

Ann Griffiths

by Robert Rhys

Robert Rhys explores the life and spiritual legacy of Anne Griffiths, emphasizing her role as a hymn writer during a time of revival in Wales and the enduring relevance of her faith experiences.

Duration: 51:12

Topics: "Faith And Doubt", "Persevering In Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the desire to possess faith and believe in God's word. They mention a well-known hymn that expresses this longing for faith with angels to understand the hidden mystery of salvation. The speaker also refers to the Song of Solomon, using it as an illustrative example of living in anticipation of the Lord's coming. The sermon emphasizes the importance of persevering in grace and staying close to Christ, relying on God's unchanging promises.

Transcript

Well, thank you for the welcome and the kind invitation to take part in this series of meetings on revivals. I had the privilege of speaking here on William Williams's Pantychaolin many years ago now, I think in 1991 or 1992, so it's a privilege to be here tonight to speak on the work, on life and work, or on the spiritual life of Anne Griffiths. The many and varied events which were arranged in Wales to mark the bicentenary of Anne Griffiths' death in 2005 confirmed her iconic status within Welsh-speaking Wales and also the enduring fascination which her life and work holds for many in Wales and beyond.

Now unfortunately, more often than not, this fascination isn't grounded in a discerning spiritual appreciation of her experience and beliefs. To an extent, Anne Griffiths has become all things to all people. And as has happened with the history of the revivals of Wales, in particular the 1905 revival, the general tendency has been to attempt to neutralise or to nullify that living spiritual element in her work which we as Christian readers or hearers value so highly.

And so much is made of the uniqueness of Anne Griffiths in some circles, the mystic, female, religious poet, so much is made of that aspect that it becomes really an attempt to drive a wedge between her and her brothers and sisters in Christ, whose experiences are basically the same as hers. Anne Griffiths was a Christian, just like every other Christian here tonight. Now the growth of the Anne Griffiths myth or the Anne Griffiths cult in Wales and outside Wales, it's an ongoing phenomenon.

The growth of that cult from the end of the 19th century onwards starts more or less when, I think, when Owen Edwards visits Anne's home in Dolwar Fach and writes about the experience in a romantic rather sentimentalistic way. Now that's a significant topic and some of the things which have been said and written about Anne Griffiths would shock and dismay you. For example, I'm not going to dwell on this, but for example, the popular 20th century poet Cyman, at one time, briefly, a minister with Calvinistic Methodists, wrote a poem to Saint Anne, asking her to have mercy upon us, and closing with the words, O blessed Anne, intercede on our behalf.

Attempts to explain Anne, in natural or psychological terms, have continued unabated to the present day, as a musical and a radio play about a life produced in 2005 demonstrated. I'm not going to attempt a full review of the growth of the Anne Griffiths myth tonight. It's a job that needs doing, but we can do more edifying things with our time tonight, and so rather than follow a path which might lead us to be happy with a smug satisfaction with our own orthodoxy, I'd like us to challenge ourselves by comparing our times and experiences with those of Anne Griffiths, and also I'd like us to take this opportunity to comfort ourselves in our various situations, with the knowledge that the God of Anne Griffiths is also our God.

It'll also become clear, I hope, that this paper on Anne Griffiths in no way interrupts your Monday night series of meetings on revival. A brief biography. She was born, Anne Thomas, at a farm called Dolwar Fach, in the parish of Llanfihangel yng Nguinfa in Montgomeryshire in 1776.

She received some elementary education. She wasn't the first member of a family to be converted. Her brother John became a Christian and joined the local Methodist society probably in 1792.

At that time, Anne's attitude to the converts in her neighbourhood was one of scorn and contempt. She was known as a girl who liked music and poetry and dancing, and seeing a group of Christians setting out over the mountain to Bala, the capital of North Wales, Methodism at the time, she's reported to have said, look at the pilgrims on their way to Mecca. That was her attitude towards Christianity.

