

Section 25: Prayers¹ for Times of Persecution and Martyrdom

To introduce this emotive subject either the Presiding Participant or the whole gathering should read appropriate scripture passages aloud. (The Holy Spirit Himself possibly pinpointing those relevant to a particular situation.) If necessary, time should be set aside for weeping and private intercession.

1) **P1:** Lord, in this hour of evil [affliction] hear us when we call upon you, (Psalm 4:1)

2) **All:** Do not be far from us, (Lamentations 1:16)

3) **P1:** Or deaf to our prayers, (Psalm 38:16)

4) **P1:** Lord, our situation is hopeless, (Isaiah 57:10)

5) **P2:** It is utterly hopeless (Jeremiah 2:25 & 18:12)

6) **P1:** No human hand can help us

7) **P2:** Only you can help us

8) **P1:** Our enemies are poised to destroy us

9) **P2:** They will show us no mercy; it is our destruction they want

Pause

10) **P1:** In this time of peril, may we ready ourselves to listen carefully to what God's Word has to teach us about persecution and martyrdom²

11) **P2:** Abba Father, help us to be attentive to your Word and to discern which passages apply to our situation, Amen

12) **P1:** Nowhere in scripture are believers promised a life of ease or luxury. Rather "*we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God,*" (Acts 14:22)

13) **P2:** "*Few and evil are the days of our life,*" (Genesis 47:9)

14) **P1:** When Jesus' disciples enquired about world conditions preceding His return (Matthew 24:1-3) our Lord did not promise that these conditions would be characterized by a peaceful prosperity or by the triumph of His Church. Neither did He say that His followers would '*transform the nations,*' '*rule the World*' or '*remove evil from the face of the earth.*' Indeed, our Lord flatly squashed any hopes that preaching the Gospel [even on a global basis] would establish a new [and just Christian] social '*order,*' (Matthew 24:14). Such an order will only ever become a reality after the return of Jesus – never before it. Those who believe otherwise are guilty of wishful thinking.³ They could easily turn against the Lord should these false hopes be dashed in their lifetime.

15) **P2:** Instead, Our Lord warned us that we "*shall be hated by all the nations for my name's sake*"⁴ and that many shall "*be offended and betray one another and shall hate one another,*"⁵ (Matthew 24:9b-10)

¹ This whole section was first compiled in March 2007, with some of the prayers being repeated in Part B, Section 3. They are designed to enable Christians to identify with the sufferings of the Jewish people.

² A martyr is someone who witnesses to their faith through being persecuted and killed for it

³ Technically, this mistake is known as '*over-realized eschatology*'

⁴ In Matthew 24:9b, Jesus used very strong terminology; in its amplified form this passage reads; "*you shall inevitably be hated, detested, loathed (to the point where you are seen as a just and fit object for murderous persecution) by all (the full or entire number of) nations, ethnic groups or tribes because of my name, character and divine authority.*"

16) P1: Furthermore, He also stated *“If the world⁶ hates you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own but because you do not belong to the world and because I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you”* (John 15:18-19). [Even worse, *“Whosoever kills you will think they are doing God a service because they have neither known the Father nor me,”* (John 16:2b-3).]

17) P2: The world hates us because we differ from it. Consequently, we do not believe its lies nor follow its illusion of man being able to establish a New Global Order, characterized by justice, peace and love.

18) P1: Jesus has told us these things [given us these warnings] so that we would not take offense at Him and stumble in the faith, (John 17:1)

19) P2: He also gave them so that we should rely solely upon the strength that He gives to *“endure to the end and be saved,”* (Matthew 24:13)

20) P1: Those who believe that faith is a mysterious power that can be manipulated [through magical techniques] to produce prosperity [health and wealth] are thoroughly deceived. They have fallen victim to their own greed and ignorance, (Exodus 20:17). Furthermore, those who misuse faith in such a way are guilty of the sin of rebelling against the teaching of God’s Word.

21) P2: *“Rebellion is the sin of witchcraft,”* (1 Samuel 15:23). Those who treat faith as a tool to control God bring themselves into eternal condemnation.

