

Tribute to Pastor William E. Payne 1938 - 1997

Brian Robinson

The Sovereign Grace Baptist Churches of Canada were shocked recently at the sudden passing of their brother in Christ and fellow pastor, Bill Payne. Bill was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Burlington for over 24 years. He would have celebrated his 25th anniversary this October. He had also served in Central Baptist Church in Toronto and Calvary Baptist in Burlington. Brother Payne passed away at Fox River, Cumberland County in Nova Scotia on 29 June, 1997 while on holiday with his wife Hetty. Bill was well known among the Calvinistic Baptists in Canada, as well as by many of Reformed persuasion on the international scene.

Brother Payne is survived by his wife Hetty and two sons, Mark and Stephen, their wives and seven grandchildren.

William Payne was born in Liverpool, England on April 16, 1938, the son of the late Thomas and Hanna Payne. In his youth he attended Calvary Baptist Church in Liverpool. He was greatly influenced by the pastor of that congregation, the late A.E. Chillington, and it was under his faithful ministry that Bill was converted. While attending that church Bill met and fell in love with one of the girls of the congregation, Hetty Stephenson. After a stint in the armed forces, Bill and Hetty were married in 1959. That same year they emigrated to Canada.

In Canada Bill attended Toronto Baptist Seminary. This would be a life-long relationship for he later became the homiletics professor at the school while pastoring on a full-time basis. After graduating from seminary Bill was ordained and called to Calvary Baptist Church in Burlington. It was about this time that the doctrines of grace were causing a ferment among Canadian Baptists. Bill was already convinced of these doctrines and preached them with vigour and yet also with graciousness. Because of his stand he was dismissed from his church. About 40 parishioners joined with him and they formed the nucleus of Trinity Baptist Church where he would remain for the remaining years of his ministry.



Brother Bill was greatly loved by his people, and the church prospered. They were able to purchase a disused church outside Burlington on Appleby Line. It had a seating capacity of about 150. The congregation grew under Bill's able leadership until it was filled and the building had to be extended.

Bill was an able expositor of the Word of God and his people were well grounded in biblical doctrines. Several of the young people went on to become pastors and theologians, including Carl Muller (for several years assisting at Trinity Baptist in Burlington), Kirk Wellum (now at Sovereign Grace Baptist in Sarnia) and his brother Steve Wellum (now teaching at Trinity Western in British Columbia). It was fitting that two of these, Pastors Carl and Kirk should be involved in the funeral service.

Bill was a prodigious worker, reader and writer. He was the heart and soul of the Reformed movement in Canada. It was under his supervision, along with Pastor Leigh Powell (Covenant Baptist in Toronto), Pastor Roger Fellows (Bowmanville Baptist - now at Leyton Drive Chapel in Bradford, England) and Pastor Gordon Rumford, that the monthly meetings of the Fellowship for Reformation and Pastoral Studies were begun. This successful endeavour draws about 25 pastors each month to consider papers on biblical, historical or pastoral subjects. The papers are always followed by fruitful discussion.

Tribute to Pastor William E. Payne 1938 - 1997

Brian Robinson

Bill was also the leader in establishing the Canadian Carey Family Conference. The first conference was held in 1979, and from a modest beginning of about 40 or 60 this has now grown to some 300. It draws quite a number from the USA and speakers have been brought in from Canada, the USA and England. It has had a profound impact for good as far as the Reformed cause is concerned. In addition an annual Pastors' Conference was started, again under brother Payne's initiative. It has not grown as much as the Family Conference but has been a great encouragement to pastors seeking to preach the whole counsel of God. The Family Conference. The Family Conference has grown and is attended now by about 250.

From Bill's pen have come many articles for journals and magazines. From its inception he was the editor of "Reformation Canada." One of my favourite articles was a pamphlet entitled "[Pastor, What is the Difference?](#)" in which he simply but succinctly explains the difference between hyper-Calvinism, Arminianism and what the Bible teaches concerning the doctrines of grace.

Bill was in every way a pastor's pastor. It was he who gathered various independent churches into what is now the Sovereign Grace Fellowship of Baptist Churches in Canada. It is small in number and some of them are small, struggling causes, but Bill gave leadership and encouragement to all. He had the courage to see that being small was no disgrace, and that much of what was done was of a pioneering nature.

Pastor Payne was a coveted speaker at conferences in Canada and also in the USA. There were invitations from overseas too. His gifts were wonderfully used of the Lord as he spoke with great clarity as well as simplicity, making difficult theological concepts plain to even the youngest believers. He loved to exalt Christ, and as one battered and bruised Christian commented after 'accidentally' hearing him preach, 'He so preached Christ as the balm of Gilead, that my law-bruised soul wept tears of gladness.'

A saying for which Bill was well known as 'Balance brothers, balance is the key.' As was remarked at the funeral service, he exemplified this in a remarkable way. 'He was like the bubble in the middle of the carpenter's level, always at dead centre.' His theology, his family life and his private life were well balanced. It was he who gave the Canadian Reformed movement its own distinct flavour, and because of the largeness of his heart he kept many disparate elements focused on Christ and the task at hand.

It was a glorious summer day, Saturday July 5, 1997 at 2.00 p.m. when over 350 people came to honour this servant of God. The church was filled an hour before the service time. Some listened from the basement and others from outside. Most listened with tear-filled eyes. Pastor Carl Muller, Bill's right hand man and associate pastor for many years, led the service. Pastor Kirk Wellum preached the funeral message from 2 Timothy 4:3: 'For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.' Pastor Brian Robinson (Westminster Baptist Chapel) reflected for a few minutes on the life that had been lived to the glory of God and the blessing of God's people. We were reminded of a saying of Bill's that he had often repeated with regard to his own death: "When they tell you that Pastor Payne is dead, don't believe it. When you hear the news, say to yourself, 'Pastor Payne was never more alive than he is now'".

Used by permission of the editor, "Reformation Today", September/October 1997, issue 159, page 24.