That was her attitude to born-again Christians before God laid his hand on her. In 1794, when Anne was around 18 years old, her mother died. She was then responsible as mistress of Dolwar Fach with care of the family.

Things began to change in her life in 1796. She's 19, 20 years old. She attended a preaching meeting at nearby Llanddöllin.

The preacher was Benjamin Jones of Pyleoli. His sermon made an impact upon her. She was spiritually awakened since 1796.

On Christmas day the same year, she attends the plug-in service, the Christmas service at Llanfairchurch, and is repelled by the unseemly remarks made to her by the curate, a man who can offer her no spiritual assistance at all. The following year, or soon after that probably, she joins the Methodist Society at Pont Roberts, a nearby village, where her brothers John and another brother by now, Edward, were members. By the end of that year, her father had also been converted.

Salvation had come to Dolwar Fach and it soon becomes a place of hospitality for itinerant preachers and local Christian. One of the leaders of the cause locally was John Hughes, who would become a well-known hymn writer and preacher, a mentor of Anne indeed. John was converted a short time beforehand.

He becomes a leader of the cause locally and the first records of Anne's spiritual feelings have been found in letters written to John Hughes. Anne begins to compose hymns, project of her own meditation on God's word and on the sermons that she hears, during the years 1801-1802. She doesn't write them down always it seems, and her maid Ruth Evans, a Christian, commits all her mistress's stanzas to memory.

Ruth's future husband is to be John Hughes, who begins to make written copies of them during Anne's lifetime. October 1804, Anne Thomas marries Thomas Griffiths, member of a prominent Methodist family in Montgomeryshire. On the 13th of July 1805, she gives birth to a baby girl.

The child dies on the last day of that month. Anne does not long outlive her and is buried at the age of 29 in Sandby Hangard churchyard in 1805. Her hymns were published soon after that for the first time in a collection edited by the great Thomas Charles.

The most reliable edition of her hymns, unfortunately not available in popular format yet, is the one that has been prepared by our brother Dr Wynne James of Cardiff University. It's a small body of work, 30 hymns, only 73 stanzas in total and eight letters. You'll find a great deal of information on Anne Griffiths and translations of some of our hymns on the website which Wynne James has created, that's anriffiths.cardiff.ac.uk. Let's now remind ourselves of a very obvious truth, but a crucially important one when discussing Anne Griffiths, especially in the context of these Monday night meetings.

The years of Anne Griffiths' conversion and brief pilgrimage were years of great blessing and revival, and great blessing in parts of North Wales in particular. I don't think that this can be overemphasized. She was a product of revival.

Her conversion came at a period of revival. Her hymns were written at times of revival, a great unction on the preaching of the word. Thomas Charles writing to a friend in Wiltshire, Thomas Charles now was written from Bala, in 1792 describes the features of the current awakening in the town of Bala.

This is a few years, four or five years before Anne Griffiths' conversion. The first thing he says about it, and it's an English letter so this is the original, is that it was a very gracious work. Grace abounds towards the chief of sinners, unsought for, unexpected, unthought of.

He also says that it was a very powerful work, and we can compare this with the effects of our preaching, preaching in our churches in Wales. In 2007, it was a powerful work. Convictions are deep and overpowering.

All self-confidences and vain hopes are powerfully and thoroughly demolished, and the sinner is left naked and helpless before infinite eternal misery. Their consolations in general are strong consolations, which always proceed from a discovery made to their souls of Christ in the divine excellences and dignities of his person, and glorious fullness and freeness of his redemption. It was also, he says, a growing work.

It was a gracious work. It was a powerful work. It was a growing work.

It grows and thrives in the soul of those where it has begun. Human speculative knowledge, even of divine truths, frees and starves the soul, whilst divine experimental knowledge warms, enlivens, and invigorates those who are blessed with it from above. I mean, you could be talking about Angrifice's hymns.

