, John Foxe received help to return to England. His former student, Thomas Howard, now the 4th Duke of Norfolk, provided lodging for Foxe and his family. Foxe lived for the next ten years in Aldgate, London where he was ordained a priest by Bishop Grindal. Being a Puritan, Foxe did not fully conform to the practices of, and sought to distance himself from, the Church of England. One possible reason was that he wanted the liberty to preach the gospel freely.³

HIS WORK

While in England, he continued to work on his book as well as to translate it into English. In 1563, the first English edition of *The Acts and Monuments* was published. Comprising about 1800 pages, it was three times longer than the 1559 Latin edition. It was the publishing of this English edition that led to the book becoming popularly known as *The Book of Martyrs*. It was filled

³ Viggo Norskov Olsen, *John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church*, 15.

with detailed documentation and graphic illustrations of tortures and executions. More than 300 accounts of martyrs who died during the reign of Queen Mary I were recorded.

Foxe wanted his work to be published in English so that God's people would be able to read and learn from the examples of these martyrs of the faith. He chose English because it was the vernacular of the common people. Illustrations in the book made his work more comprehensible to the illiterate. Foxe was concerned that worldliness had crept into the church. He wanted through his work to encourage God's people towards holiness and at the same time to demonstrate to God's people how despite all manner of trial and persecution, the church "hath yet endured and holden its own! What storms and tempests it hath overpast, wondrous it is to behold."⁴ While so doing, he often showed how the martyrs stood firm upon the Lord Jesus Christ despite the torments and temptations they faced.

The first edition of Foxe's work soon came under the attack of the Catholics, which prompted him to prepare a second edition. In the second edition published in 1570, he included new materials not previously found in the first publication. He also responded to criticisms that were unfounded as well as corrected and removed various inaccuracies found in the first edition. He demonstrated that the Protestant faith is the Christianity of the Bible – a faith that has come under persecution since its beginning. The second edition of the work was nearly twice the size of the first with 2300 large pages of double-column text.

It was this second edition that was ordered by the upper house of the convocation of Canterbury to be placed in every English Church together with a copy of the Bishop's Bible. Such was the influence of Foxe's work that, prior to the publication of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the common people would often have read only the Bible and Foxe's work.

A third edition was published in 1576 and a fourth in 1583, shortly before Foxe's death.

HIS LEGACY

Apart from writing, Foxe was also involved in preaching and teaching. He laboured so hard and was so physically worn out that it was said that even his friends could not recognise him at times. After his patron, Thomas Howard, died in 1572, his financial situation became worse. Despite his own difficulties, he was known to be charitable to the poor and was often helpful to those in need.

A study of Foxe's work will reveal how the theology of the Reformation had influenced him. Foxe was greatly inspired by Luther, and this was clearly evident in his work. Foxe wrote of the Reformation and of Luther: "When was this glorious Reformation of the church ever true or like to be true, if it be not true now, in this marvellous alteration of the Church in this our latter days, or when was there any such conversion of Christian people in all countries ever hear of, since the apostles' time, as has been since the preaching of Martin Luther."⁵ Foxe was very clear in his mind what the foundational issue of the Reformation was all about. He was not a blind follower of Luther's theology, acknowledging that while men like Wycliffe and Huss had paved the way, it

⁴ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/john-foxe.html>

⁵ John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church, 17

was Luther who “gave the stroke, plucked down the foundation, and all by opening one vein, long hid before, wherein lieth the touchstone of all truth and doctrine, as the only principle origin of our salvation, which is, our free justification by faith only, in Christ the Son of God.”⁶

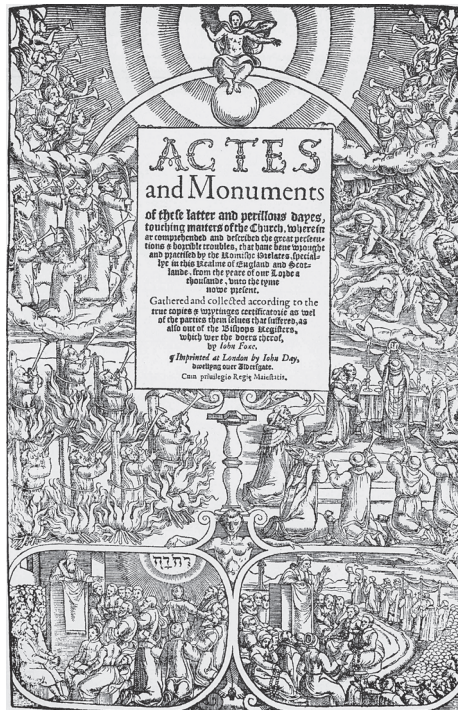
Foxe’s health began to deteriorate in 1586, and he died a year later in 1587. His wife would die eighteen years later in 1605. One of Foxe’s children, Samuel Foxe painstakingly preserved the manuscripts of his father’s writings, which comprised of at least thirty other published articles and books besides his best remembered work – *The Book of Martyrs*.

CONCLUSION

When one examines history with the eyes of faith, one will be able to perceive God’s mighty hand working and moving. John Foxe had witnessed God’s powerful workings through the Reformation; His preservation of the faithful during the bloody reign of Queen Mary I; and His deliverance of them from utter death and destruction through Queen Elizabeth I. Although many martyrs of the faith lost their lives during the great persecution, their stories continue on where the heroes of Faith in Hebrews Chapter 11 had left off. Their testimony of faith and their legacy of godly courage will continue to encourage and challenge God’s people till Christ returns.

⁶ Ibid., 18.

AN OVERVIEW OF JOHN FOXE'S *Acts and Monuments*



During John Foxe's life-time, six editions of *Acts and Monuments* were published. Two were Latin editions, and four were English editions. After his death in 1587, his work continued to be published with several revisions. The first abridged version was published shortly after his death in 1589. It was the abridged version of 1631 published by John Taylor that first took on the name *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* as is commonly known today.

This book is still published today but with many of the editions being an abridged version of the original work. This outline and summary of John Foxe's work is based

on an 1841, eight volume edition, published in London by Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley.

This edition of the extensive work begins with a biography of the life of John Foxe and a defence of his work. After Foxe's preface, articles on various related and relevant topics were included, before the historical portion proper begins. The historical portion comprises of twelve books in total, with each book describing the persecutions of Christians during a particular period in the history of the Church. The twelve books will detail persecutions spanning from the time of the Lord Jesus Christ up to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS

Foxe wrote several prefaces, where he addressed various groups of people who were relevant to his work. He included in his address, Queen Elizabeth I, the Papists which he identified as the persecutors of God's truth, as well as the true and faithful congregation of Christ's universal Church.

He explained the reason for his work: "yet let us yield thus much unto their commemoration, to glorify the Lord in his saints, and imitate their death (as much as we may) with like constancy, or their lives at the least with like innocency. They offered their bodies willingly to the rough handling of the tormentors; and is it so great a matter then for our part to mortify our flesh, with all the members thereof? They neglected not only the riches and glory of the world for the love of Christ, but also their lives; and shall we then keep so great a stir against another for the transitory trifles of this world? ... Besides, let us not shrink, if case so require, from martyrdom, or loss of life, according to their example, and to yield up the same in the defense of the Lord's flock. Which thing if men would do, much less contention and business would be in the world than now is."¹

ARTICLES (83 Pages)

After a substantial introduction, Foxe then included articles on various theological themes that were relevant to the issues he faced during his time. Most of these articles concerns, "a Summary Collection of the Errors, Heresies, and Absurdities contained in the Pope's Doctrine, and the First Institution of the Church of Rome." The various theological themes he covered include, faith and justification; works of the law; of sin; of penance, or repentance; the difference between the law and the

gospel; of sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper; of Matrimony; of purgatory. Having carefully considered these issues, Foxe then went on to describe the various accounts of the martyrs of the faith. These accounts are divided into twelve books, with each book describing the accounts of martyrs during a specific period in Church history.

BOOK I (192 Pages)

Covers: "The three hundred years next after Christ, with the ten persecutions of the primitive Church."

Overview: Describes persecution that occurred during 64 AD to 313 AD. These would include accounts of the persecution that the early Christians, including the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, endured. These persecutions were suffered from the time of Nero to Diocletian.

Notable martyrs during this time would include the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, Alban the martyr and Gordius the Centurion.

BOOK II (78 Pages)

Covers: "The next three hundred years following, with such things specially touched as have happened in England from the time of King Lucius to Gregory, and so after, to the time of King Egbert."

Overview: This book, does not deal extensively with persecution per se, but details the history of England with several accounts of persecution the Church faced. It covers the history of the Church in England from the second century to about 802 AD. It recounts the history of the entering and reigning of the Saxons in England.

¹ George Townsend, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, vol. 1, pg. xxvi.

Various persecutions suffered during this time include persecutions under the hand of various invading pagan barbarian hordes. Some of these include the Huns, Piets, Hengist, and the Saxons. It was only during the reign of King Ethelbert in 593 that the Saxons received the Christian faith. In 597, Augustine, the first archbishop of Canterbury (not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo) went to England as a missionary.

BOOK III (98 Pages)

Covers: “Containing the three hundred years, from the reign of Egbert to the time of William the Conqueror.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 807 – 1066 AD. This book focuses on the struggles between various Saxon Kings and the Danes. Persecution during this time was suffered at the hands of the Danes who were pagan. An example of a Christian who was martyred during this time would be King Edmund, King of East Angles.

BOOK IV (612 Pages)

Covers: “Containing another three hundred years, from William the conqueror to the time of John Wickliff.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1066 – 1343 AD. The first part of this book concerns the reign of William the Conqueror and the impact he brought when he wanted jurisdiction over both the state and the church.

Of significance in this book is the history concerning the Waldenses. Foxe described the origin, teachings and persecutions of the Waldenses.

BOOK V (661 Pages)

Covers: “Concerning the last three hundred years from the loosing out of Satan.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1360 – 1422 AD. This book especially focuses on the story of John Wycliffe and John Huss. Wycliffe’s sermons were recorded. Materials recorded here include, Pope Gregory’s epistle to Richard, King of England to persecute John Wycliffe; Wycliffe’s protest; his trial and his being condemned as a heretic.

Foxe then included the testimony of men who opposed the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and were persecuted as a result of that. These men who are less commonly known include, William Swinderby, Walter Brute, William Sautre, William Thorpe, John Purvey, Sir John Oldcastle, and Lord Cobham amongst others. The persecution of the Lollards was also recorded.

Focus then shifted to the persecution of John Huss, where a detailed account of his teachings, trial and martyrdom was recorded. The testimony of John Huss’ companion, Jerome of Prague, and Zisca was recorded.

The persecution during this period in history was so severe, that Foxe saw it as the time of the loosing of Satan. These events would be covered in three books (Books V-VII).

BOOK VI (370 Pages)

Covers: “Pertaining to the last three hundred years from the loosing out of Satan.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1422 –

1509 AD. This book includes testimonies of various Christians who were martyred or persecuted for speaking out against various practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Testimonies include those of Magery Baxter, Thomas Bagley, a Bohemian martyr, Tomas of Rennes who was burnt in Italy for the profession of Christ, John Segovius, and Reynold Peacock who was tortured for the proclamation of the Gospel.

A noteworthy martyr during this period is Girolamo Savonarola. Also recorded in this book is the history of the Turks and the persecution, slaughter and captivity of the Christians under the Turks.

Foxe also wrote regarding the exaltation of the Pope above Kings and Emperors, and compared it with the image of the Antichrist exalting himself above all that is called God.

BOOK VII (389 pages)

Covers: “Pertaining to the last three hundred years from the loosing out of Satan.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1509 – 1561 AD. Book seven records the accounts of the persecution and martyrs of various men leading up to the Reformation, and in the years after Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses.

A detailed account of the beginning of the Reformation was described. The life, writings and teachings of Luther were recorded. His appearance at the Diet of Worms is most instructive. Other notable men described in this book include Philip Melanchthon and Ulrich Zwingli.

Several lists of Christians who suffered persecution and martyrdom at the hand of

the Roman Church were listed out. These lists included those who were martyred in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. Stories of the persecution of the Waldenses were again included here.

BOOK VIII (950 pages)

Covers: “Continuing the history of English matters appertaining to both states, as well ecclesiastical as civil and temporal.”

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1519 – 1547 AD. This book begins with no introduction but delves directly into the lives of English martyrs. It begins with the martyrdom of the seven godly martyrs who were burnt at Coventry. Their crime was to teach their children and family the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments in English.

The persecutions of Patrick Hamilton, Thomas Harding, George Wishart, and Anne Askew amongst many others were recorded here. These persecutions took place during the reign of King Henry VIII, who wanted to break away from Rome, but still maintained core Roman Catholic teachings in the Church of England. This he did with the introduction of the Act of the Six Articles, reaffirming Roman Catholic doctrines out of a desire to build better relationships with Spain and France. Thomas Cromwell, an influential advocate of the English Reformation was imprisoned in the Tower of London and executed during this time.

BOOK IX (350 pages)

Covers: “Containing the acts and things done in the reign of King Edward the sixth.”

Overview: Covers the history of the Church from 1547 – 1553. This book focuses not so much on the persecution of the Church, but on the reforms brought about during the

reign of King Edward VI. Edward VI was greatly influenced by Thomas Cranmer and together they advanced the Reformation in England. Foxe writes of the relative calm and respite Christians enjoyed during Edward VI's reign. A detailed account of the reforms, including the repealing of the Act of Six Articles was recorded. The influence of John Hooper and William Latimer upon the Reformation was also described. They denounced the Bishop of London, Edmund Bonner, who wanted to maintain Roman Catholic doctrines. He would be imprisoned but was later released during the reign of Mary I.

BOOK X (234 pages)

Covers: "Beginning with the reign of Queen Mary."

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1554 – 1555 AD. This book describes the circumstances surrounding the ascension of Mary I to the throne. She held Roman Catholic beliefs, restored Roman Catholicism in England, and persecuted those who did not submit to the same religious beliefs.

This book also contains the account of the debate in Oxford, between Thomas Cranmer, Bishop Ridley and Hugh Latimer, who held Protestant views, and Dr Smith and others who held Catholic views.

BOOK XI (1154 pages)

Covers: "Wherein is discoursed the bloody murderings of God's saints, with the particular processes and names of such godly martyrs, both men and women, as, in this time of Queen Mary, were put to death."

