

What is a Saint?

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[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen. It is a dangerous thing for a son to talk about his mother in public. We are told by those who should know these things that the umbilical connections are too close to allow even a semblance of balance in the discussion.

It's also a difficult thing to get a historical perspective on someone who died only three years ago. We're told again by those who should know these things that 50 years at least must pass before we can get the right sense of the person's contribution.

Some have even been known to say that we are too close in time to the French Revolution of the 18th century to be able to provide a balanced perspective. But one of the four corners of the Learners' Exchange program, the quadrilateral as it's been called, is that it's determined to be a focus on Christian biography.

Are we then condemned to confine our attention to Christian biography of people from the distant past and only those from the UK?

[1 : 29] Now, we do suspect that Dr. Packer believes that no one younger than the Puritans in the 17th century is likely to qualify for something.

And if you check on the nationalities of the biographical studies that we have listened to over the past decades, the overwhelming majority were born in the United Kingdom many moons ago.

Well, I propose to take a huge risk and introduce someone who died only three years ago, even someone who hailed from the frigid North.

Not North of England. Nowhere, the country of the Vikings, were best known for their skills at raping and pillaging those poor souls in the UK. Why would I take this risk?

Both of misinterpreting my mother's life and exposing some of my most personal thoughts to this group. Well, there are three reasons, at least.

[2 : 45] I believe that Learners' Exchange is a place of sharing with and of learning from each other. I do not have to pretend to give you the definitive biography of my mother.

More importantly, I believe there are contemporary saints of the kind that I will try to define, but many of them are rather ordinary folks, with no credentials such as a DIP CS or an MDiv from Regent College, and that we ignore these saints at our peril.

Most importantly, we are commanded to honour our mother and our father. Now, all Christians are saints in status.

If you want to check the book of Acts, that's the common word that is applied to the believers. But not many of us are saints in practice.

Indeed, one suspects that there are even fewer practicing saints than saints decreed by the Holy See. And yet, I was privileged to know it firsthand, and to love, and to be loved by a mother who I believe qualifies for that unique accolade of having lived a saintly life.

[4 : 06] If that sounds too good to be true, allow me to reflect on some of the ways in which the attribute of saintliness not only characterized my mother's life, but also challenged her encounter with contemporary life.

Now, you have a handout, which is something to keep an eye on, because I sometimes migrate, and this is the intended outline.

And when I have lost my way, I shall refer to a number on this front page. I must also get back to my crutch.

So the way I hope to look at this is to give you some context first. It's not, I promise, a geography lesson, but geography does play an important part in the context.

And I will summarize briefly some of the events and influences on the life of Astrid Helena Brin, 1907 to 2004, under the headings of External Influences, Internal Influences, and, oddly enough, Church Communities, which one might categorize, in this particular case, as either internal or external, as you'll gather as we talk about.

[5 : 36] Having given that context, I will try and summarize what I presume you came to hear this morning, something about the characteristics of a saint.

So, starting with External Influences, there are five phases of my mother's life. First of all, born in Norway and lived there continuously between 1907 and 1928.

Then she embarked on this career of an au pair girl, which Sheila tells me that this was the first time that this topic has been engaged at the Learners' Exchange.

But what it's meant in practice was there was a movement away from Norway to Wales, back to Norway, then back to England, then back to Norway again, between 1928 and 1932.

Then there was her arrival in Wales in 1932. And her life, most of her life, was lived in Wales between 1932 to 1939, and then 1945 to 2001.

[6 : 55] Then in Norway, from 1939 to 1945, and the final three years in England, 2001-2004. The first of these, Norway, 1907 to 1928.

Norway was a new nation as of 1905, having broken away from Sweden, having previously broken away from Denmark, a long way from the proud traditions of the Vikings, when the Vikings looked after the Danes and Swedes, quite messy.

She was fiercely proud of her homeland, and I think the spirit of optimism and pride, being born in the third year of a newly independent nation, was something that was important as a contextual thing.

During World War II, when Germany invaded Norway and Quisling headed the puppet government, her pride and her optimism were severely tested, both by her physical separation from her husband, but also by the everyday challenges of how to behave Christianly under the evil regime.

The next phase, comment on the context of this period of travel between Wales and Norway and England, and we have here the essentials of the context.

[8 : 13] The link between South Wales and Norway was established in a reciprocal sense that pit crops were provided by the Norwegian forests, and coal was provided by the South Wales coal field.