Experimental knowledge warms, enlivens, and invigorates those who are blessed with it from above. They then become not truths to be talked upon only, but to feed and to live upon, and when we live on this living

bread, we cannot but be lively and strong ourselves. Now, this was the great work of God into which Angrifis, or Aunt Thomas as she was at the time, was drawn by grace, and it was within this spiritual atmosphere, under this degree of unction, that she lived and wrote her hymns.

Now, these were years when many of God's people, even in this small area of Wales, were empowered and energised to complete work extraordinary in its volume and influence. You may know something of Thomas Charles's labours with his monumental Bible dictionary. It's still a work which many Welsh-speaking, well, I would say most evangelical Welsh-speaking ministers rely heavily on.

Less familiar, but extremely influential, was George Lewis, who came from the same corner of Carmarthenshire as Thomas Charles, I'm glad to say, and was Minister of the Independent Congregational Church at Llanwchlyn, five miles down the road from Bala. In 1797, at the age of 34, Lewis published his *Drich ysgrithiol*, the first Welsh-language systematic theology, a work much valued and used by the young converts of the revival, and it's not unreasonable to assume that Angrifis read it. I'm making a very simple point.

Angrifis was one of a new generation of Christians, effectually called by God at this time, and it struck me when I began to consider Angrifis and his times in 2005, it struck me worth noting that the period of time between the first awakenings of the 18th century revival and Angrifis's conversion in 1796, which is roughly 60 years, isn't it, is very similar in length of time to the one between the movement of God's spirit in the late 1940s, which eventually led to the establishing of the evangelical movement of Wales and eventually evangelical churches, and the present day. We're as far away from the late 1940s as Angrifis was from Howard Harris's conversion in 1796. But as the 18th century was drawing to a close in Wales, God was graciously and powerfully and providentially at work.

The great leaders of the 18th century revival were being called to glory. Daniel Rowland died in 1790, William Williams the following year. But the work wasn't their work, it was the Lord's work, and the Lord saw fit to renew it and to make it flourish.

He called a new generation of servants and workers for his vineyard. And I'm sure that this historical correspondence, it should be a source of comfort and challenge to us, to pray that the correspondence might be made complete, as it were, and that we might see a new generation of leaders saved by grace and made servants of great use in God's kingdom. We need the gracious blessing which fell on Bala in the 1790s, unsought for, unexpected, unthought of.

It doesn't mean by that that they weren't praying for it, but just that in its scope and effects it was beyond what they'd hoped for, even. And before turning to Constantine Angriff's work, I want to underline that point with a few examples. We've sung one of John Elias' hymns.

Now John Elias is best known, of course, as a preacher. He was two years older than Anne. He'd come to an assurance of faith in 1792.

He began preaching. His ministry began in 1794. James Hughes, not as well known as John Elias, not a household name perhaps in evangelical circles, but eventually became Minister of Jew in Crescent in London and a very well-respected biblical expositor.

He was converted in Llangaiho in Cardiganshire in 1797. Edward Griffiths, preacher, Anne's brother-in-law eventually, he was converted in 1792 at the age of 14 under the ministry of John Jones

Caergorlaeth, who'd himself been converted from the world in 1787. There are a lot of names and dates which you won't find easily digestible, I know.

I'm just giving you an impression of how God is at work. God's network, as it were, is being set up through him saving people from the world, many of them with no Christian background at all, and using their gifts to further his kingdom. Finally John Hughes, Pontrovert, I've mentioned already.

John Davies of the same neighbourhood, whose name would come to be linked with his mission field in Tahiti. Many areas of Welsh-speaking rural Wales in the 1790s were at least as spiritually dark then as they are today, as many autobiographies attest. They weren't in any way.

Wales, rural Wales in the 1790s was in no way more promising or amenable to the preaching of the gospel than it is today. The Wales of Andrew Griffiths was a country of gross immorality and Sabbath-breaking and hard indifference to the gospel. It was a dark country, and when we remember how God changed lives and communities in that day, surely in 2007 we can take hold of the words of the prophet Micah, 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 or my enemy.

