

**General Topics :: An Appreciation for T. Austin Sparks****An Appreciation for T. Austin Sparks - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/5/1 23:11**

An Appreciation of T. Austin Sparks

by H.F.

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

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

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

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

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

Especially in his earlier years, brother Sparks used to lay great emphasis on the need for the inward application of the Cross to the life of the believer. He preached a Gospel of full salvation by simple faith in Christ's sacrifice, but he further stressed that the man who knows cleansing by the blood of Jesus should also allow the same Cross to work in the depths of his soul in order to release him from himself, and lead him into a less carnal and more spiritual walk with God. He himself had gone through a crisis of self-undoing by his acceptance of the Cross's verdict on his old nature, and had found this crisis to be the introduction to an altogether new enjoyment of Christ's life so great that he could only describe it as "an open heaven".

In the church life of the people among whom he ministered he had also seen a striking transformation produced by this message of the Cross to the believer: it was no wonder, therefore, that he took every opportunity of affirming that there is no other way into the full experience of the will of God than by union with Christ in His death. Again and again he would revert to the teaching of Romans 6, not just as a favourite topic, but out of a conviction that such union was the

sure means of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

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

For various reasons many other sufferings came into his life, but this was consistent with his own teaching that in the School of Christ one learns more by suffering than by study or listening to messages. If, however, the Cross involves suffering, it is also the secret of abundant grace, as he certainly proved.

His last annual motto, prepared for this year of 1971, was devoted to the theme of the sufficiency of God's grace. In November he wrote an editorial in this paper, recording the fact that for him 1970 had been a year of unusual pressure and difficulty. Perhaps as an onlooker I may be permitted to comment that in the eyes of those nearest to him it was also a year of new and fuller evidence of the grace of God, and that for my part I have been left with blessed memories of fellowship in conversation and prayer which could never have been possible between us without the triumph of divine grace.

To God be the glory!

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

If brother Sparks at times tended in this direction, he certainly moved farther and farther away from it as he came nearer to eternity, being growingly careful to show a proper appreciation of all true believers, whatever their connection.

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

(<http://www.neve-family.com/books/sparks/index.html>) T. Austin Sparks

Re: An Appreciation for T. Austin Sparks - posted by kathleen1 (), on: 2008/5/2 6:11

I love to read the writings of T Austin Sparks...I am currently reading his book, "The school of Christ". Though it is a small book, it is power packed. It can be bought for \$2.00 on David Wilkerson's World Challenge Web site, and is so worth it. I go to Bro Sparks' online library site, where they have most of his writings posted:

(<http://www.austin-sparks.net/enter.html>) T Austin Sparks Online Library

They are such a blessing and challenge and provoke my heart to read them....and so often confirm what the Lord is teaching me Himself...God bless!!!

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Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/5/4 15:23

Quote:

He could never think of himself as an isolated Christian, nor of assemblies as isolated groups, but he tried to keep before him the divine purpose of redemption, which is the incorporation of all believers into vital membership of the one body. It has sometimes happened that Christians most anxious to express this oneness have yet contradicted its spirit by being betrayed into an attitude of superiority towards other Christians, so allowing themselves to be wrongly divided from their fellows in Christ. We here have had to confess our own failures in this respect, realizing that our very eagerness to be faithful to the Scriptural revelation of what the Church ought to be may have unintentionally produced something of a separateness among the people of God.

I have recently also come to appreciate Sparks more, along with a few others such as Katz also.

I remember when i first heard Sparks, i listened for 5 minutes then i turned off, he sounded "boring" or maybe "dull" is a more appropriate word.

He didnt shout or sound exciting, he didnt draw up very colorful pictures and also that English accent.

But after "forcing" me to listen to some i started to read some from him, and i noticed something that i think Sparks shares with Arthur Katz that is if you dont listen with 100% attention the whole message, you will miss it.

He may not shout, he may not be so "colorful", but what depth!

I have come to the conclusion if i would recommend only three men to listen too, probably Sparks and Katz would make out two of the three.

Off course we grow and mature and change. But right now i feel i get so much from these.

I feel Sparks can say more in five minutes then many say in one hour.

How i would have missed out if i continued to only listen to the "colorful" preachers.

Dont get me wrong, a screaming wilkerson and Ravenhill and others a like is very anointed words and very good. But i get a sense each preacher has a different reflection off the eternal things.

I also remember listening to much Katz in the beginning, and now re listening to the sermons, and i realize i didnt hear what he said the first time, so much new things open up, i suspect it is so with sparks also.

Re: An Appreciation for T. Austin Sparks - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2008/5/4 15:53

Thank God for TA Sparks, he has left a legacy that has been of tremendous blessing to this day unto many here at SI and around the globe.

The man who wrote this article about Mr. Sparks is another gem, and one who doesn't get much attention but should. His name is Harry Foster and he wrote a terrific series of short articles for A Witness and a Testimony, the series was simply titled For Boys and Girls. The short stories make for great reading in family devotions.

Mr. Foster also was editor of the magazine titled Toward the Mark which he started after Sparks died. It is along the same vein as A Witness and a Testimony and Foster published many excellent articles in Toward the Mark.

You can find many of the issues of both magazines at the following link...
(http://www.austin-sparks.net/magazines_alpha.html) Online Library of TA Sparks.

In Christ,

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Ron

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2008/5/4 17:25

I appreciate Brother Sparks very much, and His writings are so very relevant to the Church today. Brother Sparks always looked at the big picture. He helped us to see things from a eternal perspective. The emphasis in much of the Church today is on God meeting the needs of His people. Brother Sparks was always directing us to see what the Lord is after in us.

Brother Watchman Nee acknowledged Brother Sparks in his book "Back To The Cross" as one that was used by God to restore truths concerning resurrection and the Church to the Body of Christ.