Consequently, many ships, many captains of ships, and many owners of shipping lines traveled between those two cities. And the concept of the old air girl was twofold.

One was that it might provide the opportunity for a young lady to learn English in the home of a family that could be relied upon as having some minimal standards of integrity.

So the captains and the merchants and so on conspired to assist in making this link. And one of these links was the uncle of my mother who lived here and who had connections in Swansea.

So this is essentially taking a ride on the globalized trade route between the two countries. And so between 1928 and 1932 my mother traveled backwards and forwards along this route and stayed with a variety of families and incidentally in the last visit met my father.

[9 : 56] Anyway, that's another story. So international trade and economic goods have already become globalized. Coal from Wales to Norway, pit props from Norway to Wales. ship owners and captains were commonly asked to find reliable young women who would provide temporary household services and that's the second motivation of course temporary household services in return for the opportunity to travel and to learn English.

The map shown on this screen provides some context for the ease with which Astri was able to travel between the UK and Norway. It was not as common in those days to get cheap Ryanair or WestJet tickets as it is today.

The context between the third context of Wales 1932 to 1939 and 1945 to 2001 is that in 32 there was the economic depression the job of a railway clerk Arthur Astri's husband was relatively secure during the depression but woefully remunerated.

Arthur remained in the same job from the age of 11 when he was sent from his home in Herefordshire to Craven Arms a rail stop on the London Midland Railway from South Wales to Northern England and he stayed there or then in Swansea until his retirement in 1960 and no promotion during that time.

Post-war rationing was a constant struggle to find enough money to finance holidays in Norway this is a relevant point which I'll review later but the improving economy during the 1990s meant that the last few years were comparatively prosperous indeed from the time of Arthur's death in 1985 Astry had 19 years of comparative prosperity based on pensions from World War I from my father and from British Royalism.

[11:59] The fourth element here of Norway during 1939 to 1945 under occupation by Germany Ter Boven the German commissioner for Norway and Quisling who claimed themselves head of government the legitimate government under King Holcomb VII was in exile in London and in September 25 1940 Quisling began to employ terrorist methods with secret police concentration camps massacres of Jews in Norway you may not be aware that there were such things censorship mass arrests and executions the whole family including the majority of Norwegian citizens was involved in various aspects of resistance to the illegal government and the Telemark branch of the family spearheaded the sabotage of a heavy water plant designed to assist in the manufacture of atom bombs by the Germans you may have seen a curious film called The Heroes of Telemark which is a little bit of an inflated account of the event finally then the fifth external point the final three years a tranquil rural existence the last three years of her life was spent in a two room apartment in an old folks home in central Hampshire in England so those are the external points clearly this is just a very brief overview internal influences are perhaps far more germane to our thoughts here her grandparents the Findring family the grandfather was born in 1847 and her grandmother in 1855 and I remember quite well my great grandmother in this context

Aslak Findring her grandfather grew up in Telemark where in 1860 there was a major revival it was not until 1865 that he experienced conversion but in his testimony he writes and I'm going to quote extensively from my great grandfather's work and also from my mother's account of her life so every time I say I quote it will be from one of these sources in Aslak's testimony he writes it was not my prayers it was not my tears but it was the blood of Jesus that saved me from my freed soul I was able to say this was the work of God in 1866 he preached his first sermon by 1875 he was ordained to become an itinerant preacher traveling ceaselessly up and down the mountainous interior valleys of southern Norway he became the first pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Kristjonsson which is the southernmost town in Norway and he remained the pastor there for 44 years and all the children say my mother's siblings were baptized under his pastorship so that this very much a home life influence so when Astry was born in 1907 she entered the world of pietistic conservative evangelical wisdom conviction home and church were inextricably bound together in a seamless Christian reality she remained shocked to the end of her days at the startling divorce between meeting and home life which she encountered in the

Plymouth Frederick tradition back in Wales as far as home life is concerned she was number two of nine children and as the oldest daughter in a family of nine children she learned early the responsibilities and privileges of caring for others she outlived all her sisters and all but one of her brothers I never heard a negative word about my mother from any of my aunts or uncles she was loved by all of them although I understand she exercised a pretty strict regime when she was left in charge at the last family reunion which was held in 1999 with about 70 members and she and her last surviving brother and sister were present at that time as well as the rest of the family she presided over the event with grace and charm the second then internal influence the life as an au pair girl in 1928 a ship owner cousin of