When I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, and that's Wales 2007, the Lord shall be a light unto me. Now Andrew Griffiths differed from many of her spiritual contemporaries, not only because she was a woman, but because her pilgrimage was such a short and intense one.

There are no periods of blatant backsliding as we can find in the case of James Hewns, for instance. She is the hymn writer of the first love, and all the joy and delight and warmth of the first love, which also includes a dread of becoming cold and losing that spiritual ardour, is found in her work. She was, as I've said already, and as any Christian would be at pains to emphasise, she was an ordinary Christian.

She was a Christian, like you and me. But she was endowed with extraordinary gifts, and she did use them at a time of extraordinary blessing, and that combination, I think, is what makes her work so special for us. Now writing 34 years after her death, her old friend John Hughes said that she shone more brightly in spiritual religion than anyone else he'd come across in his life.

As for the quality of the hymns she wrote, Thomas Charles's early assessment needs no amendment. This is what Charles said, they display strong flights and views of the person of Christ and his sacrifice, which are sublime and glorious. I probably need to add that we cannot attribute this to any special, once again, any unique personal revelation or gift which she received.

Her hymns remind us, and having acknowledged that she was extraordinarily gifted, the hymns also remind us what a blessing it is to be grounded in the great truth of Christian doctrine as a young Christian. She was nurtured within a Christian society, as we shall see, which took its teaching and preaching and godly living very seriously indeed. Now I used some concordance software to make a concordance of Angrafer's hymns.

It's not a great body of work, so it was a fairly manageable task for me. And I was struck and challenged by the prevalence of the word awe in her work. It's the same word in English and in Welsh, the awe of longing and desire.

Now it's not peculiar to her work, it's a means of expression used by most hymn writers as a glance at the first line index in Christian hymns would confirm awe for a closer walk with God. And so I'm not saying that Anne is unique in this either, but I'm using this as a means to approach her work and as a means of presenting her work to you this evening. We do have about 20 examples in what is a very small corpus of hymns, as well as five examples in the letters.

And I want to look at this awe of desire and longing and pleading and entreaty. Now as evangelical Christians, perhaps certainly as Welsh-speaking evangelical Christians in the Welsh-speaking world, we've been more than ready perhaps to point a finger at nominal chapel goers and to accuse them of lustily singing the great hymns without any real experiential knowledge of their content. But perhaps there are times when we should point that finger at ourselves and assess our own condition in the light of a kind of experiential religion displayed in Agraphis's hymns, just as we could assess our own preaching in the light of John Elias's printed sermons or our own commitment and spiritual work rate compared to the work done by men like Thomas Charles and Thomas Jones.

I've attempted therefore a quite a crude classification of the awes in Agraphis's work. I'll be quoting, for the most part, I'll be quoting from excellent translations produced by a man called Alan Gaunt. Those translations are available in a book called *The Hymns and Letters of Agraphis*.

They're not literal translations, but they convey the original with great accuracy and sympathy. There are a couple of examples of the awe being used in exclamation, but for the most part, as I've said, it's used to express spiritual desire. In effect, therefore, we're looking at Agraphis's spiritual desires.

I've got five headings, but the content underneath the headings becomes shorter as we move on. The first point is this. There is an awe which expresses the desire to continue, to persevere in grace, not to fall away, to keep the blessing which has been received.

I want to focus on these two lines, first of all. Oh, my soul, to cling forever. Cling to him, my life's desire.

Oh, my soul, to cling forever. Cling to him, my life's desire. They come from a hymn which opens with lines, with these words, see an open door before me, means of total victory.

It's a hymn of joy and triumph, all on account of Christ's victory. I quote again, through the gifts the willing servant gained by his humility. But it's not a triumph gained, but the feeling of triumph, the experience of triumph for Agraphis isn't gained without struggle and without a conscious focused meditation on Christ's work.

I quote now another stanza from the same hymn. My sad soul recalls the battle, leaping up in ecstasy. As I see the law exalted, great transgressors going free.

