

Reformation
& Revival



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A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

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Editor: John H. Armstrong

Associate Editors: Donald E. Anderson

Jim Elliff

Thomas N. Smith

Design and Production: Jennifer McGuire

Subscriptions Manager: Anita Armstrong

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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide,
 2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.
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Reformation & Revival Ministries
% Mr. Malcolm Bouchard
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Rocklea 4106

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% Mrs. Diane Deacon
P.O. Box 1W8
Leeds LS16 7XB

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% Rev. Don B. Cook
P.O. Box 2953
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5G5

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in this country, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

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J.I. Packer has written: "The devil keeps step with God, and when revival comes it is always a mixed work, hard to identify just because so much error, fanaticism and disorder are mixed up in it." With this in mind we need to understand that revival is never to be sought as a panacea for present problems. Revival showers bring fruitfulness and growth, but they also bring persecution and mudslides!

The lead article in this issue deals with one of the best known awakenings in our century, the 1904 Revival in Wales. Eifion Evans, one of the leading students in our time of that awakening, offers insightful reflections upon the blessings and problems seen in that visitation.

It is my concern that a movement has arisen in our time which is focused intensely upon prayer for awakening and global revival without understanding either the theological issues which are at stake, or the psychological and sociological problems associated with revival movements. We tend to assume revival will solve all our major problems and bring deep unity to the church. We seem to believe that revival will cause all who profess the name of Christ to "get together" in extensive campaigns for moral righteousness in the public square. Of all the present prayer movements for revival that I know of personally not one seems to grasp significantly the dangers inherent in this subject.

In America we have at least three generations who have been reared on the belief that *revivalism* is the same thing as genuine revival. *Revivalism* sees revival as a movement of men, designed and stimulated through human ingenuity and plan. God helps us, for sure, but we are able to bring revival through our planning and working.

As a result of this *revivalism* we have politically conservative movements seeking to bring back another era of church-state harmony which is neither biblically desirable nor genuinely feasible in a radically "post-Christian" culture. I have actually heard leaders say, "America came

under God's judgment the moment she took prayer out of the public schools."

Such movements speak of revival as if America were the "My people" (i.e., a covenant people) of 2 Chronicles 7:14! In this same view the land to be blessed will be America. Further, pietists of all sorts think of revival as a kind of grand recovery which will bring back the yesterdays of week-long meetings and mindless preaching. In this view "soul winning" (as understood by this particular tradition) will again be successful in the church, producing huge programs and multitudes of zealous but often ill-taught evangelists.

Moralists of all kinds campaign against pornography in the media, the present administration in Washington, and the general drift of our culture toward secularism. But was all of this the agenda of the church of the New Testament, which was in the midst of the greatest revival recorded in Scripture?

To put it another way, if we had another Great Awakening, what would it look like in our culture and era?

First, let me answer that question by saying no one knows! God is the author of revival, as surely as He is the author of any single conversion. He is original, in one sense, and can do as He pleases. No man will dictate *how* He will act. His sovereignty, consistently and powerfully seen in any true revival, demands that we leave clear room for mystery in His ways.

Having said this, however, it is important to see how God has acted in the past and what His Word reveals about His character and the revelation of His will. Though free and sovereign, God is not arbitrary, and He will act consistently with Himself and His revealed will. Both the Word of God, its accounts of awakenings and its theology, must be carefully considered by all who pray for revival in our time. Further, church history, though not an inerrant revelation, certainly gives account of just how a holy and merciful God has

awakened His people in other times and cultures. We would be foolish, dangerously so, in fact, to ignore such records.

Revival, if it is sent into a cultural situation like our own, would *most likely produce some radical* changes, such as:

1) Renewed holiness among the visible people of God, which would lead to multitudes of pastors and church leaders resigning their posts due to immoral behavior which disqualified them from service.

2) Major concern for the recovery of the gospel of grace, especially in the truth of justification by faith alone. As a respected historian told me some months ago, "If we see another awakening then there must be a new grasp of justification by faith alone combined with a powerful preaching of the same truth."

3) The surrounding culture, hostile to God in particular and truth in general, would probably openly persecute awakened believers.

4) The culture might not be quickly changed due to such an awakening, since we are so far from the Christian presuppositions of earlier revival eras, and the scene would thus be much more like that of the early centuries of Christianity when the church was a very powerful and growing minority within a pagan culture.

5) The church would be in need of equipping a new generation of young leaders who would find seminaries, as we know them presently, unacceptable vehicles for both academic and spiritual preparation for ministry. Would this result in major changes in our present schools, some new schools, models yet to be tried and developed for training men and women to serve the church?

6) A major recovery of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture would cause a reconsideration of the assumptions which now grip the church in the name of "self realization" theories and therapies.

7) A new wave of authoritarianism would possibly sweep

through churches, and servants who had Christ's interest for the flock would be called upon to deal with excessive control of the minds and hearts of hungry sheep.

8) Many megachurches would find almost no interest in their present programs, unless they too were caught up in the awakening. The local church would begin to think of itself more as a "War College" than as a place for entertainment designed to reach baby boomers who are disinterested in the rough truth which does not go down well in our time.

9) Prayer and preaching would have to become central again, and almost everything else we count important would be lost in a season of revival. The problems this would cause are immense for most highly structured North American churches.

10) Charismatic excesses would have to be understood and addressed properly. Revival will bring supernatural phenomena, but can a poorly taught church discern the difference between God's blessings and psychological aberrations? Between the work of God and the subtle, crafty, believable work of the enemy?

All of these concerns, and many more, strike me as matters for our concern if we are called to be leaders of the church of God in our time. How can we pray for revival and not recognize the dangers, as well as the desired blessings, inherent in such intercession? Revival men and women must be prepared to lead, whether or not God sends the showers many of us are pleading for in our day. The showers are His to give, the preparation is ours to undertake.

Editor