22) P1: True faith is that humble acceptance of God’s will in all circumstances and the belief that He can bring good out of the [many] evils afflicting us

23) P2: True faith does not seek to control God; but to humbly rely upon His will and mercy

24) P1: Pay close attention to what scripture says concerning persecution and the distressed feelings it may engender.

25) P2: This we will do in the strength given to us

A brief pause should follow the reading of each successive scripture. The Presiding Participant or designated members of the group should read one passage after another.

26)

Deuteronomy 30:7

And the LORD your God will put all these curses upon your enemies and on them that hate you, which persecuted you.

Job 19:22

Why do you persecute me and why are you not satisfied with my flesh?

Jesus clearly implied that hatred of Christianity would climax in some form of global persecution. No mention is made of safe nation states into which persecuted believers could flee.

⁵ Matthew 24:10 continues in the same vein; in its amplified form this passage reads, *“And in consequence (or as a result) of the nations’ hatred a great many (an abundant proportion) will be mortally offended, scandalised, tripped up to the point where they will turn aside from the faith and fall into sin and shall betray, give or surrender one another to murderously persecuting governing authorities and in consequence (or as a result) miserably hate, detest and loathe one another to the point of murderous persecution.”* Both the original language and the wider context of this verse reveal that Jesus was describing the frightful condition of His Church before His return. This dire condition appears to be as a result of the Church not taking the many biblical warnings of persecution seriously. The Church as a whole had failed to entertain right expectations about the future and had clung to false hopes. When these hopes were finally dashed by persecution the result was the situation described in this verse. The moral is this ALWAYS TAKE CHRIST’S WARNINGS SERIOUSLY. Should this not be done then all that results is a *‘falling away’* from the faith.

⁶ Here, the term *‘world’* refers to the *‘world’* of fallen humanity, with its sinful beliefs, values and practices. These give rise to (often complex) socio-economic and religious-political systems which stand in militant opposition to God and His people. Such systems can sometimes be dominated by highly destructive demonic forces.

Psalm 7:1

O LORD my God in you do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me and deliver me.

Psalm 7:5

Let the enemy persecute my soul and take it; let him tread down my life upon the earth and lay mine honour in the dust.

Psalm 10:2

The wicked in his pride does persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

Psalm 31:15

My times are in your hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies and from them that persecute me.

Psalm 35:3

Draw out also the spear and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am your salvation.

Psalm 35:6

Let their way be dark and slippery and let the angel of the LORD persecute them.

Psalm 69:26

For they persecute those you have smitten; and their talk grieves those whom you have wounded.

Psalm 71:11

[Accusing enemies are] saying, God has forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.

Psalm 83:15

So persecute them [those who seek to destroy us] with your tempest and make them afraid with your storm.

Psalm 109:16

Because that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even kill the broken in heart.

Psalm 119:84

How many are the days of your servant? When will you execute judgment on them that persecute me?

Psalm 119:86

All your commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help me.

Psalm 119:161

Princes [government officials] have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart stands in awe of your word.

Psalm 143:3

For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has smitten my life down to the ground; he has made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead.

Isaiah 14:6

He [the Lord's Messiah] who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted and none hinders.

Jeremiah 17:18

Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded: let them be dismayed, but let not me be dismayed: bring upon them the day of evil and destroy them with double destruction.

Jeremiah 29:18

And I will persecute them⁷ with the sword, with the famine and with the pestilence and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse and an astonishment and a hissing and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them.

Lamentations 3:43

You [God] have covered [yourself] with anger and persecuted us: you have slain, you have not pitied.

Lamentations 3:66

Persecute and destroy them [our persecutors] in anger from under the heavens of the Lord.

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:11

Blessed are you, when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Matthew 5:12

Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Matthew 5:44

But I say unto you, 'love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which spitefully use you and persecute you.'

Matthew 10:23

But when they persecute you in this city, flee you into another: for truly I say to you, you shall not have gone over [to preach the Gospel to] the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 23:34

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes: and some of them you shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues and persecute them from city to city.'

Luke 11:49

Therefore God said, 'I will send prophets and apostles and some of them they shall slay and persecute.'

Luke 21:12

But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

John 5:16

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day.