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1555 – 1556 AD. This book is the longest of

the twelve, and records the lives and testimonies of martyrs who suffered during the reign of Mary I. The first martyr during this period was John Rogers. Not long after, John Hooper was also executed. The same Bishop Bonner who was earlier imprisoned, now became an instrument of persecution during this period.

The accounts in this book continue on to Book Twelve.

BOOK XII (497 pages)

Covers: "Containing the bloody doings and persecution of the adversaries against the faithful and true servants of Christ, with the particular processes and names of such as were put to slaughter from the beginning of January 1557, and the fifth year of Queen Mary."

Overview: Covers the history of the persecution of the Church from 1557 – 1559 AD. These last two books would record the lives and testimonies of nearly 300 martyrs who were tortured and executed during the short reign of Mary I. It is because of these deaths at her hands, that she came to be known as "bloody Mary."

Foxe included an account of how the Lord dealt against Mary I for her persecution of God's people. The reign of Mary I ended with the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth I held on to Protestant beliefs. An account of her preservation and the reforms she brought was recorded.

In the concluding section, Foxe added in various notes and matters in history which he had omitted, and he included a brief account of the massacre suffered in France in 1572 AD before concluding his work.

In conclusion Foxe wrote, "And thus to conclude, good Christian reader, this

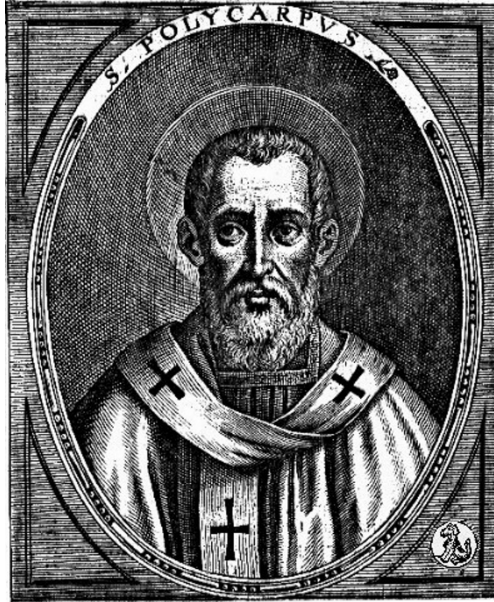
present tractation, not for lack of matter, but to shorten rather the matter for largeness of the volume, I here stay for this present time with further addition of more discourse either to overweary thee with longer tediousness, or overcharge the book with longer prolixity; having hitherto set forth the acts and proceedings of the whole church of Christ...Wherein may be seen the whole state, order, descent, course, and continuance of the same, the increase and decrease of true religion, the creeping in of superstition, the horrible troubles of persecution, the wonderful assistance of the Almighty in maintaining his truth, the glorious constancy of Christ's martyrs, the rage of the enemies, the alteration of times,

the travails and troubles of the church... But so it is, I cannot tell how, the elder the world waxeth, the longer it continueth, the nearer it hasteneth to its end, the more Satan rageth giving still new matter of writing books and volumes...In the mean time, the grace of the Lord Jesus work with thee, gentle reader, in all thy studious readings. And while thou hast space, so employ thyself to read, that by reading thou mayest learn daily to know that which may profit thy soul, may teach thee experience, may arm thee with patience, and instruct thee in all spiritual knowledge more and more to thy perpetual comfort and salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord; to whome be glory *in secula seculorum*,² Amen.”³

² Literally means “unto the ages of ages.”

³ George Townsend, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, vol. 8, pg. 754.

POLYCARP



EARLY YEARS

Born in 69 A.D., much of Polycarp's early life remains undocumented. What is recorded of him reveals that he was born of Christian parents, and while still a child, he was sold as a slave to a wealthy woman named Calisto. Under her care, Polycarp came to know Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. After she died, Polycarp inherited her estate. He then used his newfound wealth for the furtherance of the Gospel work and to help the poor. Polycarp was a kind and generous man, who was also very diligent in the study of the Scriptures.

LINK TO THE APOSTLES

Polycarp was born at a time when some of the Apostles who walked with Christ

while He was on earth were still alive, and being the direct disciple of the Apostle John, Polycarp played a very important role in providing greater insight into the teachings of the Apostles, as would the other Apostolic Fathers (e.g. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch). Polycarp was able to compare the teachings that were being circulated then with what the Apostles had taught, and verify if they were indeed true. Polycarp himself was faithful to the Apostles' teachings, which we can observe from the writings of Polycarp's student, Irenaeus of Lyons, who, being well taught by Polycarp, was a notable Christian apologist who wrote against heresies, e.g. Ebionism, Gnosticism. Irenaeus also wrote a book entitled "Against Heresies

(Adversus Haereses)”, also called “On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called Gnosis”. Many others such as Tertullian and Eusebius also attest to Polycarp’s faithfulness to the teachings of the Apostles and his steadfastness in life and death.

Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* quotes Irenaeus’ testimony, saying, “When I was still a boy I saw you [Florinus] in Lower Asia in Polycarp’s company. . . . I can describe the place where blessed Polycarp sat and talked, his goings out and comings in, the character of his life, his personal appearance, his addresses to crowded congregations. I remember how he spoke of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord; how he repeated their words from memory; and how the things that he had heard them say about the Lord, His miracles and His teaching, things that he had heard direct from the eye-witnesses of the Word of Life, were proclaimed by Polycarp in complete harmony with Scripture.”

EXPOSURE OF HERESIES

Polycarp was in a prime position to expose the early heresies of the second century, which he did, when he exposed the errors of Gnosticism propagated by Marcion, whom he called the “first born of Satan” when they once met in Rome. Polycarp would not stand for heresies, and was harsh towards heretics, even at times labelling them “antichrist(s)” and “of the devil”. He abhorred those who would pervert the truth of God. Along with Marcion, Polycarp also combated other heretics like Valentinus and Cerinthus, travelling to Rome to dispute with the latter even in his old age. Polycarp was eventually martyred for his stand for the truth, and is the first recorded Christian martyr in the post-New Testament period.

PERSECUTION

In the events leading up to Polycarp’s martyrdom, it was ironically, the Jews at Smyrna who wanted him dead the most. Polycarp served as the Bishop of Smyrna for about 60 years, ordained to the office by the Apostle John. However, it was this very group of people he had served the most that would now turn around to bite the hand that fed them. As the head of the Christian community in Asia Minor at the time, Polycarp was the main target of attack when persecution against the Christians broke out. However, he never budged in his stand, and faced the persecution without compromise. When he needed to hide, he did, never foolishly putting himself in harm’s way unnecessarily. When he needed to show himself, he did, never shrinking from harm for Christ’s sake.

ARREST, TRIAL AND DEATH

Finally, in A.D. 155, the aged Polycarp was apprehended by Herod on the charge of being a Christian. At that time, Philip of Tralles was the high priest, and Statius Quadratus was the proconsul. When Polycarp knew of the Roman officials’ intention to arrest him, he initially did not attempt to flee, but at the behest of his friends, he fled to a small place outside town. There, he prophesied that he would be burned alive. When the Roman soldiers caught up with him, Polycarp submitted himself to God’s hands and acknowledged that “God’s will be done”. He also treated the soldiers with much kindness in offering them food, and requested for time to pray before they took him away. That he did, for two hours. Rebuked by Polycarp’s behavior, the soldiers regretted coming to arrest him. Nevertheless, they had orders to follow. They transported Polycarp back to the city on a donkey, and brought him to the local proconsul Statius Quadratus, to undergo examination.

EXECUTION/HOMEGOING DAY

On the day of his execution, the 23rd of February 155, all Polycarp had to do to be set free was say “Caesar is Lord” and offer incense to Caesar, but he would not. When the people failed to make Polycarp change his mind, the mob there became more physically violent towards him, even laying their hands upon him. Polycarp was then told to reproach Christ and he would be released. In front of the proconsul, he said “Eighty and six years have I served Christ, nor has He ever done me any harm. How, then, could I blaspheme my King who saved me?” What words to conclude his ministry! Age did not diminish his spirit. On the contrary, it strengthened it, for through the years, Polycarp had tasted of the goodness and faithfulness of Christ, which buttressed his faith in Him.

Next, Polycarp was threatened with death by wild beasts and fire, but he replied that the fires of God’s judgment would be worse. He would rather die at the hands of man than at the hands of God. He proceeded to proclaim himself to be a Christian. Finally, Polycarp was brought to the stake. He was not bound to the stake, because he promised he would not run away. So there he stood, with just his hands tied behind his back. Polycarp thanked God for having been counted worthy to suffer unto death for Christ’s sake like other faithful martyrs. The fire was lit, but it failed to consume him. He was then stabbed with a dagger and eventually bled to death. His body was later burnt.

WRITTEN WORKS AND TEACHINGS

Beyond Polycarp’s exemplary life of faith, his writings were of great significance too. In A.D. 110, Polycarp wrote a letter to the Philippians, which borrowed much from Paul’s epistles in general and both the

Old and New Testaments, and reflected much of John’s writings in it. A careful examination of the letter reveals references to all the New Testament books in it. Therefore, this letter is significant not just for the value of its teachings, but also for its value as evidence that the generation after the Apostles already had the Word of God, before all the Apostles died. We can therefore conclude that the Word of God has been passed down from generation to generation without gap.

Since 1633, this letter has been published in full, and consists of fourteen short chapters. From the outset in the first chapter, Polycarp teaches that faith and salvation are gifts of free grace, teachings that are very much Pauline in nature. In the letter are also recorded practical applications, commendations for the Philippians’ love for fellow ministers, their faithfulness to the Christian faith, and exhortations to a life of virtue, good works, and steadfastness even to death which Polycarp himself exemplified. Instructions were also given to various people of various vocations on how they ought to behave and carry out their duties. More importantly, the letter struck out against Gnostic Docetic errors.

In his time, Polycarp recognised that the true church of God would consist of a remnant, and exhorted true believers to separate from the majority who were in error. This truth that the true church of God would consist of a remnant would later be reflected during the rule of the Roman Catholic Church during the Dark Ages, and holds true even till today. He also upheld the primacy and authority of Scripture over the teachings of the Church of Rome.

It is alleged that Polycarp was not a Trinitar-

ian, but a Binatarian or a Henotheist (one who believes in and worships a single god while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities). However, this allegation is untrue, and is due to a wrong interpretation of Polycarp's writings.¹

Polycarp is also alleged to have been against military service because of its violence and encouragement of retaliation. Once again, this false allegation is due to a misinterpretation of his writings. In his writings, there is no proof of such a stand.

What Polycarp was against though was violence in personal vengeance.²

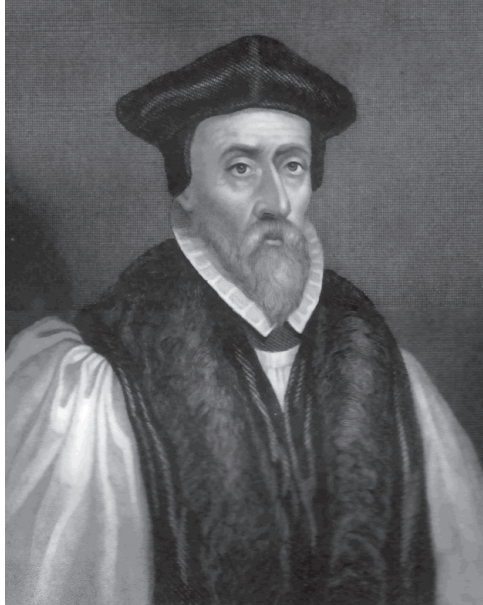
As the Lord through the Apostle John wrote to the church in Smyrna, during the time when Polycarp served there as Bishop, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev 2:10), Polycarp was indeed faithful unto death.

¹ In Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians, he wrote, "Now may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High-priest Himself the Son of God Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and truth, . . . and may He grant unto you a lot and portion among His saints, and to us with you, and to all that are under heaven, who shall believe on our Lord and God Jesus Christ and on His Father that raised him from the dead." (Lightfoot, J. B. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Baker Book House, 1956), Electronic Edition. Here Polycarp calls Jesus Christ "Lord and God".

In Polycarp's prayer before the fire was kindled for his execution, he said, "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, . . . I bless Thee for that Thou hast granted me this day and hour, that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs in the cup of [Thy] Christ unto resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit. . . . For this cause, yea and for all things, I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal and heavenly High-priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom with Him and the Holy Spirit be glory both now [and ever] and for the ages to come. Amen." Polycarp mentioned the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as worthy of receiving eternal glory. He places them on equal footing as God.

² In Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians, he wrote, "not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing or blow for blow or cursing for cursing;" (Lightfoot. *The Apostolic Fathers*)

JOHN HOOPER



EARLY YEARS AND CONVERSION TO PROTESTANTISM

Born in 1495 in Somerset, England, John Hooper was the only son of his family. His early studies included training in the arts at Merton College, Oxford, where he entered in 1514, and graduated with a B.A. in 1519. While at Oxford, by God's grace, Hooper came across the writings of the Reformers, whereby his eyes were opened to the wrong teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. He became a Protestant, and went around preaching the Protestant Reformed faith. It was not an easy task trying to convince the people to let go of the superstition and idolatry they had been holding on to for such a long time, and this was made harder when in 1539, the Roman

Catholic Church introduced the Act of Six Articles. This Act affirmed certain Roman Catholic Church teachings and gave instructions for how heretics that objected to them should be treated and punished.

PERSECUTION AND FLEEING

Because of this, Hooper left Oxford and stayed with Sir Thomas Arundel in Devonshire as his steward and chaplain. Initially, Arundel accepted Hooper because he liked him as a person, but when he found out about Hooper's dissenting views, which Arundel disagreed with, Arundel ceased his protection and care over Hooper. As a result, Hooper fled to France, and there, he remained with the Huguenots (French Protestants). However,

after a period of time, Hooper left them because he disagreed with some of their practices. He then went back to Somerset and stayed with Seintlow. He did not remain there for long, for he was soon recognized and fled to Ireland, Holland, and Switzerland. In Zurich, he stayed with Henry Bullinger who was Zwingli's successor. God used his living with Bullinger and learning from him to ground Hooper more firmly in the Reformed teachings. Hooper taught Greek and Hebrew. He got married there too, to Anna de Tzerclas, an helpmeet for him.

