

## **True Sainthood**

By: Keith Keyser

The recently deceased journalist, diplomat, and scholar of South East Asia, Phillips Talbot once wrote: “I’ve been a Christian, and in particular a Presbyterian, and yet in Gandhi I saw saintliness...He was a 77-year-old ascetic and the physical ordeal did not worry him. Here, if I ever saw one, is a pilgrimage. Here is the Indian – and the world’s – idea of sainthood: a little old man who has renounced personal possessions, walking with bare feet on cold earth in search of a great human ideal.”<sup>1</sup> His profession to be a Christian notwithstanding, Talbot betrayed a common misunderstanding of the nature of true saintliness. His comments on the Indian statesman Mohandas K. Gandhi depict a saint as a really good man or woman, whose abstemious or extremely religious behavior directs attention towards himself or herself in the pursuit of “a great human ideal.”

### **Saints: The False & The True**

The biblical usage of the term is far different: it depicts bad men and women who have been set apart by the grace of God to receive a life of eternal glory with the Lord Jesus Christ. This eternal life is a gift from the Lord, stemming from His generosity and love – not based on any personal merit in the recipient of this gracious position. It results in a transformed life, that displays the character and reflective glory of Christ Himself as given through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26.) The destiny of saints culminates in their being conformed to the image of their Lord through “the redemption of the body” which results in glorification (Rom. 8:17, 23, 28-30; 1 John 3:1-2.)

Some world religions believe in calling upon saints to intercede for them with God. In contrast, the Bible says that true saints need the Son of God to intercede for them (Rom. 8:27.) Their good deeds earn no favor before God; He must mediate His blessings to them through His Son’s high priestly work. Nevertheless, if one is a saint by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, then they have been saved to live separated lives. They belong to the Lord and must not form entangling alliances with the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18.) As they walk with Him in the power of His Spirit they will live differently than the lost ones around them; good works will be produced like fruit (John 15:1-5; Eph. 2:8-10.) As Titus 2:11-15 expresses it:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

### **The Wardrobe Of The Saints**

The saints' righteous deeds are actually crafting their future wedding garment (Rev. 19:8.) This metaphor shows that their anonymous and unnoticed service in this world will one day be manifested to the universe by the Lord of glory (Eph. 2:7.) Because their very existence – as well as their works – are the result of His work in and through them, the Lord will receive the honor from the saints' activities (Phil. 2:12.) Genuine sainthood turns people's gaze to the Almighty. Real saints say: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30.)

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<sup>1</sup> Haresh Pandya, "Phillips Talbot: Journalist and diplomat who became an expert on South Asian affairs" (Obituary) in *The Independent*, 3 January 2011; electronic edition: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/phillips-talbot-journalist-and-diplomat-who-became-an-expert-on-south-asian-affairs-2174491.html> Accessed on 1/10/11.