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## **Biblical Truth for Today's Church**

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## **LATIMER COMMENT 11**

### **TWO MEN OF GOD: RAYMOND JOHNSTON AND JOHN STAFFORD WRIGHT**

(Obituaries reproduced from the church press for Fri. Oct. 25 and Fri. Sept. 13 1985)

#### RAYMOND JOHNSTON

Raymond Johnston, director of Care Campaigns, and education and research consultant to Care Trust (the two wings of the former Nationwide Festival of Light), passed away at the age of 58 on Thursday last week. He was educated at Solihull School, and became a Christian when thirteen through a Crusader Bible Class. At seventeen he went up to Oxford to read Modern Languages at Queen's College, and afterwards took the London Diplomas in Theology and Education. He became a teacher, first at Maidstone Grammar School and then at King Edward VII School, Sheffield. He was a man of great energy, fond of the outdoor life, and at both schools he ran a Scout troop, through which a number of boys became Christians, and afterwards lifelong friends.

At Oxford he had come to be a close friend of Jim ( afterwards Dr Jim ) Packer, who was studying Classics there, and together they developed a great interest and concern for Reformation theology, especially in the Calvinistic and Puritan tradition, which they rightly held to be mainline Anglican theology, not some aberration from it. In 1957 they collaborated to publish a valuable new translation of Martin Luther's Bondage of the Will, with a historical and theological introduction - one translator supplying his knowledge of Latin and the other his knowledge of German, and both their appreciation of the theology of the work. From about 1958 to 1968, when Dr Packer was organizing the Puritan Study Conference annually at Westminster Chapel, Raymond Johnston was an active participant. In 1960 he published his translation of Cadier's life of Calvin, The Man God Mastered.

From being a schoolmaster, he went on to become lecturer in Education at the University of Newcastle. While holding this post, he collaborated with another friend and lecturer in Education, Philip Ma}', to write the timely and positive book Religion in our Schools (1968). This already reveals his conviction both of the importance of the national profession of Christianity, and of the dangerous state of morals in contemporary national life, which were to be the guidelines of his later work. By this time, he was a member of the House of Laity of Church Assembly, where he represented the diocese of Newcastle from 1965 to 1970, and weighty letters from Mr O.R. Johnston on national concerns had begun to appear in the press.

The 1960s were a crucial period in the history of the church in this country, when the long-standing hesitancy of so many bishops and theologians on matters of doctrine began to spill over into ethics as well. Just when the trends in society called for a clear Christian voice, one was faced with the incredible spectacle of spokesmen of the church actually defending decadent developments and advocating permissive legislation. It was left, for the most part, to ordinary parish clergy, and especially to laymen, to step into the breach. Foremost among these laymen were Mary Whitehouse, who, amid much opprobrium, had founded her Viewers and Listeners Association as early as 1964; Lord Longford, whose report on Pornography appeared in 1972; and Raymond Johnston, who, though he was not one of the

organizers of the great rally in Trafalgar Square which launched the Festival of Light in 1971, became its first full-time director.

The Festival of Light, from the outset, founded its work on the principles of the Ten Commandments, and welcomed support from people of all denominations, and indeed from non-Christians, who recognised a duty to society as a whole, and were concerned for the same moral standards. Raymond Johnston was appointed its full-time director, to give it the intellectual calibre which it needed. He moved to Oxfordshire, from where, in 1980, he was elected to the House of Laity of the General Synod.

Already for most of the previous decade, however, in pursuance of his Festival of Light work, he had been throwing tremendous energy into the same causes that he advocated in the General Synod, writing and circulating popular and informative literature, speaking up and down the country ( and in other countries as well), advising Christian members of both Houses of Parliament, answering countless calls from individuals for help and advice, and working an incredibly long day. He served on many committees (those of the Church Society, Marriage Solidarity and the National Club, among others), he was chairman of the Churchman editorial board, and of the Latimer House theological work group, and was vice-chairman of the Latimer House council. He was also active as a lay preacher, but he still found some time to devote to his love of the arts, and especially to his family. In all his work he was supported by his loyal and courageous wife Peggy, to whom, with his aged father and his daughters Joanna and Rebekah, the sympathy and gratitude of his many friends goes out.