Life's great author has been buried, mighty resurrection dies. Peace eternal is established, earth united to the skies. Now, meditating on Christ's victory transports her from sadness to spiritual joy, but for a particular reason or based on a particular gospel truth.

Great transgressors are set free without God's perfect justice being compromised in any way. And she wonders at that, and we know that, but she knows that and she wonders at it. She marvels at that.

And the hymn is an outpouring of her joy and wonder at that great truth. The law exalted, great transgressors going free. We also have here another example of the way Agraphis, so often in her work,

marvels at the apparent paradoxes of gospel truth.

Literally, in the verse she says, the author of life is put to death, the great resurrection is buried. But her saviour's all-sufficiency, revealed to her by the powerful preaching she heard, as well as her own spirit-anointed meditation on the message, never causes her to become a complacent, laid-back Christian. Rather, in a context which acknowledges the reality of Christian experience in the wilderness of this world, it brings forth this desire to persevere, to cling to her only hope.

All I need through surging waters, she says, is Christ. All I need through raging fire, O my soul, to cling forever, cling to him, my life's desire. On Arabia's tangled pathways, plagued by foes increasingly, let me fully share his passion, precious death, on Calvary.

The sentiment or desire expressed then is to persevere, not to fall away. She could have said, I don't want to fall away from you. Those aren't Angrifis' words, they were written by Keith Green, the late 20th century American Christian songwriter who was killed in a plane crash at the age of 28 in 1982, a similar age to Angrifis.

Now, as a young Christian during the early months of 1985, I was sent a tape of his songs by an old friend who'd become a Christian some years before me, and I was thrilled by songs which spoke of the experience, which had now miraculously, unbelievably, become mine. Now, I think it's fair to say that the doctrinal grounding which Angrifis received in Shanti Hangel and Winva was significantly different to that which Keith Green received, and that the American singer was possibly disadvantaged as a result. But I've been more struck, and it's always made an impression on me, as to how similar these two poets of the Christian's first love are, in fact, full of joy and devotion and zeal, a jealous guarding of their relationship with Christ, an ever-present nervous fear that their own sin might come between them and their beloved, and a desire to taste more of the fullness of salvation.

Well, possibly sometime we can look in greater depth at the similarities between Keith Green and Angrifis. Another Angrifis hymn that I want to refer to rejoices in the Christian's great privileges. The Christian, one in whom sin still dwells, is one who is allowed to scale God's sacred mountain, and to be a member of God's church.

The verses that I'm about to read remind us of, once again, a very well-known and obvious truth, but once again, one worth emphasising perhaps, in the context of hymn writing. Her work is saturated in scriptural language and allusion. In this particular hymn, she first of all refers to Isaiah 25, verses 6 onwards, and in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make a do all people a feast of fat things, and he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.

Now, here is Angrifis as a sinner, as a sinner celebrating her privileges and wondering and being moved by the fact that she's allowed these privileges at all. Since I still remain corrupted, leaving you repeatedly, right to scale your sacred mountain is high privilege to me. There the veils are torn that hide you, every cover swept aside, transient things of earth made nothing, your great glory magnified.

Rejoicing then in her pride privilege, she then proclaims her desire to continue to do so, and this is where the O comes in, O to drink on high forever, where salvation's waters rise, drink till I no longer thirst for transient things the earth supply. Now, the second part of this stanza makes sound and warm illustrative use of the Song of Solomon, which has been read for us at the beginning of our meeting tonight. Chapter 5, verses 2 to 6, an aspect of her work which unregenerate readers and critics have possibly inevitably,

but certainly disgracefully misinterpreted.

So, this is Anne, this is Anne, once again, making illustrative use of the Song of Solomon. Live to watch for my Lord's coming, wide awakened in my place, there to open quickly to him and enjoy, reflect his face. Now, we're still with the O, which expresses a desire to persevere, still the first heading, not to fall away, to stay near to Christ, indeed to stay in Christ.