Astry's mother invited Astry to take up an invitation from a captain in Swansea to be an au pair girl for one year with his family he it turned out was the founder of the Norwegian seamen's mission church which was later to play such an important part in Astry's life which was an unusual household to which she was introduced they all seemed to concentrate on the meeting which was in the gospel hall next door to their home there was a meeting for the Lord's supper on Sunday morning at 11am Sunday school at 3pm and an evening gospel meeting at 6.30pm so Sunday was essentially a day of rushing about from morning till after the evening meeting finished I quote there were as a rule several people who came in for tea and after tea we all trooped down to the kitchen to wash up and lay the table for supper on returning from the evening meeting we had him singing around the piano I being the pianist until supper at 9 o'clock everyone called out their favourite hymns and I was expected to recognise the tune and play by the time supper was over we were all truly exhausted and of course

[18 : 16] I was expected to lead the washing up brigade she stayed there for one year and returned home to Norway in 1929 very soon thereafter an invitation to go to another home this time in Cheshire was arranged by one of her uncles who was also a ship owner and she stayed there from 1930 until the summer of 1931 so there was this interplay between several households and her own background marriage and life in an apartment from 1932 to 1936 and then in the permanently rented family home from 1936 to 2001 the home in which I was born 65 years of rental I can imagine might be quite a nice nest egg but there were no assets as a result after 65 years of renting the first child my sister Ruth arrived in 1935 and I quote it was quite hard to make ends meet Arthur earned five pounds a week that's 15 bucks so we were not able to buy any luxuries but we did manage the step daughter needed a bridesmaid's dress almost immediately and her fees at the local high school came to three pounds per term there was the rent to pay and the running expenses and there were school uniforms I had to learn to take one day at a time and made me realize how fortunate I had always been in having never had to worry about money matters until this time at the ripe old age of 25 forth forthly in these internal influences the enforced separation it was decided in the wisdom of my parents that they should have a holiday in Norway in 1939 the holiday commenced in the middle of June Arthur returned to Wales at the end of July to get back to work said to Astrid why do you stay another month let the grandparents enjoy these delightful children on September the 3rd Astrid and the two children my sister and I sailed from Norway on a boat to go to Newcastle Arthur was waiting in Newcastle but the outbreak of war meant that all Norwegian captains were ordered back to Norway Arthur waiting in Newcastle to meet the boat but had to return home alone and for the next six months conveniently Ruth and I were afflicted with standard childhood illnesses of measles, chicken pox, etc. and finally arrangements were made for a flight from Stavanger for April 2nd Stavanger being located just here but when we arrived in Stavanger it turned out that the seats had been taken by the military and the flight actually crashed into the North Sea with all lives lost. The next flight was on April the 9th. we stayed in Stavanger for that week apparently now clearly at the age of the ripe old age of six months.

[21 : 54] I didn't watch this too closely. The next flight was on April the 9th but we awoke that morning to hear Quisley declare a pro-German government and the bombing of Stavanger and the whole region commenced.

I quote there were rumours that the RAF were going to bomb the town that everybody had to get out as quickly as possible. So after a hurried breakfast we took the road leading out of Stavanger. We had Olaf in his pram and Ruth by the hand she had her doll under her arm and Olaf his cuddly pony. That's self-exposure.

I was sorry, no but novice confidence in me as my sisters and brothers in Christ. This cuddly pony to which he clung.

Both children were coughing and spluttering while we trudged along the road in icy sleet. My father was able to contact a colleague this is my mother's talking so it's her father able to contact a colleague and he invited us to come and stay with him and his wife in their lovely home on the field.

[23 : 09] Needless to say I felt miserable as Arthur who had travelled to Scotland this time to meet our flight knew nothing of what might have happened to us. It took us 14 days to get back from Stavanger to Trichelsand a distance of 400 kilometres.

Bridges had been broken by the Norwegians to hinder German transport but the enemy came in their thousands and they were armed so we could do nothing. First we managed to get a seat on a bus going partway and from there we begged a lift in a fishing boat then we were allowed to sit in the open back of a mail van and finally we were able to board a bus to take us to Christian Sand. When we arrived home we discovered the spire of the cathedral had been shot off by the German invaders. Arthur had by this time returned alone to Swansea for the second time and would not have official word for six months via a Red Cross telegram and the family escaped to the countryside in Norway but was very difficult to travel and Red Cross telegrams of no more than one sentence were permitted every six months.