Under his leadership, the Festival of Light and Care have concentrated particularly on defending and supporting family life, in all its aspects. It was a sadness to him that the Government, despite its professed concern for family life, has not done more to uphold it, and has even pursued some policies from which the family can only suffer. One of his last books, Who Needs the Family? (Hodders, 1979), is a comprehensive survey of his chosen theme. In two other recent books, Nationhood: towards a Christian Perspective (Latimer House, 1980) and The Functions of a National Church (Latimer House, 1984 - Max Warren's book reissued with a new introduction), he gives his considered views on the mutual responsibilities of church and state within national life.

Calvinists are often supposed to be a dour and narrow-minded school of thought. It is interesting to test this assessment by the example of Raymond Johnston, of whom nothing was more characteristic than his infectious sense of humour, or his appreciation of music, and who delighted in quoting papal statements on social questions, whenever they supported the principles for which he strove. In his last illness, he remarked to the writer what a comfort it was to be a Calvinist, and to know that it rested in his heavenly Father's hands whether he lived longer in this world or not.

He fell asleep in Jesus, after a short but sharp illness, borne with great fortitude, on October 17th. May his example raise up many others to follow in his footsteps and carry on his work.

Roger Beckwith

## CANON J. STAFFORD WRIGHT

John Stafford Wright, 'Staffy' to his many friends and former students, died at Bristol on August 27th at the age of 80. A scholar of Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, who graduated in classics and theology as long ago as 1927, he was one of the first students at the newly founded Bible Churchmen's College (later, Tyndale Hall) Bristol, under its first principal, the doughty Protestant church historian and liturgiologist Dr. Sydney Carter. The College, founded to uphold the total trustworthiness of the Bible and the teaching of the Reformation, and to train both ordinands and BCMS missionaries, began its life in conditions of controversy at the era of the introduction and rejection of the 1928 Prayer Book. Those who chose to be students there were marked men.

After a curacy at St. Mary's Weymouth, he returned to the college in 1930 as Dr. Carter's vice-principal, but two years later internal controversy led to the foundation of a second conservative evangelical college a mile across the downs, Clifton Theological College. Dr. Carter became first principal of the new college, continuing as such until his retirement, and Stafford Wright for a short time accompanied him there, though his loyalty to the old college led him to return the same year. His friendship with Dr. Carter continued unabated, and he was afterwards able to take the first steps towards the reunion of the two colleges, by arranging for various joint courses of lectures. Much later, in 1971, the two colleges were to join with Dalton House to form Trinity College.

He continued teaching at Bristol throughout the difficult war years, then in 1945 moved to be senior tutor at Oak Hill College, London. In 1951 he returned to Tyndale Hall to succeed Mr Dodgson Sykes as principal, and held this post until his retirement in 1969. Among the distinguished staff members who served under him were Philip Hughes, John Wenham, Richard Coates, Jim Packer, Colin Brown and Tony Thiselton. He maintained and increased the college's reputation for theological scholarship, doctrinal orthodoxy, and loyalty to the Anglican formularies, and he attracted growing numbers of able students, graduates as well as non-graduates. In 1967 Bishop Tomkins made him an honorary canon of Bristol Cathedral, at that date an unusual honour for a principal of a college of such definite evangelical churchmanship.

In his time, Stafford Wright must have taught every subject in the college curriculum, but his chief expertise was in Old Testament, the psychology of religion and cults. On all three subjects he issued important writings, but on every subject he showed himself a most thoughtful defender of biblical orthodoxy. Rejecting the common charge of obscurantism against his college, he prided himself on both teaching the negative critical arguments and on developing scholarly answers to them. He was an active member of the Tyndale Fellowship and of the Victoria Institute. Among his writings were The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem, What is Man?, Christianity and the Occult Some Modern Religions and The Child's Right to Baptism.

A friendly, unassuming, open-minded man, with a lively sense of humour and a love of Nature and simple pursuits - a good preacher, a considerate pastor, an encourager of budding scholars, as well as of those who found study very difficult, hundreds of present-day clergy and missionaries will join the writer in giving thanks for his memory, and in extending to his wife Sylvia, and to his children and grandchildren, sympathy and love in their loss.

Roger Beckwith