Hooper ministered through the reigns of King Henry VIII (reigned 1509-1547, separated from the Church of Rome to form the Church of England, and removed the Pope as the head of the Church of England), of King Edward VI (reigned 1547-1553), and of Queen "Bloody Mary" Tudor (reigned 1553-1558). The change in rulership affected the religious climate of the land. King Henry VIII and King Edward VI were pro-Protestant, while Bloody Mary was pro-Roman Catholic.

PREACHING MINISTRY AND BISHOPRIC

In 1547, when Edward VI ascended the throne, Hooper returned to England, hoping to do his part in the Reformation work there. He arrived in London in May 1549, and began preaching. Many came, drawn by his eloquent and faithful declaration of God's Word, and churches were packed to the door. While carrying out the work, Hooper realized the dismal state of the clergy. The vast majority of them did not know the Word of God well at all. They could barely recite the Ten Commandments or the Lord's Prayer. Some did not even know which part of the Bible they were taken from. What a disaster! It was unacceptable, and thus Hooper set out

to build up the clergy in their knowledge of God's Word. At the same time, Hooper was appointed Chaplain to the Protector, the Duke of Somerset.

The following year, Hooper had a chance to preach before the King. Soon after, he was to be made Bishop of Gloucester and later Worcester. However, his consecration to bishopric was delayed for quite some time. This was because of Hooper's firm stance against making the oath taken at consecration (because it was in the name of not just God but also the saints), and against wearing the approved dress of rochet in ministry (clothing worn by the Roman clergy, which Hooper felt had stemmed from superstition and was unnecessary). Hooper's refusal to budge on these two areas greatly strained his relationship with Archbishop Cranmer and Ridley, who saw nothing wrong in those two things. Hooper on the other hand, was more cautious and preferred to err on the side of caution.

Because of this irreconcilable disagreement, Cranmer refused to consecrate Hooper to bishopric and debarred him from preaching. Hooper was even put in the Fleet prison for many months. For more than a year, things were at a standstill, neither side agreeing to compromise. Finally, Hooper was allowed to not take the oath, and he compromised to wear the rochet on certain public occasions. He was properly consecrated as a bishop on 8 March 1551. As a bishop, Hooper was faultless. He taught his clergy proper doctrines and duties, as well as took good care of his flock. This exemplary leadership was reflected not only in his public church life, but also in his private life. He was a good father at home who ruled his household well. He was prayerful, and kind to the poor as well, having them over for dinner daily.

ARREST, TRIALS AND DEATH

Two years later, in 1553, Mary Tudor ascended the throne. Things took a drastic turn for Hooper when Mary Tudor set out to persecute him. Unlike previous occasions, when the threat of persecution arose and Hooper fled to other countries, this time he did not flee because he felt his calling to remain with the flock entrusted to his care. On 29 August 1553, before the Queen and the Council, a false charge of owing the Queen money was brought against him. In actual fact, he was being persecuted for his religious teachings and practices. The Council unjustly sentenced him to imprisonment in the Fleet prison. They could not at this point take his life, like burn him at the stake, because there was yet no law allowing it. So, the “best” they could do was to keep him imprisoned. That they did, for about 18 months, from 1 September 1553.

During this very trying time wherein Hooper was ill-treated in many ways, physically, mentally and emotionally, and he had to stand before many judges like Stephen Gardiner and Edmund Bonner to undergo various gruelling examinations, Hooper committed himself to the Lord. By God’s strengthening, Hooper endured it all without compromising on his faith. Likewise did many others like John Rogers, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and Ferrar who had also been imprisoned. The Queen and the Council targeted the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, in a “kill one to warn a hundred” manner, with the intention of scaring off the lay people from opposing the Roman Church. But despite such measures taken against these prominent Protestant preachers who were their leaders, the lay people were not discouraged. They did not surrender and still held on firmly to their Protestant beliefs.

The Council took things a step further and stripped Hooper of his bishopric in March 1554 on the basis that he was a married man, which was against the Roman Catholic Church requirement of clerical celibacy. Nine months later, in December 1554, the Heresy Act was enacted which allowed heretics to be burnt at the stake. Hooper was put under trial again and this time, he was charged for his religious beliefs. He was charged for condemning transubstantiation, being against clerical celibacy, and with refusing to divorce his wife.

Over a period of about two weeks, Hooper was examined three times, on 22 January 1555 before the Bishop of Winchester at St Mary Overy’s, on 28 January 1555 and the next day on 29 January 1555. Following the second examination, Hooper was moved to Compter in Southwark. There, he had a conversation with John Rogers about being the first to be burned at the stake, and how by God’s grace they would have the privilege to suffer for Christ in such a manner. The third examination condemned him to be degraded, which was executed on 4 February 1555 by Bishop Bonner, who also handed him over to secular power. On this day, Hooper was sentenced to be burnt at the stake at Gloucester. Following the third examination, he was moved to Newgate, where the people there met him along the way and saluted him and praised God for his steadfastness, and prayed for God to grant him persevering grace to remain faithful till his very last breath. A similar thing happened on 7 February 1555 when Hooper arrived in Gloucester. There, he was greeted by many of his supporters who stood with him and wept with him, even though identifying with him meant putting their own lives in danger.

On multiple occasions, his enemies tried to make him recant, promising wealth and position and relief. None of these moved him, neither counted he his life dear to himself. "Sir Anthony Kingston, whom he had once offended by rebuking his sins, came to see him, and entreated him, with much affection and many tears, to consult his safety and recant. "Consider," he said, "that life is sweet, and death is bitter. Life hereafter may do good." To

led to the execution grounds at St Mary's Square. Despite heading to his death, Hooper maintained a cheerful countenance. He prayed for about half an hour. Moments after he began his prayer, the Queen offered him one last chance to escape such a cruel and painful and shameful death, for she would pardon him if he would recant. But no, even at death's door, Hooper did not compromise. He rejected the offer. He never shrank nor



this the noble soldier of Christ returned the ever memorable answer: "The life to come is more sweet, and the death to come is more bitter." Hooper wanted God's favour rather than man's. He would rather have God than this vain world. He also encouraged others not to complain but to have patience in trials. While awaiting execution, Hooper was housed at Mr Robert Ingram's. There, he spent time in prayer till his execution.

EXECUTION/HOME-GOING DAY

On 9 February 1555, in the cold early morning at eight o'clock, Hooper was

faltered. Having set his mind to the fact that death was his next step, he requested to die quickly, but alas, it took 45 minutes for him to be burnt to death. This was because it was a cold morning, the wood for burning was wet, and the fire blew in the wrong direction. As a result, the fire had to be rekindled and rebuilt three times before it finally did its work. Hooper maintained the disposition of a lamb to the slaughter, and of a sheep before its shearers, silently bearing his cross. Today, there is a monument at Gloucester outside Gloucester Cathedral commemorating Hooper's sacrifice and martyrdom.

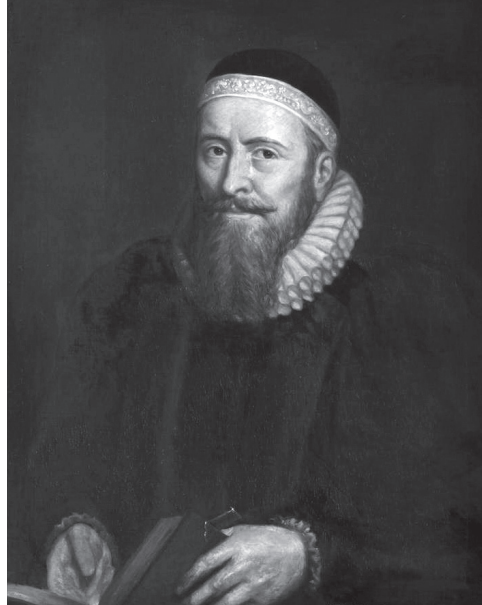
Hooper was the first among many Protestant bishops to be burnt during Mary Tudor's five year reign. Hundreds more joined him for their Protestant beliefs. Despite all her persecution, Protestantism waxed stronger. This was because the way Hooper and those faithful martyrs faced death for Christ's sake attested to the worthiness of the cause for which they died, that being the 16th Century Reformation, to turn people away from the Roman Catholic Church to Christ. Their willing and courageous martyrdom gave strength to the validity of the Protestant faith in the people's eyes. Also, the Roman Catholic Church's resort to violence in order to get rid of her opponents showed the people how weak her doctrines and practices were. By and by, God opened the people's eyes to the truth, and countless more souls were saved.

WRITINGS

Hooper's works have been compiled into a volume, "Writings of Dr. John Hooper:

Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester. Martyr, 1555 (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1831)." This volume contains his writings on "A Declaration of Christ and His Office", "An Oversight and Deliberation upon the Holy Prophet Jonah" which were sermons he preached on Jonah before the King and his Council, "A Godly Confession and Protestation of the Christian Faith", expositions of certain Psalms, and letters he wrote to various people. Other compilations also include Hooper's writings on "Answer to the Bishop of Winchester's book" where Hooper argued against Bishop Stephen Gardiner's and the Roman Catholic Church's false view of the Sacrament of the Altar (the Roman Catholic Mass, or the Lord's Supper), "A Declaration of the Ten Holy Commandments of Almighty God", and "A Funeral Sermon upon Revelation 14:13". His writings went on to influence the Puritans during the reign of Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603). As such, he is known by some as the "Father of English Puritanism" and "Father of Nonconformity."

JOHN ROGERS



Many would often remember William Tyndale (c.1494 – 1536) for his work in Bible translation. No doubt, Tyndale’s work of Bible translation was significant for he was the first person who translated into English the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible. While William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale were instrumental in the production of the English Bible translation from the original languages, it was John Rogers who was instrumental in the promoting and publishing of the English Bible.

STUDIES AND CONVERSION

John Rogers was born in 1505 in Birmingham, England. He studied in

Pembroke College in Cambridge where he graduated with his B.A. in 1526. Six years later, in 1532, he became Rector of “Holy Trinity the Less church” in London, when England was still under the influence of Roman Catholicism.

In 1534, Rogers went to Antwerp, Belgium, where he served as a chaplain to an English merchant company called The Company of Merchant Adventurers. Through God’s providence, it was here he met William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, who had voluntarily exiled themselves to avoid the “popish slavery and idolatry” of the Roman Catholic Church.

¹ The Apocrypha was not regarded as Scriptures by the Reformers, but was still regarded as useful historical records of the inter-testament period.

It was through the influence of Tyndale and Coverdale that John Rogers was converted from the Catholic faith to the Christianity of the Bible. After his conversion, he married an Antwerp native, Ariana de Weyden. This was significant, as he had through marriage renounced his vows of celibacy, knowing that this was not a vow according to Scriptures.

TRANSLATION WORK

Rogers, catching the spirit of the Reformation, became involved with Tyndale and Coverdale in the translation work of the Bible. In 1535, Tyndale was betrayed by Henry Philips in Antwerp. Arrested and tried, he was condemned to be burned to death. After Tyndale's death, the Lord used Rogers to push on with Tyndale's translation work. As Tyndale and Coverdale had completed most of the translation work, Rogers mainly added prefaces and marginal notes to the translation. He also translated part of the Apocrypha¹.

In 1537, Rogers published the complete translation of the Bible. Tyndale had previously published his New Testament translation in 1526, and Coverdale his translation in 1535. As the work could not be safely done in England then, Rogers had to print the translated Bible in Antwerp and Paris. The Bible was printed by Jacobus Van Meteren, uncle of his wife Ariana, under the pseudonym "Thomas Matthew." This was necessary as the publishing of the Bible was still forbidden then. This Bible then came to be known as the "Matthew's Bible." This translation was pivotal, as it would later serve as the platform for the publishing of the Great Bible, the Bishops Bible, and the King James Bible.

In 1540, Rogers went to Wittenberg where he pastored a congregation and furthered his studies in the University of Wittenberg.

It was there he met Phillip Melanchthon, the German Reformer and a co-labourer of Martin Luther. The people whom we meet through our lives are placed there by God's divine appointment.

TURMOIL IN ENGLAND

After King's Edward VI ascension to the throne, Rogers returned to England in 1548, to further the cause of the Reformation. He was appointed as a lecturer in Divinity in St Paul's Cathedral.

When Queen Mary I ascended the throne in 1553, he preached strongly against the "pestilent popery, idolatry and superstition" of the Roman Catholic Church and he upheld the true doctrines taught during the time of King Edward VI. For this, he was arrested and summoned before a council and commanded to keep within his own house. In January 1554, Bonner, the new Bishop of London, imprisoned him in Newgate prison, together with other Protestant Reformers such as John Bradford, and John Hooper.

While in prison, he was interrogated and tortured. Finally, in late January, he was condemned by Stephen Gardiner to death by fire. The day of his execution was set on 4 February 1555. On the Monday morning, on the day of his execution, Rogers was sound asleep and had to be awoken! He was untroubled by his impending death. Only one who has confidence and faith in his Lord can find peace even in the face of torture and death. His only request was to speak to his wife for one last time, but this request was denied.

MARTYRDOM AND DEATH

When the time came for him to be brought from Newgate to Smithfield, the place of his execution, Woodroffe, one of the sheriffs, approached Rogers and asked if

he wanted to recant his teachings. Rogers answered simply, "That which I have preached I will seal with my blood." When Woodroffe accused Rogers saying, "Thou art an heretic." Rogers replied, "That shall be known, at the Day of Judgment." Woodroffe replying Rogers said, "I will never pray for thee." But Rogers in response said, "But I will pray for you."

As he was led to his execution, he found great support from the people; many were "comforting him in such a manner that it seemed as if he had been led to a wedding." On his way to his execution, he saw his wife and children. This would have been a tempting prospect for many – to recant and be re-joined with his family

again. Yet it was testified of Rogers that "this sorrowful sight of his own flesh and blood could nothing move him, but that he constantly and cheerfully took his death with wonderful patience, in the defence and quarrel of the Gospel of Christ." Just before his burning, a pardon was signed and offered to Rogers, on the condition that he would recant his teachings and deny his faith. But he vehemently refused it.