Now, another well-known example comes at the close of one of her most famous hymns. The desire expressed is, O to stay here in his love through all my days. The hymn, in fact, is translated on the leaflet which you got before you, but the O hasn't been translated.

It's the last answer of number three on your leaflet. You see the Welsh is, O amaros, yn ei gariad ddyddiau ddoes, and the translation I have is, O to stay here, which reflects a longing, O to stay here in his love through all my days. Now, the original is one of her best love hymns.

It's a hymn which is sung more often in congregational praise than many of her hymns. Many of her hymns do pose some metrical difficulties and awkwardness for congregational worship. They probably weren't written for that purpose.

Now, this hymn, See him stand among the myrtles, O lo, he stands among the myrtles, again reminds us that Angrafer is possessed of a very high degree of biblical knowledge and literacy, and also that her use of the Old Testament is bold, imaginative, and always looking for Christ. And there's no doubt that she, once again, reflected contemporary preaching, fed off that preaching, fed off the Bible studies, which she would have been part of in the Methodist societies in Montgomeryshire. And Wynne James, in his definitive edition of Anne Simms' Letters, helpfully points out many examples of correspondences between references in Anne's hymns and subjects covered by Thomas Charles in his Bible dictionary.

Charles, for instance, says unambiguously that the man standing among the myrtles in Zechariah 1 verse 8 is the Lord Jesus Christ. So, see him stand among the myrtles, no need for a great theological discussion, it's the Lord Jesus Christ. Here's the first answer in Alan Gord's translation.

You can compare the one on your leaflet. See him stand among the myrtles, object worthy of my mind, though I only partly know him over all things unconfined. Hail that morning when I see him as he is.

Turning to the second verse, we find that Thomas Charles also notes that Christ, in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verse 1, refers to himself as the Rose of Sharon. And there you have the second stanza, once again one of her best-loved stanzas. He excels by far ten thousand splendid sights in time and space, friend of sinners, he is their pilot on the sea.

Now, as I've said, much has been written about Andrew's imagery from this particular source, the Song of Solomon, and certain critics have had a field day in discussing their imagined psychological or sexual significance. There's been conjecture about the failed romance. In fact, a television film was created based on that idea.

The idea was that her jilted affections were then re-channeled into her religious affections, rubbish of course, but people will believe anything but the truth. I also need noting that along with William Williams and Isaac Watts and Charles Spurgeon and Samuel Rutherford and many others, her illustrative use, the use she makes of the Song of Solomon, is far removed from perhaps our slightly more timid and tentative approach today. Now, the final verse which includes that O of spiritual desire also makes use of Hosea 14,

verse 8, Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with thy does? Now, I'd like to quote one other verse before we move on to our next point.

This is just another example of this O of desire to stay in Christ, to persevere, not to lose the blessing. Very strong motivation in her work and also in the preaching of people like John Llaus. It should be remembered.

When they received the blessing, they wanted to keep it. When they felt that they were in midst of revival, they didn't want to lose that. They wanted to guard it and keep it.

Ever in a sea of wonders, O to stay there if I could. So, she's experienced obviously. If she asks to be allowed to stay somewhere, she knows something of it already.

She knows something of being in a sea of wonders, more or less. O to stay there if I could, even in this place of sinners living by his cross and blood, with my mind enthralled completely, wholly subject to God's laws, fashioned like him through obedience, faithful witness to his cause. Now, one of the things thrown up by the concordance I made of her work was that obviously she has certain key words.

One of these in Welsh is raibheith, with its associated forms, strange or wondrous, wonders, wonder, wondrous, wonderful. These are words which occur several times in her work. Here, she longs to keep the blessing, to stay in Christ, expressing not only her individual desire, but also a corporate one on behalf of the church.