My own memories go back to the World War Two years in Norway. Although the whole family was involved in the resistance movement and Astrid in particular having taken British nationality was cross-questioned and tortured by the Gestapo, my most characteristic memory is one of tranquility, warmth and love.

It is true that the nightmare of her frequent removal by the Gestapo during the early hours of the morning stayed with me until I was in my late teens. It is also true that the air of tension that surrounded the family during the famous incident of the blowing up of the heavy water plant at Rue Cairn was palpable.

[24 : 55] Nevertheless, I never doubted the security, love and confidence in God's goodness that my mother modeled. Fifthly, the internal influences from separated family to reunited family, from surrogate father to real father, from Norwegian speaking to English speaking, was traumatic for me as for all members of the family.

In theory, it should have been all game. In practice, the task of re-knitting the family was immense. Only with the benefit of hindsight can one appreciate the challenge faced by both my parents. I know and regret the pain that I unwittingly, but also sometimes wittingly, caused by making invidious comparisons between life in Norway and life in Wales.

Family in Norway, family in Wales. But it had also to be said the main burden of this family rebuilding fell on my mother, because not only were there internal tensions that had understandably arisen after six years of separation, but there were external problems too.

She was perceived by many members of the meeting as an alien influence, who seemed to stubbornly refuse to converse with precisely the same turn of phrase as that used by Sid Paul in the King James Version of the Bible.

[26 : 23] Some of you may recognize this. Syndrome. Being different in an inwardly directed small community can demand a heavy price.

There was also the additional scandal of her taking her family to worship at the Lutheran Norwegian Seamans Church on a Sunday evening. After the service, this is an interesting context, because of course many Norwegian seamen would be at sea for up to a year and not see any other persons than those on the boat.

When they came to a port like Swansea, they would come there for the possibility of speaking their home language and also for relaxation. In fact, there was a church which was trying to preach the gospel at the same time.

It was incidental as far as the seamen were concerned. Hence the scandal of our going there. But anyway, after the service, some of the church members were actually refuted to uncover the billiards table and play snooker with the Norwegian sailors who were briefly in court during extended absences of 12 months or more from their homes.

Could there be a more striking evidence of the corroding effect of mixing with people outside the meeting? Much of the difficulty of this has been reconstructed over the years, since my leading Swansea at the age of 19.

[27 : 43] Because throughout this period, both of my parents sheltered me from the harshness of these tensions. Not only that, but I actually enjoyed playing snooker. Arthur had made the promise that Astrid should go back to Norway as often as possible.

And this promise he kept throughout their married life. These visits were a lifeline for Astrid, who found the atmosphere of the brethren meeting claustrophobic. And the fulfilling of his promise by Arthur was heroic, given the extreme shortage of carriage at home.

The implications were that absolutely no other holidays were possible but for the three-yearly visit to Norway. Now, church communities.

And as I mentioned earlier, that one could categorize this under either external or internal influence is because of the way in which the interaction was so strong with home lines.

So first of all, the upbringing in Lutheran Evangelical Free Church in Christian Sand in Norway, the main characteristic of Astrid's recollection of her early involvement in the church is one of total integration of family and church.

[28 : 58] Of course, the fact that her grandfather was the long-standing minister who presided over all the festivals and solemn occasions that affected her and her seven brothers and sisters at one of the nine had died at an early age.

But there were other factors. All the social activities that she recalled were directly sponsored or connected with the church. Hiking, skiing, skating, swimming, music, parties were all encouraged and or organized by the local church community.

The majority of her school friends were also involved in the church activities. Her outdoor enthusiasms and her musical talents were all prized and identified as gifts that were at the disposal

of the church community.

Even during difficult war years, she clung to her sense of strength of the family and the church under God and her perpetual optimism that God's will would be done in reuniting her and her children with their father.

love. I quote, It was in many ways a very good time we spent in Norway during the war. I missed Arthur so very much, especially realizing that he was on his own, but the only thing one could do was to pray continuously that the Lord would bless him and guide him through every day and sustain us both in the hope of meeting again before long.

[30 : 18] I had so much support from my parents, both spiritually and in every other way, so I felt I was the fortunate one. The church community was entirely united in its support for me and the children were so happy in Sunday school and in the many festivities that were organized in the church.