John Rogers was burnt at the stake on 4 February 1555, becoming the first Protestant martyr under the reign of Mary I. While little is known and recorded of John Rogers, the testimony of his faithfulness even unto death is enough to serve as an encouragement to Christians even unto this day.



JOYCE LEWES



This brave lady martyr lived during the reign of the first queen regnant of England, Mary I, famously known as “Bloody Mary” for her fierce persecutions and executions of Protestants during her five-year reign (1553-1558). On ascending the throne in July 1553, “Bloody Mary” restored Roman Catholicism in England. Hundreds of Protestants were burned at the stake during her short reign, one of whom was Mrs Joyce Lewes.

CONVERSION

Joyce Lewes was brought up in the upper classes of society, and she indulged herself in the worldly pleasures of fine clothing and other vanities. Her marriage to Thomas Lewes of Manchester was her second; she

had previously been married to a man by the name of Appleby. Until the martyrdom of Rev Lawrence Saunders at Coventry, Joyce Lewes had been a faithful Roman Catholic. Her interest in Protestantism was aroused when she realised he had been put to death for refusing to receive Mass, and she endeavoured to understand the reasons for his conviction. She sought help from John Glover, who lived nearby. Seeing how troubled Joyce Lewes was, and her great thirst for the knowledge of the truth, John Glover began to teach her the truth of the Gospel. He expounded from the words of Scripture and explained to her why the Mass and the other popish traditions were contrary to God’s Word. At the same time, he also reproved her for the worldiness

that she had long delighted in. Joyce Lewes was greatly convicted of her own depravity through his faithful teaching, and renounced her former sinful life.

PERSECUTION

Having now understood the Gospel in light of the Scriptures, Joyce Lewes began to detest the Mass, and all the idolatry that she had once been so lost in. Her heart was stirred towards thankful and fervent devotion to God. Thomas Lewes, however, was furious and unsympathetic to her new beliefs, and forced her to continue to attend church with him by violence. However, enlightened by the truth, Joyce Lewes could not help but exhibit contempt for the anti-biblical ceremonies that were carried out. When the priest sprinkled 'holy water', she turned her back upon him, as she now deemed the act to be an insult to the blood of Christ. She was therefore reported to the Bishop of Lichfield for despising the sacraments.

Immediately, a citation was sent by the Bishop commanding her to appear before him. On receiving the citation, Thomas Lewes became so infuriated that he threatened the messenger to bring it back, or he would make him eat it. The messenger refused, at which Thomas Lewes angrily held him at knifepoint and followed through with his threat – the poor man was made to swallow the paper and then drink it down before he was allowed to leave. The Bishop at once summoned both Mr and Mrs Lewes to his presence. Thomas Lewes apologised and submitted himself, and the Bishop was willing to accept his apology as long as his wife would submit as well. Joyce Lewes, however, stoutly refused, insisting that she had not offended God nor broken any of his laws by refusing the 'holy water' sprinkled. The Bishop was incensed, but because she was a gentlewoman, he was

unwilling to 'take her at the worst'. Instead, he granted her one month's respite. Thomas Lewes was commanded to bring her before him again at the end of the month, or pay a penalty of a hundred pounds.

After meeting with the Bishop, Joyce Lewes prayed even more earnestly and diligently, and continued to seek John Glover's teaching. He continued to teach her God's Word faithfully, but also exhorted her not to do anything for the sake of vain glory, to make herself famous. It was terribly dangerous for her to go against the Roman Catholic Church, and she must follow Christ's leading in the matter.

At the end of the given month, Joyce Lewes' mind and faith remained unchanged. John Glover and many others tried to convince Thomas Lewes not to bring her to the Bishop, for they knew it would spell her certain doom. They counselled him to try to save her by some means, or to forfeit the penalty, but he callously answered that he would not lose or forfeit anything for her sake. Joyce Lewes was therefore delivered to the Bishop by the hands of her own husband. On examining her, the Bishop found that she was even more resolute than before concerning her beliefs. Furious, the Bishop ordered her to be imprisoned. The prison of his choice was so repulsive that the maid-servant who was sent to attend to Joyce Lewes fainted due to the nauseating stench of the place. Poor Joyce Lewes would be imprisoned in such a place for 12 months.

During her incarceration, Joyce Lewes was examined over and over again. Yet she remained undaunted, even emboldened with time. Finally, she was brought up for judgment. The Bishop tried to convince her once again, and asked her why she could not partake of the popish sacraments. Her

brave reply was, "Because I find not these things in God's Word which you so urge and magnify as things most needful for men's salvation. If these things were in the same word of God commanded, I would with all my heart receive, esteem and believe them."¹ To this, the Bishop retorted, "if thou wilt believe no more than is in the scriptures concerning matters of salvation, thou art in a damnable case." A shocked but Spirit-filled Joyce Lewes responded in rebuke, telling him that those were ungodly and wicked words of blasphemy.

Joyce Lewes was hence sentenced to death, and was delivered to the sheriff for the deed. The sheriff however refused to be compelled to do such a thing, especially because he had only recently been put in office. Thus, Joyce Lewes continued to endure the loathsome conditions of her prison cell until the sheriff's tenure had ended.

MARTYRDOM

Deliverance came when another sheriff was appointed to office a year later. When the writ *de comburendo* ('warrant of burning') was brought from London, Joyce sent for her friends, requesting them to meet her in her prison, that she might take counsel on how to conduct herself in a manner that would make her death most glorifying to her Saviour, edifying to her fellow-brethren, and discouraging to God's enemies. Greatly assured of God's love to her, she said, "As for death, I think but lightly of. When I know that I shall behold the amiable countenance of Christ my dear Saviour, the ugly face of death does not much trouble me."²

The evening before she was to be executed,

two priests came to the house of the under-sheriff where she was held, wanting to receive her confession before she died. Calmly, Joyce Lewes gave her reply to them through the under-sheriff that she had made her confession to Jesus Christ her Saviour, by Whom she had been forgiven without a shadow of doubt. She had no reason to confess regarding what she had done to earn her impending doom, except that she would humbly praise her God for counting her worthy to die for His truth. She defied from the bottom of her heart any absolution they would give her by the Pope's authority. At such a rebuff, the priests left angrily. Joyce Lewes remained in cheerful spirits through the evening, and spent her time in prayer, reading of God's Word, as well as conversing with fellow-saints who had come to comfort and strengthen her through the Word.

Yet even the bravest souls would have their times of weaknesses too. At three o'clock in the morning, temptation came, and doubts arose in Joyce Lewes' heart. She began to question if she was truly saved. In her mind, she began to think, "I grant that he died, but that he died for thee, how canst thou tell?"³ She was terrified, but God provided good counsel through the friends that were with her. In her hour of temptation, they lovingly pointed her to wonderful passages of Scripture, and her heart was greatly comforted.

At 8 o'clock, the sheriff arrived at her cell and announced that she would be executed in an hour by the Queen's orders. For a brief moment, Joyce Lewes was shocked and dismayed. A friend who was by her side promptly reminded her, "Mrs Lewes,

¹ Charlotte Elizabeth, *The Female Martyrs of the English Reformation* (New York: John S Taylor & Co., 1884), 140.

² John Foxe, *Fox's Book of Martyrs, Or, The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church*, ed. John Malham, and T. Pratt, (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith & Co., 1856), 424.

³ Charlotte Elizabeth, 144.

you have great cause to praise God, who will vouchsafe so speedily to take you out of this world, and make you worthy to be a witness of his truth, and to bear record unto Christ that he is the only Saviour.”⁴ These timely words at once brought her to her senses, and she said, “Master sheriff, your message is welcome to me, and I thank my God that he will make me worthy to adventure my life in his quarrel.”⁵

An hour later, the sheriff returned with weapons and attendants, and Joyce Lewes was taken from her cell. Surprisingly, the sheriff showed her unusual compassion, and granted permission for two of her friends to accompany her to the stake. Guarded by many billmen, she was led through the town, with two faithful friends, Mr Michael Reniger and Mr Augustine Bernher, by her side. Evil men who had been hired by Joyce Lewes’ persecutors sought to increase her sufferings by taunting and reviling her along the way, but the courageous woman remained unaffected.

The long journey to the execution grounds however, wearied Joyce Lewes so much that she nearly fainted on arriving. A cup of water was brought for her refreshment

from the sheriff’s house. Before taking the cup in her hands, Joyce Lewes fearlessly and loudly prayed three times, imploring God to deliver the land from the idolatrous Mass and the popery. Then, she took the cup and said, “I drink to all them that unfeignedly love the gospel of Christ, and wish for the abolition of papistry.”⁶ Her friends and many other women drank with her, praying the same prayer.

Joyce Lewes was then chained to the stake. In the face of death, she remained cheerful, her heart confident with a peace that passeth all understanding. Despite having been incarcerated in dire conditions for the past year, her cheeks were rosy, and she exhibited such patience that brought many who were present to tears when they witnessed the cruelty that was shown to her. The fire was lit, and Joyce Lewes bravely met with her death, her hands lifted up towards heaven. Not once did she struggle or move even when the flames engulfed her. Her friends had requested the under-sheriff to prepare excellent fuel for her, that her suffering would be short, to which he graciously complied. Thus, Joyce Lewes died very quickly, and was received to glory, burned at the stake at Lichfield on 10 September 1557⁷ for her faith.

⁴ Ibid, 145.

⁵ Ibid, 145-6.

⁶ Ibid, 147.

⁷ Susan Doran, and Thomas Freeman, ed., *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 175.

GEORGE WISHART



EARLY YEARS

Born in 1513, in Scotland, to James Wishart and Elizabeth Learmont, by the grace and mighty hand of God, George Wishart grew up to be one of the earliest religious reformers in that land. His early studies included training in the classics at the University of Aberdeen, and in the arts at the Leuven University in Belgium. Resources are scarce when it comes to detailing the next few years of his life. The records of his life continue with Wishart returning to Scotland in 1538. Having settled down in Montrose, he taught the New Testament in Greek at a certain Grammar School which set the precedent for teaching Greek in Scotland. There, he was also the schoolmaster.

GROUNDING IN PROTESTANTISM

However, not all favoured such an important study of the Word of God in the language it was originally inspired in, as it was still illegal to read the Bible in its original languages. One of the chief opponents was the Bishop of Brechin, who persecuted Wishart on that account, causing him to flee to Cambridge. There, Wishart entered the Bennet College/ Corpus Christi College, where he came to know Hugh Latimer (English Reformer), and his understanding of the Christian faith became more grounded in the Reformed doctrines of the faith. At Latimer's request, Wishart undertook the role of preacher at Bristol. He preached faithfully according to the Word of God,

and spoke against the false teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. In retaliation, the clergy trumped up false charges against Wishart and accused him of preaching the heresy that Christ's death had no merit. From Wishart's writings, we see clearly that he never held to such an erroneous doctrine. However, in order not to face death, Wishart, at the advice of the Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, was forced to recant and had to bear the faggot (bundle of sticks used for burning heretics) twice, on 13 and 20 July 1539. Wishart then spent the next three years in Switzerland and Germany. It was perhaps during this time that he translated the Helvetic Confession to English. In 1542, he returned to England and studied and taught at Bennet College.

PREACHING MINISTRY ANTAGONIZED THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In 1543/4, Wishart returned to Scotland, and preached in Montrose, Ayrshire, Leith, throughout East Lothian, and Dundee. While at Dundee, he preached from the book of Romans, and exposed many of the heretical views and ways of the Roman Catholic Church, e.g. absolution of sins by confession to priests, prayer to the saints. Among many Biblical truths Wishart preached, the primacy of Scripture was one key doctrine. Wishart, according to this truth, challenged the people's blind allegiance to the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church which were not founded upon the Scriptures. He revealed their superstition and idolatry.

This antagonized the Roman Catholic clergy, who, under the lead of Cardinal David Beaton (the Archbishop of St Andrews), tried to silence Wishart. Once, Cardinal Beaton sent Robert Mill who accused Wishart of disrupting the peace and unity of the religious and social circles,

and in Queen Mary's and Governor Arran's names ordered Wishart to stop preaching, even while he was still in the midst of it! Wishart denied the accusation, and declared his innocence in the matter. He defended himself and argued that he had sought only their good and not to cause trouble for them. He also warned that they must repent, if God should later punish them for driving His faithful messenger away.

Being driven away, Wishart headed to the West of Scotland, in Ayr and Kyle. In the churches there, he preached rousing sermons, and when the churches shut their doors to him, he continued in fields and market squares, and wherever people would hear him preach. The power of God worked through Wishart to convert many. In this period of time, Wishart was a major influence on John Knox, a most well-known Scottish Reformer, though he did not play a part towards his conversion. It was so that John Knox followed Wishart around in his preaching ministry, acting as his personal bodyguard, armed with a two-handed sword, even to the few days before Wishart's arrest and death.

A month after Wishart left Dundee, in 1545, news came to him that a most lethal plague had broken out in Dundee. In fact, the plague had started four days after Wishart was prohibited from preaching there. Overcome by much concern for the people there, Wishart rushed straight back. He stationed himself at the East Port/Cowgate Port, and preached to both the sick and the well, with the East Gate dividing them, the sick without and the well within. Today, there remains a section of the townwall where Wishart preached from and is called the "Wishart Arch". Wishart used this calamity to warn of the greater plague of sin which only Jesus could heal. Here we

see Wishart's great love and compassion for people, even for those who had ill-treated him, to the extent that he was willing even to put himself at risk of contracting the plague. This very much corroborates other testimonies of him being a kind and generous man, as was made evident by his sacrificial act of giving his clothes and bedsheets to the poor. Wishart's love for the people also won their affection for him. They deeply loved him.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS ON HIS LIFE

Being displeased at Wishart's return to Dundee, Cardinal Beaton sent the priest John Weighton/Wightman to assassinate Wishart. Armed with a naked dagger, Wightman waited for Wishart after one of his preaching sessions, ready to strike when the opportunity arose. The time never came, for Wishart spotted the dagger and took it from the priest. Stunned and remorseful, the priest begged Wishart for forgiveness, which Wishart readily gave. The whole incident created a commotion, and the people around, learning of the priest's assassination attempt, wanted to hurt him. But Wishart would not allow it and defended the priest. Again, we see Wishart's generous and forgiving heart. Later, one of Wishart's dying acts would be to forgive his executioner who begged for forgiveness. This Wishart learnt from his Saviour, Jesus Christ.