John 15:20

Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

⁷ A reference to the apostate Judeans who persecuted true prophets like Jeremiah

Acts 7:52

Which of the prophets have not your fathers' persecuted? They have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Acts 26:11

And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Acts 26:14

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me and saying in the Hebrew tongue, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the pricks.'

Acts 26:15

And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus whom you persecute.'

Romans 12:14

Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not.

1 Corinthians 4:12

And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it.

1 Corinthians 15:9

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.

2 Corinthians 4:9

[We apostles are] persecuted but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed.

Galatians 1:13

For you have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God and devastated it.

Galatians 1:23

But they had heard only, that he who persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed.

Galatians 4:29

But as then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now

1 Thessalonians 2:15

[The Jewish religious establishment associated with the second temple] who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us; and they please not God and are contrary to all men.

Revelation 2:13

I know your works and where you dwell even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast to my name and have not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwells.

Revelation 17:6

And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Revelation 12:13

And when the dragon saw that he was cast onto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

Pause

27) P1: Heavenly Father, please grant us the wisdom to discern which of these passages apply to us at this present time [of persecution], (James 1:5)

Additional prayers (asking for wisdom) may be made, either privately or publicly. At the Presiding Participant's discretion up to five of the more relevant passages may be re-read.

28) P1: In particular, we [come as beggars with outstretched hands] to ask that you grant us the wisdom to discern how best to face this persecution. Should we fight, flee or face martyrdom? Please answer this by granting the same kind of wisdom you gave to Solomon when the Queen of Sheba tested him with difficult questions, (1 Kings 10:1 & 2 Chronicles 9:1)

29) P2: Grant us wisdom, oh Lord and show us your will for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ

30) P1: May we now ask God to calm our emotions realizing that vengeance belongs to Him and not to us, (Romans 12:19)

Additional passages (concerning the need to leave vengeance in God's hands) may be read either aloud or quietly. They are best introduced with the phrase '*As it is written.*'

31) P2: May we not take vengeance into our own hands, oh Lord, Amen

32) P1: Abba Father, we can only offer you our abject helplessness and feelings of anger, fear and dismay. Through your son Jesus [who also endured persecution], send your Holy Spirit to show us how we should pray – both for ourselves and for our persecutors.

Let us now commend our persecutors into God's hands (for Him to remove, restrain or bring to repentance).

Named persecutors and any other related parties are commended into God's hands, with the salvation of particular individuals possibly being requested (as the Holy Spirit leads). Should this be the case the prayer '*Oh Lord, please turn this 'Saul' into a 'Paul' for the glory of your great name*' may be said. At the end of each intercession the words '*Into your hands we commend n*' may be used.

33) P1: May God use this distressing time to strengthen our faith

34) P2: May this be so, Amen

35) P1: May He also use it as a means to spread His Gospel and to bring [many] others into His Kingdom

36) P2: May this be done in the power of your Holy Spirit, Amen

37) P1: If our call is to face martyrdom let us prepare for death by using the following comforting prayer, given to us "*for such a time as this,*" (Esther 4:15)

Under the Presiding Participant's guidance, all or some of the following phrases may be used. (They may also be of comfort to those believers in the final stage of illness or old age.)

38) All:

"Oh Father, if it be possible let this cup [of suffering] pass from me; nevertheless not as I will but as you will," (Matthew 26:39)

"Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit," (Matthew 27:46)

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23:34)

"Remember me when you come into your Kingdom," (Luke 23:42)

"Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59)

"Lay not this sin to their charge," (Acts 6:60)

39) P1: Should our call be to face martyrdom then we know this will be a clear witness to Christ through us being slain [murdered] for our faith. No one should [rashly] volunteer for this form of witness lest they panic and deny our Lord.

40) P2: Martyrdom never involves the killing of others [along with oneself as a martyr] in the name of God. Also, it adds nothing to the work of Christ, for His blood alone atones for our sin.

41) P1: Although we are “*surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses*” [consisting of angels, departed believers and martyrs] who take an enthusiastic interest in our progress (Hebrews 12:1 & Revelation 6:9-11) we are not, under any circumstances, to pray to them nor to ask them to pray for us. To do so would displease both them and God our Heavenly Father. Remember, when John fell down to worship a heavenly being he was firmly rebuked and told...