Secondly, Dremeth Brethren, that's to say the meeting in Swansea, 1932 to 1999, and I quote, The reason for my tardiness in responding to Arthur's request for my hand in marriage was due to the restrictive nature of the meeting.

A small example of her discomfort is implicit in the following. I quote, Sundays were strictly observed. I was asked to play something one Sunday afternoon for the benefit of visitors.

So I played a piece by shopping, but when I finished, the lady of the house quickly suggested that I should play some hymns, which seemed odd to me, as no one had any intention of singing.

At home in Norway, we had played any good music, especially on Sunday evenings, when my mother used to play her repertoire of marches, waltzes, etc., and often with my father accompanying her on the flute.

[31 : 33] But this family, into which I had now been introduced, did not seem to have any outside interests, did not go to any concerts, for example, and seemed quite content to go backwards and forwards to the meeting.

Thirdly, the Lutheran Seaman's Mission Church in Swansea, this small church was a lifeline for Astrid at times when the meeting became oppressive. I quote, We always went to the Norwegian church after the evening gospel meeting with the brethren.

I felt it was essential for the children that they keep up the Norwegian connection to tide them over the great change in their lives which had taken place. We tried to make the festivals as happy as possible so that the children would have good memories of the special seasons of Easter and Christmas.

The Norwegian church was always like a home from home where thoughts and ideas were freely exchanged. Ruth, my daughter, used to sing and I played the piano such that the Norwegian sailors were often reduced to emotional tears or gratitude.

Doesn't say anything about what Olaf did. Thank you very much.

[32 : 41] Finally, the Church of England in Wales in Swansea and the Church of England in Petersfield, when the Norwegian church finally closed because the trade between Norway and South Wales was finally reduced to a trickle.

and they could no longer support this church. And then the Plymouth Brethren meeting also folded. The local Anglican church was most welcoming and Astry's funeral service was conducted there. The warmth of the Anglican church in Petersfield was also extraordinary. And they adopted Astry at the age of 94, gave her enormous support and fellowship in her final years. Well, I hope I've given you enough of a context to show you that this is a fairly unusual geographical context, but they're very ordinary people operating under rather extraordinary circumstances.

So then, if I may, just suggest the characteristics of a saint. We read in the community service at 7.30 this morning from the first letter of Peter, in which we're instructed to be holy because I am holy, says your God.

And that surely is a characteristic of a saint. But what really does holiness mean? And I think some of the dimensions of this are expressed in these various characteristics that I'd like to place before you.

[34 : 16] And again, I'm fully appreciative that I have conflict of interest here. So please reduce the overall enthusiasm.

I quote, first of all, with respect to my mother's overarching sense of gratitude, which I think is absolutely the key feature of this whole life.

I quote, whenever I think about my childhood home and life in Norway before I married, it gives me a tremendous feeling of love, care, and togetherness. We were confirmed by my grandfather, the minister of the Evangelical Free Church in Christian Sand for over 40 years.

In the evening of the confirmation service, grandmother and grandfather, godparents and friends of my parents were invited, and we would sit down to a festive meal. Father made a speech for the one who was confirmed, stressing the implications of young adulthood and the need to take social responsibilities seriously.

He always gave us a greeting from the Bible. Remember, there were eight of these occasions, one sister having died, but too early to be confirmed. These reminded us how important was the decision to choose Jesus Christ as the guide of our lives, so that we could all meet in heaven when our lives on earth were finished.

[35 : 37] For, he would say, heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. people. There were always lots of speeches, poets and telegrams, but what I remember most from my confirmation dinner was my grandfather's greeting from John chapter 1, verse 12.

To those who received him, he gave the right to become the children of God. We had such happy evenings with music, singing, and general celebration.

It is with joy that I look back on all the times our parents' friends came into our home. There was always a welcome hymn in which everybody joined, by contrast with the other context in which hymns were played that nobody sang.

As a reflection on the above, when my brother-in-law asked her in 2002 whether she, that is Astrid, had any suggestions for her funeral service, she asked that the hymn praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation, be sung, and that John chapter 1, verse 12 be read.

I do not recall my mother complaining about her lot. She remained serene, at least outwardly, and always projected a sense of gratitude to God for all his care and goodness.