When the plague neared its end, Wishart headed to Edinburgh for the purpose of meeting evangelicals from the Provincial Church Synod from the west, to hold a public dispute with the bishops, on 13 January 1546. During his journey to Edinburgh, he stopped over in Montrose, where yet another attempt was made on his life. This time, Cardinal Beaton had forged a letter in the name of Wishart's close friend,

the laird of Kennier, claiming that he had fallen ill suddenly, and pleaded for Wishart to return to him. Not suspecting any foul play, Wishart started on his return journey. Meanwhile, Beaton had already positioned men en-route to ambush and kill Wishart. However, having not departed far from his starting place, the Lord caused Wishart to know the danger that lay ahead, and so Wishart turned back to Montrose. Wishart later found out the plot against him, and predicted that he would eventually die by the hand of Beaton.

IMPENDING DEATH

From Montrose, Wishart travelled to Edinburgh, where he stayed with James Watson of Invergowrie. One night, he suddenly went to the yard and prayed very intensely. This was witnessed by some of the people of the household. When questioned the next day, Wishart initially declined to offer an explanation for his actions, but after much pressing and persuasion, he finally revealed to them that it was because he knew his end was near. He was praying that he would not compromise on his faith when this spiritual battle was the most intense. On top of that, he assured the people that after his death God would send the people spiritual light.

Not dismayed by his impending death, Wishart pressed on in God's work. He moved around preaching, at Leith, Inversek, Tranent, and Haddington. At these places, he came into contact with three faithful men, Alexander Crichton of Brunstone, Hugh Douglas of Longniddry, and John Cockburn of Ormiston. These were men who were known as firm opposers against the Roman Catholic Church. Wishart eventually found his lodging with Cockburn, but before he went to Ormiston, he stopped John Knox from following him this time, saying

“One is enough for a sacrifice at this time”, alluding to his near death.

ARREST, TRIALS AND DEATH

As planned, the Provincial Church Synod met, but Cardinal Beaton postponed the session to after Easter. Within that timeframe, he promised to hand a certain church heretic to them, referring to George Wishart. After locating Wishart's whereabouts, Beaton sent the Earl of Bothwell to John Cockburn's house to arrest Wishart. As a dutiful host and friend, it was only upon promise of safe passage for Wishart from the governor and the cardinal, and with Wishart's permission, that Cockburn allowed for Wishart's removal. Wishart had granted it, saying, "God's will be done." Bothwell, on the other hand, had no integrity. He first housed Wishart in Ephinstone Tower, but later broke his promise of protection, and on 19 January 1546 handed him over to the governor in Edinburgh Castle and later to Cardinal Beaton in St Andrew's Castle, who locked him up in the castle prison dungeon.

On 28 February 1546, Wishart was summoned for trial the next day. During the trial, Wishart was accused of preaching heresy. With John Lauder at the helm, 18 articles were brought against him, examples of which were: preaching against the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, against purgatory and against Papal power, against transubstantiation, and against free will. However, none could righteously fault and condemn Wishart for teaching wrong doctrines. Quoting from Scripture and explaining from Scripture, the solid ground upon which his teachings stood, Wishart proved that in his preaching and teaching, he had not departed from the Holy Scriptures.

Nevertheless, the hardened hearts of the clergy, blind to unquestionable proof of Wishart's innocence, condemned him as a heretic and sentenced him to death. They were like those who demanded that Jesus be crucified, even though none could find Him guilty of any wrongdoing. Throughout the whole process, Wishart never moved in his convictions, and never recanted.

On the night before his execution, Wishart, in line with his own teachings and continuing in his defiance against false Roman Catholic Church practices, refused to confess his sins to two friars of the Roman Catholic Church.



The martyrdom of Wishart

EXECUTION/HOME-GOING DAY

At breakfast, on the day of his execution, 1 March 1546, Wishart, using the wine and bread at the table, taught the Lord's Supper for about half an hour before administering it to those present. Then, he was taken away by two men to the execution ground.

Bound with a thin rope around his neck, chains about his waist, hands behind his

back, and bags of gunpowder around his body, Wishart stood at the stake ready for death. Before his death, Wishart encouraged the people to hold on to the Word of God and to fear God rather than man, which he exemplified in his own life. He suffered willingly and gladly for Christ's sake. Then, he commended his spirit to God's hands, and prayed for forgiveness for his accusers. He was hanged and burnt outside St Andrew's Castle where Beaton watched from his window. Beaton had abused his authority because it was actually illegal for religious authorities to pass the death sentence and execute someone. Only the civil authority had the power to do so. About three months later, on 29 May 1546, Beaton was murdered.

George Wishart uncompromisingly preached the truth, and lived it out in his own life. He was eloquent and fierce for the truth from the pulpit, but also kind, gentle, courteous,

humble, meek, teachable, and eager to learn. He lived for God, and never indulged himself in a life of extravagance. Physically, Wishart stood tall, with dark hair and a long beard; he wore a French cap, and his body clothed with "a frieze gown to the shoes, a black millian fustian doublet, and plain black hosen, coarse new canvas for his shirts, and white falling bands and cuffs at his hands." Spiritually, Wishart stands as a faithful martyr for the Christian faith. On his 400th death anniversary, the spot he died at was marked with the letters "GW" in cobblestones. A nearby plaque commemorates his death and his name is also recorded on Martyr's Monument at St Andrews.

Charles Rogers, in his *Life of George Wishart*, said of the man, "In his blood the Scottish Church took root, and so long as his countrymen cherish Protestantism, and love liberty, his memory will be fragrant."

WANG ZHIMING



Yunnan, a far southwestern province of China, borders Vietnam, Laos and Burma. Famed for its breath-taking sights, exotic food, and rich culture (home to one-third of China's ethnic minorities), it has been named one of the most sought-after destinations that tourists to the Red Dragon of Asia seek to visit. Lesser known to the world, however, is a most intriguing memorial that stands in its hilly regions of Wuding County. Erected in 1981, it is the only monument known to commemorate a Christian martyr of the Cultural Revolution in the country. This brave soul is none other than Miao Pastor, Wang Zhiming.

BACKGROUND & EARLY LIFE

Wang was born in 1907 to a family of the

Miao ethnic minority. The Miao people had been a deeply superstitious people since ancient times. However, one year prior to Wang's birth, missionaries Arthur G. Nicholls and William Theophilus Simpkin from the China Inland Mission arrived in Wuding, Yunnan. By God's providence, these missionaries had come at a most opportune time: the region had been struck by a great pandemic that very year. The poverty-stricken villages were stricken by bubonic plague and typhus, and people dropping dead like flies. Bound by their divine calling, the foreign missionaries courageously went among these suffering people despite the evident danger, personally ministering to both their physical and spiritual need.

The sick were nursed to health, and the dying comforted. Improvements were also made to the living and sanitary conditions of the surviving. Most significantly, the missionaries exposed the deception of the dark, superstitious traditions and beliefs that had enslaved the Miao people for generations, and brought them the light of the gospel. As a result, many abandoned their idolatrous ways and came to Christ. Amongst these new converts was Wang's father, whom Nicholls renamed Wang Sashi, meaning "abandon the secular world to pursue the path of the Lord."

MINISTRY AND WORK

Wang's Christian upbringing had a significant impact on his personal faith and his life's ministry. In 1924, his father transferred him to a school run by the church in Sapushan, where Nicholls and the missionaries had established their headquarters. Upon graduation in 1926, 19-year old Wang was sent by the church to teach in mission schools and to preach in the counties of Haoming and Lufeng. In 1935, he returned to Sapushan where he taught and preached, in the town as well as in the nearby villages. Two years later, when the foreign missionaries were forced to leave the region due to the outbreak of the resistance war against Japan, Wang was chosen as preacher at the main congregation in Sapushan. He became the President of the Sapushan Christian Association in 1944.

The Sapushan parish was the largest Miao parish in Yunnan, under which were all the Miao churches in the counties of Wuding, Luquan, Fumin, Lufeng, Yuanmou. Donkeys were the main mode of transport in those mountainous regions, making the gospel work arduous and challenging. Notwithstanding the harsh conditions, the parish grew quickly under the fervent

evangelistic efforts led by an undaunted Wang. According to the records, before the Communists came to power in 1949, there were about 5500 Miao, Yi and Lisu converts in the Wuding county.

Wang also had a gift for music, and was responsible for the translation and compilation of what is likely to be the first Miao hymnal, 《颂主圣歌》 (Sacred Hymns of Praise). In 1951, Wang was ordained in Kunming. By then, all foreign missionaries had been forced out of China, and Christianity, the "white men religion" had been condemned as "spiritual opium", used by "white men" to brainwash and oppress the Chinese people.

One of Wang's greatest enemies was a man named Long, the elder of two brothers who had been trained by foreign missionaries in Southwest Seminary, Chongqing, Sichuan to become Sapushan Miao pastors. Both brothers were deputies of the District People's Congress and Political Consultative Conference. Sadly, the elder Long on his own accord renounced his Christian faith some time later, and began to propagate atheistic ideas aggressively in public meetings. He was a dangerous character. Being familiar with Scripture, he was very adept at misquoting and misinterpreting it, causing great confusion in the minds of lay believers. He also worked very hard to see to the persecution of church leaders like Wang. In 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Long joined the ranks of the Red Guards. For years, Wang zealously preached and exposed the errors of Long's teachings. It was said that Long was the one who brought about Wang's arrest and execution.

PERSECUTION

Under the rule of the Communists, all religious activities were banned, and all

foreign missionaries had been banished from China. The Church property in Sapushan was also sealed and confiscated by the government, and Wang was ordered to return home to do farming under the watchful supervision of the revolutionary peasants. As Christians, Wang's family were not allowed to share the 'fruits of revolution' – they were given no land, housing or money. However, as Wang was one of the rare literate people in the area, he was also made village accountant. In obedience to the Bible's command, Wang prayerfully submitted himself to higher powers. Despite his compliance, in 1954, he was arrested on charges of "resolutely refusing to mend his ways and continuing to be a religious spy". He was sent to prison in the Luquan County.

Wang was released a few months later, probably owing to his position in the hearts of the Miao people, as well as his having never expressed any intention of revolting against communist rule in the past. In 1956, he was even appointed as the deputy leader of a delegation of representatives from minority ethnic groups in the region, travelling to Beijing to join the national day celebrations. He was personally received by Chairman Mao. Yet there was no mistake that the Government's intentions had nothing to do with aiding in the furtherance of Wang's pastoral ministry. Soon after, Wang was appointed a member of the preparatory committee of the Political Consultative Conference in the Chuxiong Prefecture, and sent to work in the Wuding County Cultural Centre. Wang, who never believed in the communist cause, was the

target of many political campaigns, and the subject of humiliation at many public condemnation meetings.

While Wang submitted himself to the authorities, his heart was still with his flock, and he yearned to once again care for their spiritual needs. Soon, in 1964, as part of the Four Clean-ups Movement¹, Wang was removed from all public posts and expelled from the revolutionary ranks. He was again forced to return to farming under the watchful eye of the communists. Undaunted by the danger, believers continued to gather for secret worship and prayer under Wang's leadership.

The height of Wang's sufferings came in 1966 when the Cultural Revolution² began. Christians were tied together with ropes, paraded from village to village to be publicly denounced, and even hung by their hands in the air for days. Wang and his family were also not spared. The now sixty-year-old pastor was forced to wear a big dunce cap with the words "Spy and Lackey of the Imperialists." This was followed by condemnation meetings that were attended by thousands, where they were spat upon, beaten and ridiculed. For the next three years, the daily harassment persisted, until the revolutionary rebels' infighting began. During this time, the surviving secret church found a new place of worship – in the mountain caves of Sapushan. The gospel began to spread once again in the villages, and many brave converts were baptized by Wang, who continued his pastoral ministry during this short period of peace.

¹ "In 1963 Mao Zedong launched what was called the Socialist Education Movement (社会主义教育运动). It was a movement with the goal of cleansing politics, economy, organization and ideology, and it became known as the Four Cleanups Movement (四清运动 Py. Siqing Yundong.) He sought to remove what he believed to be "reactionary" elements within the bureaucracy of the Communist Party of China, saying that "governance is also a process of socialist education."... It was carried out between 1963 and May 1966 in some rural areas and a small number of urban factories, mines, other enterprises and schools. Many cadres at the grass-roots level were maltreated..." (10,000 Chinese numbers, page 74).

Alas the days of peace did not last, as the authorities soon caught wind of their revived gatherings, and Wang was arrested in the early hours of 11 May 1969. In an interview conducted many years later, Wang's son recounts the events of his arrest: "Two soldiers guarded the entrance to the courtyard while two others, carrying loaded rifles with fixed bayonets, kicked the courtyard door open, fired two shots, and charged inside. They warned that anyone resisting would be shot on the spot. Inside the house, they found my father in bed and yelled, "Get up! Come with us." My father was very calm. Without saying a word, he put on his clothes, but before his feet touched the floor, the two soldiers rushed forward and grabbed and twisted his arms. He looked in their eyes and said, "No need to do that. I will go with you." He then raised both of his hands, asking the soldiers to put the handcuffs on him. My mother screamed and wouldn't let my father go. The soldier kicked her. She fell and pass out. ... She had become incontinent, her pants soaked with urine. When she regained consciousness a few moments later, she

kept asking for water, saying: "I'm thirsty, I'm thirsty." She drank several bowls and said her chest hurt. The pain stayed with her the rest of her life."³

Five charges were listed against Wang while he was in custody – (1) being the lackey of foreign imperialists and an incorrigible spy, poisoning people's minds with "spiritual opium", (2) being a counter-revolutionary, (3) consistently boycotting the government's religious policy, (4) being a member of the local landlord gang, and (5) leading a large group of evil landlords to ambush the communist Red Army when they passed by Lufeng County; personally killing seven soldiers. Clearly, the authorities were going all out to malign and condemn Wang. The most absurd of the charges was number 5, as Wang was not even in Lufeng County at the time when the Red Army passed by.

For the next four years, Wang was incarcerated in a tiny prison cell. Everything that belonged to him was confiscated by his persecutors, but they could not rob him of his faith. In the midst of his suffering, his

² "The Cultural Revolution was the brainchild of China's 'Great Helmsman', Chairman Mao Zedong.

