

Tribute to Dad

given by Bernard at his funeral, 1 December 2008

I speak on behalf of my mother Kathie, my sisters Rosalind and Annette, our spouses Susan, Marc and John, and the grandchildren David and John, Hannah and Esther. We count ourselves very privileged to have had Rowland as a husband, father, father-in-law, and grandfather. Though we grieve his loss to us, we are left with such a positive impression of this remarkable man. We give thanks today for a life well lived.

The first thing to say about Dad is that he was a man of God. His thinking began and ended with God. He set us a fine example of how to live one's life in relationship to God. He was a man of prayer. Many of us here today have been led by him to the throne of grace. When he prayed it was obvious that he knew God and that he knew that he had God's ear; he was confident that he had access to the throne room at the very centre of the universe. A few days ago I received an email from the pastor who married myself and Susan: 'I remember your Dad praying at your wedding. When he prayed, I thought "Wow, what am I doing leading this event."'

He was a man of Scripture, certain that this is God's word to us. He knew the Scriptures intimately, having studied them multiple times from end to end, marking up numerous English and Thai Bibles with his own system of annotations. And he longed for all Christians to study, know and love the Scriptures themselves.

He had a high view of God's providence, both in the past and for the future. Looking back, he saw how God had shaped his life, starting long before he knew the Lord. He knew God's providential care in his several close brushes with death: in 1976 when he was attacked while riding his motorbike and left for dead; in 1985 when he nearly died of cancer. It was this confidence in God's care which enabled him to face this final illness with calmness and serenity. He has been an example of the dictum that we're immortal till God's done with us.

Dad was a man of books and learning. He grew up in the very small village of Brisco, south of Carlisle, from where he walked two miles to the one-room school house in the next village. Since there were only two teachers, each student worked on his own with the aid of textbooks and occasional help from the teacher. This gave him his ability to teach himself from books. Though he left school at 14, he was to continue teaching himself from books for the rest of his life. Here, too, he saw the providential hand of God. During his first term in Thailand he returned from holiday in Hua Hin to find that termites had eaten through all his books. But at about the same time two people, unknown to each other, started sending him books, one from Banner of Truth here in the UK, the other from Sovereign Grace Publications in the US. God arranged for his first library to be destroyed and

replaced by a better one.

He never stopped learning. Very little of this was in any formal setting. He studied for three years at what was then the Bible Training Institute (BTI) in Glasgow. In Thailand he studied towards 4 O-levels, sitting the exams in Bangkok. This enabled him to go on and study for a Diploma in Theology in 1970. This was his only formal academic qualification, but he had a learning far beyond what any paper qualifications showed.

His reading was not limited to Bible and Theology. He read widely in secular subjects also. After being demobilized from the army in 1948 he trained as a psychiatric nurse, training for which he was grateful the rest of his life. Here he learnt not only how the body works but also the mind. Throughout the rest of his life he read widely and thought deeply about how the mind works in learning, understanding and acting, especially how this works for Christians learning Biblical truth and living their lives in the light of that truth. He was always thinking about how to help others learn, understand and apply.

Dad shared his love of books with us. From an early age he started giving us books. Several of these had a profound influence on my thinking. Growing up in a house full of books, we became book lovers ourselves.

He was an industrious man, devoting great energy to anything he worked on, be this his own Bible study, preparation of teaching materials, or working in the garden. All his work in Thailand was done without the aid of computers. For the Evening Bible Schools and the Home Bible Seminary he typed out thousands, probably tens of thousands, of stencils on his Thai typewriter. I remember many a trip as a child accompanying Dad up the road to the hospital at Manorom to run those stencils off on the Gestetner duplicator.

Though Dad worked hard, he did not do so at the expense of his family. Rosalind, Annette and I have many fond childhood memories of time spent with Dad. Memories of trips out from Manorom on his motorbike, of long walks in the hills of the Lake District, of he and I swimming across the bay at Hua Hin, and many more.

It has been a pleasure to see him enjoy his family at closer quarters since returning from Thailand in 1991, to see the delight he took in his grandchildren. I am deeply grateful that for the last 4½ years he and Mum have lived with Rosalind and her family in a multi-generational household.

I speak for all the family in saying that God has richly blessed us through this man. I count it a tremendous privilege to have had him for a father. Though I have spent most of my life living half way around the world from him, he has had more influence in my life than anyone, and that all to the good.

The family gives thanks today for a life well lived. Thanks be to God.