[36 : 57] Second characteristic of a saint, humility. on her 90th birthday, she wrote, I am among the fortunate ones who have experienced happy, loving, and secure relationships with my parents, sisters, brothers, and later with my dear husband and children, their families, and countless friends.

Even though I now have more friends in heaven than I have on earth, I am constantly blessed with new friends. After this 90th birthday celebration meal, I quote, many kind words were uttered, which made me feel very grateful, but also humbled, because I feel I have failed in so many of the tasks which God has entrusted to me.

There are so many memories that crowd in on one when walking through the streets of Christian Sound, and my mind goes back to all the people I used to know, most of whom are now in heaven. I have been so fortunate to meet so many wonderful saints in my lifetime.

And this was the actual sentence which made me think of calling this talk What is a Saint? I have been so fortunate to meet so many wonderful saints in my lifetime who have left such lasting impressions.

I feel that I ought to have learned much more than I seem to have done. Thirdly, loyalty. There were severe tensions between Astrid's evaluation of the meeting, and Arthur's attempts to come to grips with life outside the meeting.

[38 : 27] She was totally loyal to him, and he was totally loyal to her, and I don't ever recall a serious argument between them. So you may wonder, how did I know? After leaving home and then coming back to visit, of course, I had many conversations with my mother about this.

Below the surface, as I discovered later in life, there was a continuing tension over the extent to which they should succumb to the demands of the meeting. Arthur was perceived as not toying the line by allowing his wife and children to attend the Norwegian Seamans Church.

Astrid conformed to the expectations of the meeting by remaining silent in church, and yet in practice taught her children the essentials of the faith. Arthur was never freer than when he was expressing himself in public prayer, but he found impossible to express himself verbally at home. Astrid was never freer than when she was expressing her faith at home, both verbally and musically, but of course was not allowed to whisper a word in the meeting. So the thought of the loyalty that was involved here is quite remarkable.

I think that they were able to protect us from that particular conflict. Then the ability to mediate is point number four.

[39 : 53] Explicit discussions of contentious issues were rare at home, on the grounds that my father found discussions of most things threatening. And I was such an objectionable know-it-all, as

I now realized, that caused endless pain to him.

And I have real regrets about this. But my mother's ability to provide a loving alternative to the stark doctrine of the meeting proved to be a permanent source of inspiration.

In spite of what the brethren attempted to indoctrinate, I concluded that there was no recipe book for life at the level of one teaspoonful of sugar. There are genuine dichotomies with which we have to struggle.

And the deep honesty with which my mother tried to tackle these has left its mark on my professional career, as well as my spiritual pilgrimage. There are all too few saints who are able to mediate.

In many ways, our present crisis in the Anglican Communion derives from the absence of mediation. I know that's not the only reason to. There's a real challenge here. You may respond, we've tried.

[41 : 07] I'm skeptical of that plan. Fifthly, the ability to handle ambiguity. Profound ethical issues involving the choice between greater or lesser evils during the German occupation of Norway disturbed and matured some of Astrid's black and white Christian perspectives.

One example which caused me to reflect deeply at the time, this was in 1955, concerned the sacrament of baptism. Now, I had no prior information about the topic of next week's learner's exchange.

This is going to sound terribly, terribly subversive. I had been baptized as an infant in the Lutheran Church. I made a conscious commitment of my life to Jesus Christ through the active encouragement of my Plymouth brethren, Sunday school teacher, at the age of 13.

About the age of 16, I had been programmed to believe that my infant baptism was invalid. And so I opted for baptism by immersion. Although Astrid was doubtless hurt by my decision, I shall always recall her wise reaction.

Can you confidently state that God did not start to work in your life at the time of your baptism as an infant? I respect your decision. I'm thrilled by your willingness to make this public confession of faith.

[42 : 35] But I prefer to think of this baptism by immersion as a confirmation of God's working in your life. So that was her ability to handle what I think is a genuinely ambiguous issue.

Though our leader to my left has a very clear view on the matter. And I suspect I'll speak to you next week or have an even clearer view.

Caring for others, number six. She also remained caring for others. Always believing that their needs were greater than her own. It was not until later in life, on occasions when I returned from Canada to visit my parents in Swansea after 1971, especially during the last ten years of my father's life, 1975 to 1985, when there was much nursing to be done, that she spoke more freely with me about some of her hurts.