Seventeen years after his troops seized power, Mao saw his latest political campaign as a way of reinvigorating the communist revolution by strengthening ideology and weeding out opponents. ... Most historians agree the Cultural Revolution began in mid-May 1966 when party chiefs in Beijing issued a document known as the "May 16 Notification". It warned that the party had been infiltrated by counter-revolutionary "revisionists" who were plotting to create a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie".

A fortnight later, on 1 June, the party's official mouthpiece newspaper urged the masses to "clear away the evil habits of the old society" by launching an all-out assault on "monsters and demons".

Chinese students sprung into action, setting up Red Guard divisions in classrooms and campuses across the country. By August 1966 - so-called Red August - the mayhem was in full swing as Mao's allies urged Red Guards to destroy the "four olds" - old ideas, old customs, old habits and old culture.

Schools and universities were closed and churches, shrines, libraries, shops and private homes ransacked or destroyed as the assault on "feudal" traditions began.

Gangs of teenagers in red armbands and military fatigues roamed the streets of cities such as Beijing and Shanghai setting upon those with "bourgeois" clothes or reactionary haircuts. "Imperialist" street signs were torn down.

Party officials, teachers and intellectuals also found themselves in the cross-hairs: they were publicly humiliated, beaten and in some cases murdered or driven to suicide after vicious "struggle sessions". Blood flowed as Mao ordered security forces not to interfere in the Red Guards' work. Nearly 1,800 people lost their lives in Beijing in August and September 1966 alone." (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>, Accessed September 16, 2016.)

³ Liao Yiwu, *God is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China*, Huang Wenguang, trans. (Harper Collins, 2011), 76-77.

heart was with the souls whom God had committed to his charge, and he continually bowed his knees in prayer for them.

Wang's family was also not spared. Time and again, they were taunted by the revolutionary soldiers and villagers with vitriolic scoffings such as, "Your old man was a bad guy. He believed in God. Why don't you draw a clear line with him?" "God is not the saviour. Chairman Mao and the Communist Party are the saviours of the people. Do you believe in God or in Chairman Mao and the Communist Party?"⁴ In spite of these mockings, God kept their faith. In Wang's absence, his son Wang Zisheng took on his pastoral duties in Sapushan to continue to care for the flock, and encourage them in the Word.

MARTYRDOM

Rumours of Wang's impending execution spread around for some time, but it was only the day before the execution that Wang's family was informed of it by the authorities. On December 28, 1973, Wang Zisheng led about a dozen family members to the detention center. On reaching, they were once again ridiculed by the guards, and were reminded to support the Revolution and not follow in the footsteps of Wang. The gory sight of their beloved father and grandfather, whose tortured and skeletal body had become almost unrecognizable, immediately caused them to weep, only to be curtly berated "No crying allowed!". To prevent them from engaging in counter-revolutionary dissents, the guards ordered them to speak in Mandarin only. He also ordered them to speak quickly, as time to do so was limited. Wang's wife nodded and said to Wang, "You speak first, you have

always spoken first in the past, we will listen to you."⁵

With a knowing smile, Wang replied, "I haven't been able to reform my thinking, and I am to blame for what I am going through now. So, all of you, don't follow me. Listen to the arrangement of 'the Above'."⁶ Although "the above" referred to the government in secular terms, Wang's Christian family understood that he was referring to "God". Wang was, in fact, encouraging them to obey the will of God. He continued, "You must labour zealously, that you may have food to eat and clothes to wear! You must take note of hygiene in all things, and keep your bodies healthy so that you will not fall sick."⁷ These profoundly meaningful words were in no doubt understood by his family: these were the words that Wang, his father and the foreign missionaries of old have often repeated. He was exhorting them not only to take care of themselves physically, but also encouraging them to stand strong and stay healthy spiritually in the midst of their manifold testings.

In tears, Wang Zisheng replied, "Dad, we will listen to what 'the above' tells us, but we have many babes at home who need you. If you can't be reformed and come back home, what will the babes do?"⁸ What he meant, was that the Sapushan church wanted and needed their beloved Pastor. Wang remained silent.

Unable to cry aloud, the family huddled together with muffled sobs, and tears uncontrollably rolling down their cheeks. With trembling hands, Wang's wife presented Wang with six eggs which she

⁴ Liao, 77.

⁵ Ibid, 77.

⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁷ Ibid, 77-78.

⁸ Ibid, 78.

had prepared for his final meal. Lovingly, Wang gazed at his wife of forty years. What words of comfort could he give her at such a time? Silently, Wang reached out his bleeding hands, touched his wife on her head, her chest, and her shoulders. He then separated the eggs, keeping three and giving three to her. Symbolic of the Trinity, this was his final reminder and encouragement to them of how great a God they served, a God for whom they should willingly suffer for.

Abruptly, the family was separated from Wang. It was then announced that Wang would be executed the next day, and his body was to be 'dealt with by the government'. In great dismay, his family pleaded with the officials to know why they could not claim his body. The official's reply horrified them: by popular demand of the revolutionary masses, the government had decided that Wang's body would be completely blown up with explosives, and family members would not be permitted to enter the execution grounds. Wang's family pleaded and cried to no avail. In desperation, they begged the officials and promised never to erect a tombstone or leave any visible mark on Wang's grave. The guards curtly replied, "You Miao people have long been a superstitious lot, if you were allowed to claim his body, you will declare a few days later that he had resurrected like Jesus. That would be unthinkable!" The weeping family were finally booted out of the detention centre. Left with no choice, they went home and prayed.

When morning came, a village official informed them to borrow a horse-drawn cart to "drag the body of the counter-revolutionary home" after his public trial and execution. The family was ecstatic for their prayers had been answered! A cart was quickly obtained, and the family

quietly sang hymns as they headed towards the execution grounds. Ten thousand people were gathered at the public trial, shouting and waving red flags, hungry for blood. Armed soldiers pointed their guns at the family, and commanded them to squat down with their hands on their heads and their backs toward the stage on which Wang stood.

On the stage sat all the county leaders. Wang, hands and legs tied with ropes, stood in the middle of the stage. Two other criminals stood on his left and right. They were not to be executed, but were dragged there to "receive education". Wang opened his mouth as though to speak, but not a single word was uttered. Later, Wang's family found out that a guard had severed his tongue with a bayonet so that he could not preach. Former church members and leaders took turns to take the stage and to denounce his crimes. Immediately after that, one of the officials announced Wang's execution. Soldiers raised him to the air to be seen by all, and the murderous crowd roared with merciless glee. A wooden sign about half Wang's height, his "death sign", was placed on his back. On it was written his name, crossed out with a big red X, as well as the five crimes that he was charged with. Wang was carried on a truck that was led by two cars, with the truck in the middle. Another truck carrying fully armed soldiers followed closely behind. For half an hour, they paraded Wang on the streets. Finally, he was taken to an old airport where he was shot. Meanwhile, the members of his family were tied together with ropes and led back to the detention centre to collect "the garbage left by the counterrevolutionary".

Some friends from their village borrowed a cart and helped to bring the body back

to the detention center where they met Wang's family. With a wet cloth, Wang Zisheng wiped his father's bloodied face, while his sister covered his body with a quilt. The grieving family quietly made their way back to the village under the hot afternoon sun. Along the way, many Miao people, both young and old, stopped the cart to bid Wang farewell. A little girl climbed onto the cart, lifted the quilt, and touched Wang's body from head to toe, a gesture that amused and greatly warmed the hearts of Wang's family members. At sunset, they finally reached the village. Their house was heavily guarded to prevent visitors from coming to pay tribute to Wang. However, at midnight, after the village officials and members of the militia guarding the house had left, about seventy to eighty Christian villagers arrived, sneaking in quietly along the hilly paths to Wang's house in the cover of darkness to avoid being discovered. In hushed tones, they prayed with the family. The last of them left about two hours past midnight.

Wang's sons and son-in-law went up the hill at dawn, where they spent two hours digging a grave. The coffin was first carried up the hill and placed inside the grave. A second trip had to be made to carry Wang's body up, for the only four men of the family did not have enough strength to carry the coffin together with the body (this was a task that required eight men to perform). Anxious villagers watched from a hundred meters away, wanting to offer help but were forbidden from doing so by armed soldiers that had been sent in anticipation of a possible riot being staged by the Miao people. Only family members were permitted to approach the grave.

After his death, many of Wang's family continued to stand fast in the faith, even

in the face of great persecution. In 1974, with the Cultural Revolution winding down, and the political climate improving, the Miao believers resumed their religious meetings. However, local officials soon found out, and persecuted the church once again. In 1976, Wang's eldest and third sons, Zirong and Zisheng, were arrested like their father before them. Wang Zisheng was incarcerated in the same tiny cell once occupied by his father. He testified, "I conducted all my activities... in that tiny space. I was in darkness all the time. A person cannot stay in darkness. A plant will die without sunlight. Animals go crazy after two weeks. ... I had God in my heart. He kept me sane." Both brothers were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment – Zisheng to serve his sentence in a labor camp in Yao-an County, and Zirong in Luquan County. Two sisters of Wang's wife, as well as one of Wang's sisters were also arrested and sentenced to five and three years jail respectively. Like Wang, their "crime" was organizing and attending secret religious meetings. They were released in early 1979 due to a change in the political climate. Sadly, Wang's second son, Wang Zihua, dean of the People's Hospital in the Nujiang Lisu Ethnic Autonomous Prefecture, crumbled under the public humiliation and condemnation. He committed suicide by jumping into the Nu river.

REHABILITATION

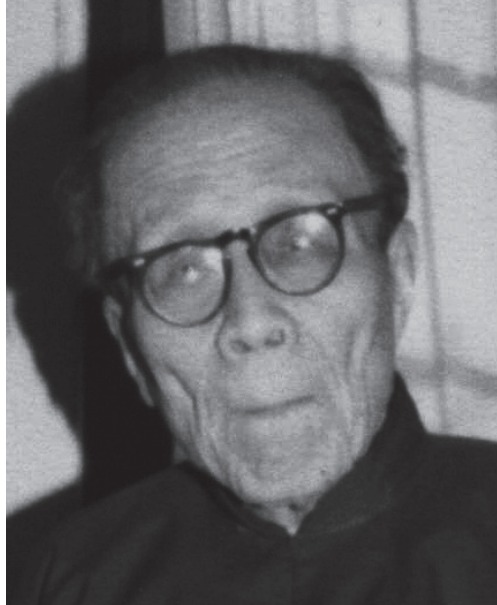
In 1980, Wang was rehabilitated by the Communist party. Finally, his family was allowed to erect a tomb in his memory. By then, the Christian community had grown from about 3000 in the 1960s, to about 12,000. In 1996, a huge memorial service was held by the church to honour Wang. The choir alone was two thousand strong. In 1998, Wang was honoured

⁹ Liao, 80.

by the Westminster Abbey in England, which chose him to be one of the ten martyrs¹⁰ of the twentieth century whose statues stand today above the Great West Door of the Abbey. As the inscription on his tombstone reads, “he has rested from his labours; and his works do follow him.” (Rev 14:13)

¹⁰ It must be noted that these are martyrs according to dictionary definitions, they are not all Christians (they include Roman Catholics like Maximilian Kolbe).

WANG MINGDAO



Unlike the preceding individuals, Wang Mingdao neither died in prison nor was burnt at the stake. By strict definition of terms, he is not a martyr, for he died in the comforts of his own home. He was, however, known as “China’s living martyr” in his evening years for the great sufferings he endured because of his brave stand for the truth.

EARLY LIFE

Wang Mingdao was born July 25, 1900, the year of the Boxer Rebellion¹. His father Wang Dehao (Wong Dzu-Hou) was a doctor with the London Missionary Society, working in the Tong Ren Hospital in Peking (Beijing). When the Boxers came, Wang Dehao and his heavily pregnant wife (Li Wenya) took shelter in the Peking Foreign Legation Quarter along with

¹ “In 1900, in what became known as the Boxer Rebellion (or the Boxer Uprising), a Chinese secret organization called the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists led an uprising in northern China against the spread of Western and Japanese influence there. The rebels, referred to by Westerners as Boxers because they performed physical exercises they believed would make them able to withstand bullets, killed foreigners and Chinese Christians and destroyed foreign property. From June to August, the Boxers besieged the foreign district of Beijing (then called Peking), China’s capital, until an international force that included American troops subdued the uprising. By the terms of the Boxer Protocol, which officially ended the rebellion in 1901, China agreed to pay more than \$330 million in reparations.” (<http://www.history.com/topics/boxer-rebellion>, Accessed September 22, 2016).

their mother, six-year-old daughter and the foreigners. As they prepared for siege, Dr Wang, being one of the wall watchers, was convinced of their inevitable doom at the hands of the Boxers. Rather than to die of starvation or by violence, Dr Wang took what was then sometimes viewed as the “honourable way out” – hanging himself. One month and three days later, Li Wenya gave birth to their son, whom Grandmother named “Tieh” (Iron). It was a name Wang Mingdao resented very much in his childhood. It was only later in life, on hindsight, that he realised how descriptive and prescriptive that name was to be of his life, for God would call him to be like Jeremiah, “an iron pillar... And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.” (Jer 1:18-19). After the rebellion ended in 1901, Li Wenya received several hundred ounces of silver as indemnity funds. With this, she bought a cluster of rooms around an open courtyard. The family of three lived in a single room, and their living expenses came from the rental received from some thirty lodgers.

SALVATION

From his childhood, Wang Mingdao received much exposure to the Christian religion. His mother, a member of the London Mission, brought him and his sister to church often. When Wang Mingdao turned 9, Li Wenya also enrolled him into the Tsui-Wun Lower Primary School established by the London Mission Society. Later on, Wang became a boarder in his Higher Primary School years. Such opportunities to hear the Word increased as the daily chapel meetings, Wednesday afternoon prayer meetings, Sunday School and weekday Bible Classes were compulsory for students. These meant little to Wang at that time, but his young

mind often pondered on the question of death and the afterlife. His studies of the Emperors brought him great despair and fear, for he realised that even the greatest of these Emperors such as Chin-Shih or Han-wu never found the elixir of life and thereby never escape death.