In the verse which I have just read, the link between blessing and obedience is quite direct and explicit. That's why contemporary preachers like John Elias weren't afraid of preaching and warning against specific sins and sinful tendencies, not because they were legalistic Pharisees and killjoys, but rather because they truly loved God's laws and valued their privileged, blessed relationship with a loving, holy, pardoning God, with my mind enthralled completely, wholly subject to God's laws, fashioned like him through obedience, faithful witness to his cause. Now, a second heading in this attempt to classify Anne Griffith's spiritual hopes and desires is this.

There's a desire to enjoy, and they're all interconnected, of course, I would labour that point. It's a desire to enjoy free access to God and to enjoy fellowship with him. Now, I'm going to quote two verses in translation of another famous hymn, and you've on your hymn sheet.

It's another hymn which embraces Old Testament references, as you'll notice. Now, the first verse is a celebration of a pardoned sinner's reconciliation with God, and the key word here, as you can see, is in fact here, as you see from your translation. Now, this is Gaunt's translation, and I think a little closer to the original, possibly, the first line, certainly.

Here we find the tent of meeting. That's what the Welsh means. Here we find the tent of meeting.

Here the blood that reconciles. Here is refuge for the slayer. Here the remedy that heals.

Here a place beside the Godhead. Here the sinner's nesting place, where forever God's pure justice greets us with a smiling face. Now, that particular translator should perhaps be congratulated for getting six years into his verse, compared to five in the original.

But Angraphis' experience of fellowship with her God, fellowship with a pardoning God, is a here experience. It's a dema experience. It's a living, vibrant, immediate, here and now relationship.

Now, the translations of these lines, they are literally correct. Here we find the tent of meeting. But the original also suggests, I mean, dema means here.

The original suggests, here am I now, sinner as I am, in the tent of meeting, in the city of refuge, meeting my God and experiencing his pardon and his mercy and grace and fellowship. And that's the great thing which she rejoices in, in these verses. And there's a strong similarity between this emphasis on seeing that we can enjoy.

We often pray for God's presence on our meetings. Now, the emphasis in Angraphis' hymns and in Thomas Charles' letters in these revival days of the 1790s is this. If you want to experience God's presence, if you want to experience God's fellowship, then there is only one place, only one location, only one ground where that is possible for a sinner.

And that is this place of meeting, which Angraphis describes here in the first stanza of that hymn. Here is God's meeting place for sinners. Here in blood, our peace we've found.

Here's a refuge. This is where I feel close to God, when I come before him as a sinner, needing his grace and pardon and mercy. Now, in the following verse, the illustrative language, once again, is taken from the Song of Solomon.

Once again, agrees with Charles' interpretation of Song of Solomon 3, verse 6, who is this, that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. And once again, we find the expression of wonder and joy in being allowed to come to a God who has an unfrowning face. You don't have this particular Welsh text.

It's a different version on that hymn sheet. Oh, to come like smoke and columns. So, she uses the reference to the Song of Solomon.

Oh, to come like smoke and columns, rising from this wilderness, straight toward his throne to see him, seated with unfrowning face. Without end, without beginning, witness to the one in three, making known the threefold glory. True, amen, who sets us free.

Another verse we do find in her work, many individual verses, standalone verses, that verse expresses a similar desire. Oh, to penetrate the knowledge of the one true living God, far enough to slay the notions human fancy has explored. Wants to know God, wants access to God, fellowship with God.

Penetrate the knowledge to such an extent that it will slay the notions of human fancy. Trust the word which tells his nature. Guilty ones would be destroyed if his own atoning mercy did not bring us home to God.

The third heading I've got, the third classification I've got, the third class I've got is a desire to live a holy life which will exalt God. That's also a very strong motivation in the work. A desire to live a holy life which will exalt God.

Now, the hymn I'm going to refer to once again makes a bold spiritual application of the Song of Solomon. Once again, it reflects the tenor and emphasis of evangelical preaching at the time. Referring, for instance,

to the verse 12 in the first chapter of the Song of Solomon, while the king sat at his table, my spike now sent a thoughtful smell, thereof, the nard, in that verse, says Thomas Charles, is the Holy Spirit working in the church and reviving its holiness.

