

A walk with Mr O (5)

Western Christianity is on life support.

Mr O, we were talking about prayer. You've been a Christian a lot longer than I have, so is there anything else on this subject that you think I ought to know?

Are you ready for an old man like me to unburden his heart? I am troubled, deeply troubled, that Christianity in the Western world is not characterised by a spirit of prayer. George Floyd died because he couldn't breathe.

When we commune with God we fill our spiritual lungs with the life-giving air of heaven. I may be wrong but, as far as I can see, very few Western believers are taking regular, deep spiritual breaths and living the abundant life that Jesus spoke about.

I don't know what to say. But I'd like to hear more about how you see things.

Thanks. By and large it seems to me that Western Christianity is like a ward of dying patients on ventilators. They cannot breathe without help. If air was not forced into their lungs, they would be gone. So, believers gather on Sundays (most of them only once) and inhale snatches of spiritual oxygen through the hymns, songs, prayers, Bible readings and preaching.

That is just enough to keep them ticking over until they put on their oxygen-mask again next Sunday. So, they don't quite die, but probably will do soon. You certainly can't say that they are bursting with the spiritual life, energy, pleasure and excitement of people who are richly oxygenated!

Mr. O, I hesitate to say this to an older man, but are you sure that you are not becoming rather cynical?

Your question is entirely right. It's something that I have often asked myself. But, rightly or wrongly, I look around me and find that my heart is breaking. Where are the believers who, every day, are having powerful, personal dealings with God?

Where are they? Where are the men and women who talk naturally and movingly about the holiness of God, the awfulness of sin, the preciousness of Christ, the wonder

of the cross, the triumph and reign of the living Victor, the blessings of the crucified life, and the heaven to which they are hurrying?

Where are the Christians who yearn after the Lord and who can never have enough of Him? How often do you meet people like that?

Well, I'm thankful to say, I do know quite a few. Some of them are my close friends. Surely the situation isn't as hopeless as you suggest.

But they are only a few, aren't they? Yet there are humiliations and agonies to be experienced in the secret place, and inexpressible, ennobling and lasting joys, of which most professing Christians never speak, and, frankly, of which they know nothing. Why are there so few who experience what the Bible would regard as the normal Christian life?

I've often wondered about that myself, but I've been afraid of being too judgmental. It's a fact that the majority of my Christian friends don't seem to have much spiritual appetite. They socialise a lot and enjoy each others' company. But most of them have no desire to be in church twice on Sundays, to attend the mid-week prayer meeting, or to get involved in trying to win the lost.

Yes, we must be careful about being judgmental. Even the very best Christian is a wicked sinner who, left to himself, has no hope outside of Christ. But that surely is the point.

There is a book called 'The Crucified God'. The title fills me with awe. And it raises all the questions we have mentioned today. Seeing that it took the crucifixion of the eternal Son of God to save us, why would we ever want to acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour, and then not be committed 24/7 to knowing Him, pleasing Him and serving Him?

Is it possible that, in fact, most professing Christians have never been to the cross at all? Is the real problem that most of the members of our Evangelical churches are actually unconverted?

Mr. O, I don't know if I have enjoyed today's walk or not. But I'm certainly going home with a lot to think about. And to pray about. And to put right.