42) All: “*Do it not: I am your fellow servant and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus: worship God,*” (Revelation 19:10)

43) P1: It is not for us to invoke or call for help from angels, departed believers or martyrs. They are fellow servants like us and we should not worship or abase ourselves before them, (Colossians 2:18). Neither should we allow our attention [and emotional attachments] to be diverted from God by any [superstitious] cult of angels, saints and martyrs.

44) P2: For He is a jealous God, hating any idolatrous attachment given even to the good things in His Creation, (Exodus 20:4 & Deuteronomy 5:8).

45) P1: We remember that it is the devil’s work to replace ‘*the best*’ with ‘*the good*’

46) P2: He does this to distract us from the only true path of salvation

[47) P1: So, respect the angels, saints and martyrs by leaving them to enjoy their fellowship with God, (Revelation 5:9f)

48) P2: In time, we too will share in their bliss

49) P1: Remember too that every angel, saint and martyr would always wish our attention to be directed toward God and His Son Jesus and not to them. If it were possible, even the [blessed] Virgin Mary would shed a tear each time people prayed to her in place of the Son she loves.

50) All: We honour the angels, saints and martyrs by not praying to them or requesting favours from them that only God can grant.

51) P1: However, when praying, every true angel, saint and martyr is delighted when we fix our attention upon God and His Son Jesus. The [blessed] Virgin Mary is likely to rejoice each time people pray to Jesus and trust in Him.]

52) All: May we therefore bring joy to all of the angels, saints and martyrs by saying, ‘*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, pray for us sinners and intercede with your Father so that He will have mercy upon us during this time of trial. Only you can mediate between ourselves and Him,*’ (Hebrews 9:15 & 12:24)

53) P1: Our call is to worship God through Christ alone⁸

54) P2: “*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,*” (1 Timothy 2:5)

Pause

55) P1: As we think of the time when we may face imprisonment [and torture] let us now, in advance of this, dissociate ourselves from and repudiate any statements or confessions that may seem to make us appear to deny our faith. So, together let us say the following prayer: -

⁸ It’s best left to Jesus to direct (by His Holy Spirit) any prayers or intercessions the angels, saints or martyrs in Heaven may make on our behalf, (Revelation 6:9-11)

56) All: Dear Lord Jesus, we do not know what the future will bring, but freely and willingly we hereby disclaim, dissociate ourselves from and repudiate in advance, any statement made in our captivity in which we may appear to deny our faith. We declare every such statement as being 'null and void' on the grounds that it represents the wishes of our captors and not ourselves. This also applies to any apparent blasphemies or 'confession' of outlandish crimes.

57) P1: So, understand that you are not bound by any statements which make you appear to deny or curse your faith. Take comfort from the way Jesus restored Peter by turning a fearful disciple into a bold apostle, whose death was to glorify God, (John 21:15-19).

58) All: We repudiate any such statements in advance. They have no authority because they will not have been made with our free consent, Amen

59) P1: Leave it to God to judge those who have genuinely repudiated their faith or have re-enacted the role of Judas Iscariot in deliberately betraying their master

60) P2: This we will do, upon His grace, Amen

61) P1: Now is the hour of [the power of] darkness, (Luke 22:53)

62) All: Please, Lord Jesus, give us the strength to endure and help us to be good witnesses to your Gospel, even to the shedding of our blood,⁹ Amen (Hebrews 12:4)

63) P1: Whilst depending upon the mercy and strength of God, let us [with undivided hearts] trust in the following unconditional [unbreakable] promises made in scripture to comfort us

Some or all of the following passages may be read by the Presiding Participant, by those appointed by him or by everyone together. If the situation is one of great danger they may be read silently.

64) All:

Psalm 23:1f

1. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want

2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.

3. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake

4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Matthew 28:20

20. I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

⁹ The blood of martyrs testifies to the effectiveness of the perfect blood sacrifice of Jesus. It does not add anything to the value of Christ's shed blood and should never be seen as another form of propitiatory sacrifice. All of the blood of the martyrs could never appease God's wrath against sin, simply because even the best of martyrs is unable to offer a completely unblemished sacrifice – an element of sin would always be present.