There were several of those privileged conversations that were shared with few, if any others. And she resolutely refused to speak ill of anyone in public, with the notable exceptions of Quisling and Hitler.

her caring remained a very strong characteristic through these particulates, 1975 to 1985 period, when she was essentially confined to the house looking after my father.

[44 : 05] She said, Seventhly, and perhaps most importantly, a woman of prayer. I last saw Astrid at the age of 96.

She had been admitted to hospital, and she was conscious of the weakness of her body, and expressed to me her surprise, that she had not yet been taken home to be with her Lord.

I thought I had a good idea. I said, could I see your prayer list? And I thought, she's working on this, and this has got lots of potential for more optimistic comments.

Can I see your prayer list? As I knew that she would be praying just as earnestly as ever for the members of her family. I thought I might suggest to her that this was one of the reasons for her continuing life.

However, I was completely taken aback to find literally four to five pages of new names of people who she had met in the hospital, and whom she was actively praying. She became quite animated in explaining to me how sad were the circumstances of many of those whom she was meeting on her board.

[45 : 16] How grateful she was for the ways in which the Lord had blessed her. And how important it was that every person who she was encountering should be held up in prayer. This was extraordinary.

She was suddenly transformed from this very weak and somewhat frustrated lady, wondering why she was in that.

But she explained exactly why she was still alive, doing exactly the right thing. So this was an example from the end of her life. In the middle of her life, when her daughter Ruth, my sister, announced that she and her husband-to-be were about to leave for Papua New Guinea to become missionaries, she became quite apprehensive about their intention to go so far away.

But she reflected that, I quote, I could not very well say anything, as I had myself left Norway to marry Arthur, and that was for a lifetime. And as they were so sure that this was God's way for them, we accepted the decision and made it a matter of prayer.

The conclusion. I opened with the claim that my mother was a saintly person. What then is a saint?

[46 : 33] The psalmist's view of the matter seems to me to be summarized in the following way. I have sought you with my whole heart. Do not let me stray from your commandments.

I have treasured your promises in my heart, since I have no wish to sin against you. Psalm 119 So I salute my dear mother for her courage, her faith, her hope, and her love.

All those prayers for me and for the whole family sustained throughout a busy life, and even during the last days when her body was weak, that her mind remained strong, and her example inspired all who came to visit her.

I'm looking forward to our next conversation, when her former health and strength will have been renewed in the presence of God. According to the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom, chapter 5, verses 15 to 16, The virtuous live forever.

Their recompense lies with the Lord. The Most High takes care of them. Thanks be to God. And I did bring a photograph.

[47 : 49] This is not intended to be an icon for those who worry about such things. This was in her 90th year, when she was all smuggered up for the wedding of her granddaughter.

Thank you. Beautiful. Sir? Why did you avoid the incident when you were seen marching behind the German soldiers in Norway?

There are many things that I've been told that I did, which I worry about repeating. I don't worry about repeating them to you, Bill. But, I mean, they sound a little bit precocious to me.

As you asked, this one concerned the Gestapo as they marched through the streets of Christensen doing the traditional Gestapo march.

I was reputedly seen to be trying to copy the Gestapo and repeating. They were singing Faden gegen England.

[49 : 04] The idea was that they were on their way to England and there was a little boy I was saying, you'll never get there, you'll never get there. These things are apocryphal.

What's in the pit of crop and trade? Well, in a coal mine, especially in the kinds of coal mines that we had at the turn of the century, the addits were constantly in danger of collapsing.

So you had to prop up the walls of the addits. They had the actual access to the face of the coal.

And I can remember as a school boy we used to have field trips to the anthracite mines in South Wales and the conditions were absolutely horrendous.

We would crawl along these addits sometimes for more than two or three feet in height and follow the miners with their lamps to the face of the coal mine and see the work that was going on in actually chipping away at the coal place.

The anthracite, as you may know, is a very clean coal but it creates a huge amount of dust underground. So the conditions were absolutely horrendous.

[50 : 33] But the pit props were crucial because if you didn't have those pit props the whole of the way into the coal place would collapse. And the damage that was done to the health of these miners was enormous.

If you ever, well, if you could first of all pronounce flaneethly, and if you were there on market day, what you could hear was just the coughing of the miners whose respiratory systems had been completely destroyed by years of work at the coal place.

So, extraordinarily enough, as youngsters in the school who were taken for field trips to this, nobody talked about insurance and one appreciates that it would not be permitted in our society today.