God, however, brought into his life a senior in school, whose godly testimony left a deep impression on Wang. This senior student sought 14-year-old Wang out and spoke to him, leading him to know Christ as his Saviour. He also showed Wang how to pray and read the Bible, and gave him a book by H. L. Zia, “A Help to Personal Development”, from which Wang received much instruction for his spiritual walk. Wang was subsequently baptized in chapel that Easter. The newly-converted Wang experienced a tremendous change in his life – there was a newfound desire for holiness, for prayer and reading of the Bible, and an unspeakable hatred for sin. Wang purposed in his heart to be a good Christian, and God provided him much needful godly guidance and timely rebuke through this same senior who had brought him to Christ.

CALL TO MINISTRY

Although Wang now knew Christ, his childhood ambitions remained unchanged – he wanted to be a politician, a position that came with the fame and glory his heart craved after. Thus, when he first felt God’s call to be a preacher at aged 15, he resisted. To him, preaching was a profession for the worthless, a “job” occupied by those who at best, were lowly in status, or at worse, had failed in everything else in life, and thus took the ministry to be a “last resort”, an easy way for them to earn a living. Wang tried to convince himself that preaching was too insignificant a role for someone of his academic calibre. It was good enough

for him to zealously worship God; greater things in life awaited him! He would obey God in all things, but this.

The call of God was, however, irresistible. As Wang grew in his love and fervency for worship, he became increasingly conscious of the Lord's call for him. Yet he continued to struggle against God for the next three years, stubbornly refusing to let go of his lofty aspirations. When the speaker of some special meetings held by the school called young men to give their lives to serve God as preachers, he tried to quench the Spirit's promptings, which only brought greater conflict within his soul. Unwilling to yield himself, Wang continued to fight against God's will for him. As the day of his graduation drew nearer, he set his heart to study politics in the university, even wearing the slogan "human determination will decide destiny" on his chest. His heart however, had no peace or rest.

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Heb 12:6). In the middle of March 1918, Wang became seriously ill with a great fever, dizziness and tiredness. He recovered slightly in early May, but suffered a relapse soon after that caused him to be sent home. Much as he tried, he was unable to sit for the promotional examinations. A doctor at the London Mission Hospital told his sister that he was unlikely to recover. It was at the height of his illness that Wang began to regret resisting God's call. Realising his foolishness in trying to go against God's will, he humbled himself and abandoned his worldly ambitions. Silently, he prayed and submitted himself to the Lord's call. God in His mercy allowed Wang full recovery by the end of June. Moreover, although he had been absent from the examinations, he was allowed to graduate on account of his past excellent academic record.

Circumstances that followed served to increase his burden for the Lord's work. Upon graduation, Wang continued with a two year university preparatory course. His studies were however affected in May 1919, when schools went on strike as part of student demonstrations against Western Imperialism. When schools reopened, they were also reorganized, and 1st year students were to be transferred to Cheloo University at Jinan, Shandong, which was more than 200 miles away from Peking. The filial Wang passed on this opportunity as he wished to be near to his mother to care for her. His hopes of a University education were completely dashed when he applied to take the exam for the Regular University Course (that was to be taken at the end of the two year preparatory course), but was completely ignored by the Department Head of the Regular Course. He became very depressed, but God's Word from Romans 14:8 and Isaiah 54:8,10 comforted him.

Without prospects of a further education, Wang sought to find a job temporarily, but found none. In his despair, he visited the senior who had brought him to Christ. His senior counselled him to not be discouraged, and advised him to go to Tung-Hsien and attend the Board of Education of the Christian Churches of Hobeh and Shansi Meetings for a change. Reluctantly, Wang heeded his advice. Unknown to him, God's Providence was at work. In Tung-Hsien, Wang met an old friend who introduced him to a job opportunity – a Primary School in Baoding was seeking a teacher for their Lower Primary students. The distance from home (100 miles), 'unmatching' position and paltry salary initially put Wang off, but he finally accepted, albeit reluctantly.

On his arrival, the small, countryside facilities of the school greatly disappointed

Wang. His spirits were lifted, however, when the Principal made him a teacher of the Higher Primary and First Year Middle School students, and increased his salary in light of his knowledge and experience. While Wang disliked his unspiritual colleagues, he had a great burden and love for the souls of his students. His experience of guidance from H. L. Zia's writings motivated him to mentor his students and teach them by example. He began holding daily prayer meetings with them, explaining what Bible doctrines he knew and instructing them in holy living. As he did so, Wang began to see the work of preaching in a new light. The transformed lives of these students moved him immensely, causing him to realise that this was work that not even Presidents had the ability to do. His eyes were opened to see how much more invaluable this spiritual work was compared to his previous ambitions in politics, and he firmly set his heart on the work of God. At the same time, he also became increasingly aware of the darkness and corruption present within the Chinese churches, and was convicted that God was calling him to bring about revolution to these churches through the preaching ministry. By Spring 1920, 20-year old Wang had unconditionally submitted to the Lord's call. Subsequently, he formally took on his "adult name" in the Summer of the same year. He called himself "Ming-dao" – "Ming" meaning to testify, and "Dao" meaning the Way or the Truth. It was a testimony of his obedience to God's call – "may God use me in this world of darkness and depravity to testify to His truth"².

The man was now willing, and even began to excitedly plan for his theological studies. God's thoughts, however, were not his

thoughts, neither God's ways his ways. By Divine Providence, Wang's path towards the preaching ministry was to be full of obstacles and "wrong turns".

MISLED

One of these "wrong turns" Wang took was his acceptance of Pentecostal teachings in his second year at Baoding. These persuasions were first introduced to him by a newly arrived colleague. While this man helped Wang to see and repent of his sin of pride, he was also instrumental in convincing Wang that immersion was the biblical way of baptism. When Wang requested this colleague to introduce him to someone who would immerse him, he referred Wang to a certain Mr Ju, who worked for a small Pentecostal church in Peking. On December 29, Mr Ju personally travelled down to Baoding from Peking and communed with Wang. A thoroughly convinced Wang informed his Presbyterian superiors of his conviction on January 2, 1921, and was threatened with expulsion if he should insist on being "re-baptised" by immersion. Wang refused to change his mind, and was expelled with immediate effect. The next day, he left the school with five other students. Despite the wintry cold they were all immersed by Mr Ju in a nearby river on 6 January.

The next day, Mr Ju taught them that they had not received the Holy Spirit, for they had not yet "spoken in tongues". Thus, they must pray earnestly and seek the Holy Spirit. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon that day, all but Wang had "spoken in tongues". Nothing came although he prayed with utmost fervency and sincerity for the entire day. The following day, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Wang produced some incomprehensible sounds while they

² Wong Ming-dao, *A Stone Made Smooth*, trans. Arthur Reynolds, (Singapore: Berean Publishers, 1995), 49.

prayed together, which Ju joyfully declared was “speaking in tongues”, but Wang would later testify that these were nothing but the “manufacture of man”.

Terribly misled, Wang would continue believing and proclaiming such falsehood for more than a year. However, when he saw how some who claimed to “speak in tongues” were simply repeating a single sound such as “ba-ba-ba-ba” for several minutes, it struck him that these could not be the tongues recorded in the Bible, for even angels spoke more than that to convey meaning. His doubts of this teaching on tongue-speaking and the receiving of the Holy Spirit were further confirmed when he encountered professing believers who had ‘spoken in tongues’, but led lives that were so sinfully wicked that they could not have been filled with the Spirit. On the other hand, he also saw how there were many sincere, zealous and devout believers who never “spoke in tongues”. This led him to eventually abandon these false Pentecostal beliefs.

Besides Pentecostalism, Wang was also misled to believe in a wrong understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Hitherto, his understanding of this doctrine had been superficial and incomplete. While he was at Baoding, Wang was only able to teach his students to worship God, love men and live morally, but he could not teach them about the afterlife, nor was he able to defend the truth when others would attack it. Wang’s understanding of the doctrine of salvation would be further clouded by the meetings which he attended in Peking (after his return from Baoding) at the Hsin-Hsin Hwei (Faith Church, a church which had connections with Mr Ju. They were later known as “the Church of God”). These meetings were led by an elderly Norwegian in the guest room of a private house.

Besides teaching the Pentecostal doctrine that tongue-speaking was an evidence of one having received the Holy Spirit, this man also advocated that the Sabbath ought to be kept on the seventh day. Worse of all, he asserted that salvation was by works, that man had to pursue holiness and purge himself from all sin after believing in Christ to be saved. He even produced a list of 83 sins recorded in the New Testament, and taught that man could be sanctified simply by reading this list daily. Many of his false teachings dissatisfied Wang, but he came to agree with him that man had to be holy to be saved. Wang therefore had no assurance of his own salvation, and was constantly apprehensive and fearful that he might not be saved.

“CONVERTED GREENHOUSE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY”

“My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). God worked in due time through His Word to lead Wang out of these false beliefs between 1921-1924. Though the Norwegian advocated “another gospel”, it was in his home that Wang would be first enlightened to the true understanding of salvation. For in the home of the Norwegian lived an elderly Swede with vastly differing doctrinal convictions. His name was Eric Pilquist. Seeing as he was very poor and sickly, Wang visited him often to care for his needs. During these visits, Pilquist constantly taught Wang the doctrine of salvation through faith. Wang initially resisted, but the passages that Pilquist quoted from the Bible began to work in his heart.

Meanwhile, word got around that Wang had thrown away his job and future in order to be immersed. Rumours began to spread that Wang was suffering from some mental disorder. His mother and sister likewise could not understand his

decision, and constantly berated him at home. Under such difficult circumstances, Wang began to doubt and contemplated abandoning God, whom he felt was treating him unjustly though he had tried to obey Him. The words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 brought him great comfort at this time: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Wang realised that he was being tempted by the Devil, and that he must overcome it the way Christ did – by the Word of God.

Thus, Wang began to devote himself to the study of God’s Word. This he did in a room in their courtyard that was once a greenhouse. As he studied and searched the Scriptures with much prayer, God opened His eyes to the truth, and he finally understood the doctrines of salvation, life and resurrection biblically. Though his hopes of a ten-year, fully-funded theological study in China and England had been dashed following his expulsion from Baoding, Wang was now comforted to realise that this was not God’s will for him. Instead, all he needed to do was to study the Scriptures and be trained and taught in this “converted greenhouse theological seminary” that God had prepared for him. He therefore prayed and asked God to allow him time to read through the Bible several times that he may be prepared for the ministry. His prayers were answered when a cousin, concerned with his “mental condition”, invited him to stay with him and recuperate for a period in the picturesque village of Da-yu. Wang gladly accepted, and spent most of his 62-day stay there reading and praying in peaceful serenity at the nearby Crouching Tiger Mountain. Wang studied the Bible by reading it

from beginning to end six times, as well as studying important themes. He called this period his “short term Bible School”.

BEGINNING OF PREACHING MINISTRY

On May 28, 1922, Wang received a letter from Chun, an old friend of his, who was greatly concerned after learning that Wang had become “mentally ill”. Convinced that this godly, likeminded friend would understand him, Wang travelled to Tsang Hsien a month later to visit him and shared his story. Chun was greatly assured after a long talk, and went on to invite Wang to preach at their church. Subsequently, the church extended an invite to Wang in September, requesting him to minister amongst their midst for a short period, for they had been greatly moved by his preaching. Wang gladly accepted, and stayed for three months. As he ministered, Wang became increasingly convinced of God’s call and equipping of him to preach. However, pride also crept in and he felt sure that God would now lay before him a greater ministry. God soon worked to humble him – on returning to Peking, Wang found himself with no preaching ministry, but instead was confined to doing petty chores around the house. Doubts and resentments toward God again crept into his heart, but he was soon reminded from his reading of Exodus that Moses too had been trained for 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd before he was used of God. Wang realised that even the lowly chores were God’s training for him, for if he failed in these little things, he would likewise fail in big things such as preaching. It was God’s way of ridding him of his desire for fame.

A humbled Wang soon received more invitations to preach. On July 1, 1923, Wang travelled to Zan-Hwong Hsien where he spoke at an eight-day convention organised

by the China Inland Mission. Then in March 1924, he received an invitation to take part in an evangelistic campaign at an army camp farther south, along with thirty other Chinese and Western preachers. The conduct of majority of his “co-labourers”, and subsequently the false show of repentance by their “new converts” grieved Wang so deeply that he left the campaign prematurely, unable to bring himself to watch the baptismal ceremony held at the end. Notwithstanding, the corruption and spiritual poverty he witnessed had stirred his heart, and he committed himself more fully to the preaching of the Word to battle against these forces of evil in the church.

On returning to Peking, Wang’s ministry slowly began. More and more people gathered to study the Scriptures with Wang, and they decided to start holding meetings in his home together, which started on 18 October 1924. What began as a small gathering of three grew to a congregation of 70 by April of the following year, and continued to flourish.

In 1927, God also opened a new area of ministry for Wang in the publishing of “The Spiritual Food Quarterly”(《灵食季刊》), a devotional that would see 30 years of unbroken circulation. Wang worked tirelessly to write articles for this magazine for years, and it was through this publication that he would expose the errors of many false teachings that pervaded the churches of China even in those times, such as Pentecostalism³, and also Modernism. During the Japanese Occupation of the 1940s, this ministry which Wang viewed as a “child” nearly “died an early death”. The Japanese had given orders for all publications to insert God-dishonoring slogans in their next issue or

face severe punishment. Complicating the situation was the counsel of Wang’s co-workers to cease publication in order to avoid both compromise of the truth and danger from the authorities. Thankfully, after much prayer, Wang was guided by the Spirit and the Word that their publication must not cease, and he must courageously face God’s battle. They published the next issue, omitting the slogans, and even sent a copy to the Japanese military for scrutiny. The Lord protected his own – there was no arrest, not even any communication made to them from the authorities. The Quarterly therefore continued publication without any adulteration.

EARNESTLY CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

For the next 20 years or so, Wang would busy himself in the preaching and writing ministries that God had called him to. Wang also met and married his wife, Miss Liu Jingwen, in Hangchow in 1928. In 1937, the church in Peking, which had now grown to more than 300, raised sufficient funds to buy No 42 Shih-Jia Lane, and build a 450-seater church there. The dedication service was held on August 1 that year, and was attended by close to 500 people. This Church was known as the “Christian Tabernacle”.