John 11:25-27

25. Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in me, though he was dead yet shall he live:

26. And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die.'

Romans 8:31f

31. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

33. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies.

34. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, but rather is raised again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36. As it is written, 'For thy sake we are killed all the daylong;' we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Revelation 20:6

6. Blessed and holy is he that participates in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Revelation 22:1-5

1. And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. In the midst of the street of it and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve types of fruits and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

3. And there shall be no more cursing; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light: and they shall reign forever and ever, amen.

If needed, additional comforting scriptural passages may be read and prayers made

65) P1: Draw comfort from the fact that persecution and martyrdom has often been the lot of many faithful Christians throughout the ages. There is nothing unique or special about our sufferings for the world of fallen humanity has always been strongly antagonistic to both Christ and His representatives (John 15:18-19 & I John 3:3).

66) P2: This is because we challenge the world's wrong ideas, oppressive authorities and idolatrous, sinful ways. Our presence threatens Satan and the many falsehoods he propagates.

67) P1: Through persecution and martyrdom we are called upon to participate [be immersed] in some of the sufferings Christ endured during His passion (Mark 10:35-40, Luke 12:50, Colossians 1:24, Philipians 3:10 & 1 Peter 4:13).

68) P2: Through our imperfect sacrifice we witness to the perfect sacrifice He made for sin upon the cross at Calvary

69) P1: Let the Holy Spirit comfort you! Soon, we [some of us] may be with Jesus. He will stand to greet [receive] us as true and faithful servants (Matthew 25:21a & 23a, Luke 19:17 & Acts 7:56). He will be our friend for all of eternity, (John 15:13-14).

70) P2: Alleluia! We will see Him 'face to face' and will share in His abundant, everlasting joy (Matthew 25:21b & 23b, John 15:11, 1 Corinthians 13:12 & Philipians 1:23)

71) P1: In order to remember that other brothers and sisters in the faith have endured [are enduring] similar sufferings let us recite the following prayer [of Polycarp of Smyrna – who died at the hands of the Ancient Romans]¹⁰

If appropriate, another martyr's prayer may be used instead

72) All:

"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels and powers and of all creation and of the whole race of the righteous, who live in your presence.

I bless you, for you have granted me this day and hour, that I might receive a portion amongst the martyrs by sharing in the cup of Christ until the resurrection to eternal life in both of soul and of body, through the immortality imparted by the Holy Spirit. May I be received among these martyrs in your presence this day, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you did prepare and reveal it beforehand and have accomplished it – for you are the faithful and ever-true God who is free from all falsehood.

*For this reason and for everything else, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you, through the eternal and heavenly high-priest, Jesus Christ your beloved Son, through whom, with you and the Holy Spirit is glory, both now and ever and for all the ages to come, Amen."*¹¹

Should the gathering be about to disperse the following response maybe said. However, there can be a pause, in order to give participants time to quietly pray and receive strength from the Holy Spirit.

73) P1: Rise and let us be going, [our time of trial is at hand] (Matthew 26:46 & Mark 14:42)

¹⁰ He was a church elder who, at the age of 86, was burnt at the stake in the Roman arena at Smyrna. (Scholarly debate suggests that his martyrdom took place in late February 155AD.)

¹¹ This quotation is based upon Lightfoot's translation, from the 'Early Christian Writings' web site. It was updated on Tuesday, 17th February 2009 for use in this liturgy. Further details of Polycarp's martyrdom will be found in Staniforth (1984) pp.153-167

74) All: Lord Jesus pray for us, pray especially that we will not fall into temptation by denying you like Peter or betraying you like Judas, for those who deny you before men you will deny before the Heavenly Father, Amen (Matthew 10:33 & Luke 22:46)

The gathering may quietly disperse

Should an attempt be made to ascertain God's will through spiritual gifts then reference should be made to the procedures outlined in Section 26, *'The listening to God Session'* to protect those who may well be in a spiritually vulnerable condition