So, Anne Griffith says, now my precious nard is fragrant, since I feast on love's free grace, blaze with zeal against transgression, love perfection's holy face. That's the zeal for holiness. Blaze with zeal against transgression, love perfection's holy face.

Then the awe comes in. Oh, to live now, sanctifying God's most pure and holy name, humble to his will and making his command my life's sole aim. Live to pay my vows completely.

Live to share Christ's treasure store, whereby his free mercy strengthened I am more than conqueror. Inspired, revived by the Holy Spirit, the Christian longs to be holy, longs to sanctify God's name, longs to live by grace and in Christ a triumphant life unblemished by sin. Live to pay my vows completely.

Live to share Christ's treasure store. That touches upon another key word in Anne Griffith's vocabulary. Live, life, alive, live, living.

A cluster of 29 words are found in that small corpus of hymns. In a word, that's what being a Christian means for Anne Griffith. Life, a new life, a new life, a forgiven life, a reprieved life of love.

I teach Welsh literature for a living. I can tell you with some authority that the most common adjective in Welsh language poetry is the little word hyn, old. It is a remarkable fact that in Anne Griffith's work it occurs only once.

That in the context which describes God's way of salvation as way so ancient, never aging. She's not a hymn writer of the old, she's the hymn writer of the new life. Now I can just refer, as I draw to a close, two further examples of her desire to sanctify God's name and to honour his law.

I'll just take out a couple of lines from both stanzas. Once again, referring to God's law, O that I might do it honour, O that I might do it honour. That's a motive, that's one of the spiritual motives, motivations.

O that I might do it honour, enter into sweet, take salvations offered good, enter into sweet communion through immersion in his blood. Another verse she says, O that I might live to honour his shed blood, and take my seat, calmly sheltered in his shadow, live and die there at his feet. Two further points quickly.

The fourth point is this, she expresses a desire to possess faith, to believe God's word and to look in faith at the law of Jesus Christ. Now this is memorably expressed in a well-known hymn with its terse, concise expression of the doctrine of the person of Christ. O for the faith with angels, she longs for this, O for the faith with angels, to penetrate and see the plan of our salvation, its hidden mystery, two natures in one person, conjoined inseparably, distinct and not confounded, in perfect unity.

My soul see this divine man, how right he is for you, here venture your whole being, give him your burden too, as human he feels with you, your weakness as his own, as God, the world, flesh, Satan, are conquered at his throne. She is a hymn writer of experience, she is also a great hymn writer of doctrine. One other example of this desire to look to Christ and to believe in God's word.

He and nothing less fulfils me, she says, he whom mind cannot define, O to gaze upon his person, O to gaze upon his person, the doctrine is there also, who is human and divine. And then finally the fifth point

and perhaps fittingly to close in the context of this series on revival, we see in Anne Griffith's work a desire to feel a greater burden for God's work and to see his church flourishing. And this is a desire, a longing expressed very strongly also in some of her letters.

The reference in the first line here is to Jeremiah chapter 9 verse 1, O my head should be all waters, she says, O my head should be all waters, weeping day and night away, Zion's army with its banners melts before the heat of day, O reveal again the pillars, mainstay through her night of loss, God's own promises, unchanging, sealed supremely on the cross. I mean she was concerned about the state of Zion in her day at the time of great revival and blessing and anointing. She didn't want to lose any of that.

O my head should be all waters, weeping day and night away, Zion's army with its banners, she sees them melting before the heat of day, O reveal again the pillars, she's praying now, reveal again the pillars, mainstay through her night of loss. What are these pillars? They're God's own promises, unchanging, sealed supremely on the cross. Now at the beginning of this service it is prayed that the events of the past might inspire us to live for God.

I trust that this consideration of Agraphis' spiritual longings and desires will move us to search ourselves. They do challenge us, they also comfort us and I trust that they will inspire us to seek the Lord and to seek his blessing on his work in our land in 2007.

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