Wang was never ordained, nor did he take the title “pastor”. He did, however, undertake the overseeing of the church with great seriousness. He was principled, and ran a tight ship – new converts would be carefully observed (up to three years) before they were allowed baptism. The pulpit was guarded with utmost caution – few except Wang’s immediate co-workers were allowed to preach from it for fear that erroneous doctrines might be brought in.

³ A translation of Wang’s article “The Charismatic Movement in the Light of the Bible” can be found in Rev Timothy Tow’s book, *Wang Ming Dao & Charismatism* (Pages 53-82).

Many were unhappy with him and left the church as a result, but Wang held to his pastoral principles unwaveringly.

Wang also quickly became a highly sought-after preacher, and received invitations from churches near and far. As a result, he became heavily involved in itinerant preaching, going even as far as Manchuria and Hongkong to preach. It is estimated that he has preached in churches across over 30 provinces of China. Many were turned off by his bold declaration of the truth, for they were offended by his strong stance against sin and corruption in churches and believers. These rejected Wang as a proud, arrogant and self-righteous preacher who reviled people as soon as he opened his mouth. Others, who thirsted after the truth, welcomed him, repenting and rejoicing at his faithful and biblical preaching.

Separation was not a doctrine that Wang merely preached, he bravely practiced it in his ministry. In the 1940s, during the Japanese Occupation, a Peking Christian Preservation Committee was formed by leaders of various churches in the city after places of worship were closed and sealed. Wang perceived this methodology of seeking help from the Japanese as similar to the Israelites seeking help from Egypt instead of God, and refused to attend their meetings. These leaders repeatedly attempted to rope Wang into this Committee, and later into the North China Christian Federation Promotion Committee that was established. Wang flatly refused, convicted by God's direction in 2 Corinthians 6:15 that they must never be unequally yoked with unbelievers (by

which he meant both the pastors of these churches that fornicated with the world, as well as the Japanese-sponsored NCCFPC itself). Wang was spared from arrest by God's mercy in this period.

PERSECUTION IN THE 1950S

The difficulties and opposition that Wang faced up till this point would pale in comparison to the intense persecution that was to come in the latter half of his life. In 1949, The Chinese Communist Party came to power, and put in place many new campaigns to make China pro-Soviet and anti-Western. One of these measures was the establishing of the Three Self Patriotic Movement Church (TSPM), in bid to make the Chinese church "self-administered, self-supporting and self-propagating" ("Three Self") and thus "independent from the West"⁴. In 1954, during the First Chinese Protestant Church National Conference, the TSPM Committee was formed, and a resolution was passed to "(1) lead the Protestant church in China to operate under the Three-Self principle, (2) merge the different denominations into one church body, (3) support the government to build a Socialist China, and (4) promote patriotic education among Christians to root out the poisons of imperialism in the church."⁵

Not surprisingly, Wang refused to have anything to do with this government-controlled, anti-biblical church movement. In 1949, he stubbornly refused to sign a document circulated amongst Protestant pastors that called Christianity "a tool of imperialism". An "accusation meeting" against him was held in September 1954

⁴ Majority of the Chinese Protestant churches then, having been founded by missionaries belonging to denominations from the West, had strong ties with their Western counterparts and received much support from them.

⁵ J. Gordon Melton, and Martin Baumann, ed., *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, 2d ed., vol. 6. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, 2010), 585.

by the TSPM. Delegates from the Beijing churches came by order of the TSPM, of which only a quarter agreed Wang ought to be imprisoned or executed. The rest sat in silent tears while Wang silently endured this public humiliation and accusations. Due to perceived pressure from the silent majority, Wang was released.

Wang was in no wise deterred. Following the accusation meeting, he fervently laboured in his writing and preaching ministries, teaching believers to live in obedience to the Bible and warning them against the errors of the Three Self Movement. Time and again, he angrily denounced the TSPM and those who supported the movement as unbelieving modernists. In his 1955 pamphlet entitled “We are for the Faith”, Wang quoted and unreservedly rebutted his TSPM opponents. In particular, Wang denounced Y.T. Wu (Wu Yaozong), founder and leader of the TSPM, as a modernist for his rejection of the fundamentals of the faith in his book *Darkness and Light*. H.H. Cui, general secretary of the Church of Christ in China, was also condemned by Wang as belonging to “the Party of Unbelievers”⁶ for rejecting the biblical doctrines of Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Resurrection, Trinity, Last Judgement and Second Coming as “irrational and mysterious beliefs, which cannot be understood”⁷. Wang stated in no uncertain terms, “... Fundamentalism must oppose Modernists because Modernists with their lips confess faith in the Bible and Christ but in reality they completely overturn the Bible and the Christ of the Bible... If I call them a party of unbelievers, am I maligning them or offending them? ...

These people have no faith; they do not believe in Jesus; they are not Christians. Masquerading as Christians, they mix with church people and spread some kind of ambiguous, false doctrine to lead astray true believers and corrupt their faith.”⁸ Concerning the Modernists’ rejection of the Fundamentals, Wang wrote, “these are all serious theological differences, and because of these differences I cannot unite with these other people. Moreover, in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ I shall fight against them.”⁹

Another man whom Wang contended against in his 1955 pamphlet was Bishop Ding Guanxu, the communist party’s principal propagandist tasked by the TSPM to discredit Wang. In the Tian Feng (“heavenly wind”) magazine, a TSPM publication, Ding continually denounced Wang, attempting to brand him a counter-revolutionary and to take him down on political grounds. Wang fearlessly responded in defence of his faith through his sermons and publications, such as the *Spiritual Food Quarterly* and other little pamphlets. As the conflict escalated, Wang continually exhorted his congregation to expect suffering and persecution, and urged them to stand firm for the faith.

ARREST

Finally, the authorities decided it was time to make an example of this staunch non-conformist. On August 7, 1955, Wang conducted worship services at the Christian Tabernacle as usual. Little did he know that that evening’s prayer service would be his last. Past ten that evening, Wang sat in his bedroom to look through the mail, while

⁶ This was a term that Wang had assigned the Modernists in a 1929 article “How Long Halt Ye Between Two Opinions?”

⁷ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China And Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 158.

⁸ Ibid, 158.

⁹ Ibid, 158.

his wife Jingwen stepped out of the room to investigate some noises she had heard, only to be met with an armed policeman in the hall. Before she could make any sound, she was overcome and handcuffed while an oblivious Wang continued his reading upstairs. Several armed policemen then burst into his room, where they began ransacking and searching. Jingwen was nowhere in sight when Wang was brought down handcuffed. An upset Wang requested to know her whereabouts. When told that she had been arrested and taken away, Wang began to yell “False arrest!” and cried for help. The policemen muffled his desperate cries by throwing a cloak over him.

That night, Wang, Jingwen and eighteen other leaders of various Beijing churches were arrested and imprisoned. In the months that followed, Jingwen could only peer through distant courtyards to catch a glimpse of her husband. On the other hand, a severely short-sighted Wang felt painfully alone, for he never saw his wife, having lost his glasses during his tussle with the policemen at his arrest.

A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS

In prison, Wang was subjected to the Communist “re-education” methods. Round after round of incessant interrogations, coupled with much tormenting from both the officers and his fellow-prisoners took its toll on Wang. In a moment of weakness, he crumbled, admitting to his “crime” of opposing the Three-Self Movement, as well as many other false accusations that were thrown on him. For months, Wang would write and rewrite his “confession” until it was finally deemed satisfactory by the officials in late summer of 1956. On September 30 of the same year, Wang read his seven-page confession before one hundred Three Self Leaders, a move that secured physical freedom for himself and Jingwen. It was,

however, a greatly tormented soul that returned home. Wang was ridden with guilt for denying his Saviour, and soon sank into deep depression. It was said that he was seen wandering around Beijing muttering “I am Peter, I am Peter”. He even attempted to hurt himself by pouring boiling water over his own head, and on another occasion, stuffing his mouth with blistering lime. Jingwen, who remained steadfast in faith, proved to be a true pillar of support, caring lovingly for her husband in this trying period of time.

RECENT AND REARREST

Thankfully, Wang would later follow through in the footsteps of Peter in sincere repentance. Despite the confessions that he had made, Wang had not been completely “converted” – he simply could not bring himself to join the TSPM, nor could he open his mouth to openly preach the doctrines they wanted him to. As a result, Wang and his wife were again arrested two years later in 1958. This time, Wang was given life imprisonment, and Jingwen received a 15-year sentence. This sentence brought about an amazing and unexpected change to Wang. He began to recall many Bible passages that he had memorized in the past, one of which being Micah 7:7-9 “Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.” Wang later testified, “At this juncture I saw clearly I had sinned a great sin – I lied. I lied to say that TSPM was proper, but when I got out I could not join them. So we were arrested the second time. She was sentenced to fifteen years and I to

life. Then did I realise this was meted to us by God, to punish me for my lying.”¹⁰

As his life sentence began, the intense shame and guilt in Wang’s heart gave way to newfound strength and courage to contend for the faith. The “Iron Wang” of old had returned! To the furious horror of his captors, Wang recanted, both orally and in a long written declaration, revoking his previous confessions, announcing that they had been made under duress and were not at all his convictions.

As a result, Wang would spend the next twenty-two years of his life in prison, enduring all kinds of unthinkable torments aimed at “re-educating” him once more. Over the years, both he and Jingwen were moved from prison to prison. The height of their sufferings came during the period of the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, Wang was transferred to the Datong Mining Camp, where he was mercilessly tormented by a “Battalion of Nine” – nine tough fellow prisoners specially selected by the camp manager to live with him. Jingwen too was not spared from ill treatment – a cellmate imprisoned for murder unleashed her wrath onto Jingwen by way of hair-pulling, kicks and slaps. By the grace of God, Wang never again succumbed. His body was tormented but not his soul - he was now a happy man who had found forgiveness as well as renewed faith and trust in his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

TRICKED AND FREED

In April 1974, Jingwen completed her 15 year sentence and was released. By then, she had developed high blood pressure, and also lost her vision in one eye due to

untreated glaucoma. Their son Tianzhe brought her to Shanghai to live with his family. She was allowed to visit Wang briefly a few times. Meanwhile, as the authorities gave up hope of re-educating this iron-willed man, Tianzhe was able to send him some five hundred books, making his cell a mini library.

By 1979, Mao Zedong had died, and Sino-American diplomatic relations had been re-established. Political prisoners like Wang received the attention and interest of the Western human rights groups. Dr. Sheng Xianzhi, the son of an old Presbyterian Pastor friend of Wang’s, travelled back from the US, and tried to visit Wang at his labour camp. Unable to find him, Dr. Sheng penned and left behind a letter which garnered international attention, and led to Wang’s release soon thereafter. In November 1979, Tianzhe received a telegram informing him to make arrangements to bring his father home as soon as possible. However, when Tianzhe arrived, Wang stubbornly refused to leave, saying, “Before I go, the government must admit three things. They must admit that they wrongly arrested me, that they wrongly sentenced me and that they have wrongly imprisoned me for over twenty years. If they don’t put this in writing, I won’t leave.”¹¹ Tianzhe had no choice but to leave without his father.

In the end, the vexed prison officials (motivated by political considerations) resorted to trickery to get the obstinate Wang out of prison. On December 29, they got him to agree to move to the visitor’s quarters outside the prison walls for a “short holiday”, on condition that they would

¹⁰ Timothy Tow, *Wang Ming Tao & Charismatism* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1989), 94.

¹¹ Mark A. Noll, and Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (InterVarsity Press, 2011), 264.

¹² Tow, 94.

help him move his books and belongings with him. Once he left the compounds, the prison gates shut behind him forever. In Wang's words, "I was not released. I was tricked to come out!"¹² It was only on New Year's Eve that Wang finally understood his circumstances, and sent a postcard to Tianzhe requesting him to come and bring him to Shanghai, where he would spend the rest of his evening years.

A FINAL TEST

Thirty years of incarceration had left its scars on both Wang and Jingwen – he was nearly deaf while she had completely lost her sight. Still, the Devil, as a roaring lion, rested not from seeking to devour the aged preacher, and sought to undermine his unwavering testimony of practising Biblical Separation. This test came in April 1988, when the famed compromiser Billy Graham visited China for the first time. It was reported that he had also been privately received by Wang. The Christianity Today painted a rosy picture of the situation, "By [Wang's] reception of Billy Graham, the honoured guest of the Chinese Christian Council (CCC), the famed evangelist is now accepted by many leaders of the House-Churches. Moreover, according to analysts, this makes the much-travelled evangelist a bridge between the CCC and the independent House-churches and Underground churches."¹³

Had Wang once again crumbled and compromised? A later interview with the man himself in December of the same year by a team from the Far Eastern Bible College would prove otherwise. When asked of Graham's visit, Wang answered "He wanted to see me, but I did not want to see him... his visit seemed to be by invitation of the Three-Self Movement. So I was not willing to speak to him. But

he came on his own one day!" Mrs Wang likewise added, "Hitherto when guests call on us, we let them come. In this case they have given no prior notice. So when we heard he was coming, we sent word to them not to come. And when again they said they were coming we sent word further to them not to come. ... We had asked them not to come, once, twice, and three times... Those pastors, executives and chairmen and closest colleagues who stood with him on the same platform have been disloyal to the Lord... we are not happy with these people." Concerning Billy Graham, Mrs Wang also commented on behalf of her husband "He had said before and some Christians in our country had heard;... 'The whole Church is unified!'... So I say he hasn't read all that is in our article, *We Because of the Faith...* Probably he could not nor did anyone explain the meaning of the article to him. Other articles have been translated but not this one. If he knows the contents of this article, he would understand. But he hasn't understood even now." Unable to turn away nor avoid meeting his insistent visitor, Wang gave Graham these words of warning, "*be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Rev 2:10).

Despite their physical ailments, Wang and Jingwen continued to labour for their Lord with what ability they had left. Wang, though unable to write by then, never ceased from preaching. From the time Wang was released, they continued to conduct regular meetings with believers in their small apartment in Shanghai until their death. Finally, on July 28, 1991, Wang Mingdao was called Home after suffering from a blood clot in his brain. A year later, after battling for months with stomach cancer that was complicated by pneumonia, Jingwen joined him in glory on April 18, 1992.

¹³ Tow, 89.

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