But it was a feature of life in South Wales that coal was a major economic product. And I think of the concerns that we have today about China adding three coal mines every week as they're increasing their production of coal and particularly producing a lot of CO2.

You know, have I lived through this transformation? It's not. a lot. Did your mother expect you to pursue a life as missionary to having had your sister?

[52 : 07] Do you know? the topic was discussed and it's not something that I discarded without thinking about it, but it seemed that so many doors were opened up in the academic.

I simply followed and took the view that if I was going to be stopped in that line work but that would be the direction that would be So the place is supposed to have and yeah.

a wonderful insight into your mother's life. And the first time I heard you spoke, you referred to her like a Norway, and that would have been what, 1980? When did the 16th start?

89. 89, right? Oh, you know that. Yeah, when we had four choices, it was in those periods. And you had talked about the ambiguity in terms of the church association for her.

I don't know what that was like for you, and maybe you will tell me in a minute, but I think the thing that concerns me, because a lot of us have experienced this in going from one church to another, is these very deep rifts within the Christian community.

[53 : 34] Why is it that, you know, Chopin sounds bad to one group and not to another group. Why is it that, you know, I was challenged at the door of a Plymouth Brethren church in this city before I was let into the service? Actually, it was not let into the service, but I gave their own answer to the question. I don't think that would happen now, but I'm not going to go back and test that theory.

And I think our views here are filled with people who have come from other churches that have an exclusive membership, as the one I came from did, to inclusive, which brings its own problems. But this terrific lack of togetherness on the part of Christians, that you have exemplified very well in the life of your mother, and probably you experienced this too. Can you tell us what this was like for a child?

I mean, or do you remember that things were funny when you got back to Wales? No, I think that was the most traumatic experience of my life, more so even the torturing of my mother, because, you know, meeting my father for the first time at the age of seven, having really got used to thinking of my grandfather as my father, because there was no guarantee that we would be back together again after the war.

He not being able to speak Norwegian, I not being able to speak English, the context was totally unfamiliar, and to actually be told that this was my father and that we were meant to be as intimate as a father and son should be, was a real trauma.

[55 : 21] But I mean, I think that my trauma would be small compared to what he went through. Yeah. That's a tricky thing to, but your question has, I mean, what I'm describing really is not just tensions between two different backgrounds in church life, it's also different traditions of culture, in which Norwegian approach to life is rather different than South Wales.

So I'm not answering your question very well because I think there are so many different strains that go through this.

I think the interesting thing for me is that I have these enormously positive feelings about the seriousness of the biblical education that I received in brethren meeting.

So although I have unhappy memories of the divorce between home and meeting, I have a huge legacy, which is very...

I think it's very... Now for my sister, the break was total. She cannot any longer communicate about her brethren past because for her, she had already become identified as a young girl.

[56 : 49] She's three to three years older than myself. I'm very much identified with the Lutheran evangelical context. And she thought that the whole of her world essentially closed down when she was introduced to the meaning.

And so she has become quite unhappy about... She doesn't really see any good thing that came out of that context.

Well, you're describing a paradigm shift here that is not just religion but also cultural language, et cetera. Yeah, exactly. And into it, which must have been very hard to recognize.

Thank you. Were the services conducted in Welsh, Welsh language, and at all in the... No. I believe it was... This is totally important. Yeah. But I mean, there are certainly often through those meetings where the services conducted in the office.

It's a minority. Did your mother have to learn Welsh anymore? No. No, she didn't. No. Bobby?
Could you expand on gratitude a bit? What have you learned about gratitude? A lovely word? Does
it cultivate it? Does it come with the gospel automatically?

[57 : 59] How do we live with this history of gratitude? Well, I guess I put it first because I don't
know what I'm saying. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't
know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. Well, I
guess I put it first because I I I feel it's the the greatest legacy that she's given to me sense of
gratitude for for what it is God has done for us.

It does seem to be that it's so often missing in church context. The idea of celebration of what God
has done, what is so often the way that it's so stiff and starchy, frightened of over expressing
ourselves. I'm not under arguing for charismatic expression, but I think that very often we do not
celebrate enough.

At the end of the communion service, every time we get up and say the Gloria, and sometimes I
look around and people look terribly worried.

Thank you, guys.

[59 : 46] As usual, start. Thank you.