

REVIVAL?

WHAT IS IT? SHOULD WE EXPECT IT? WHAT CAN WE
LEARN FROM THE PAST? WHAT WILL IT COST?

Published by the Unboring Book Company,

Northampton, England.

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REVIVAL - WHAT IS IT?

In its simplest definition, revival is the coming to life again of something that was dead. In the context of the Christian Church over the centuries, it has come to mean a clearly observable recovery of life and faith for the church in a geographical area, that is enabled and energised by the Spirit of God, and which overflows into the non-Christian community, resulting in numerous conversions which are often, even usually, dramatic and lasting.

In the past, it has sometimes happened at the same time in different parts of the world which have no obvious or known connection. One of the most noticeable of such periods was in the decade from about 1898-1908, when there were stirrings of revival in (at least); Melbourne in Australia, Khasi Hills in India, Korea, Wales, China, parts of South Africa, Norway, Sunderland England and - perhaps one of the most famous - in Los Angeles at the Azusa Street Mission. Initially most of these began with little or no known inter-connection between them, but as things developed, contact began to be made.

Numerically, some of these did not involve very large numbers. For instance, the work in Sunderland was primarily centred in the locality around All Saints Anglican Church in Monkwearmouth where Alexander Boddy was vicar, and where the Venerable Bede was thought to have been born some 1330 years previously. Interestingly it was here that Smith Wigglesworth came into a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit which he then took back to Bradford. Although the revival in the Khasi Hills saw some of the most remarkable conversions with over 8,000 converts from Hinduism

being baptised in a two-year period, the geographical extent of the work remained small. The Welsh revival was larger, covering most of Wales, and some of the newspapers reports contained lists of converts which were numbered in the tens of thousands. It was also reported:

“Such was the transformation of some Welsh coal miners that it was said the pit ponies couldn't understand their masters once they had stopped swearing”.

The length of time these revivals lasted varied enormously. The impact on Wales and Los Angeles was dramatic but then faded to the place where today there is virtually no trace of the former glory. In contrast, Korea, which prior to the nineteenth century had possibly no Christians at all, has seen continued life, and South Korea now possibly has the largest percentage of Christians per head of population anywhere in the world. The Khasi Hills in India, which then saw a limited move, appears to have intermittently continued to experience the blessing of God in some measure, and as recently as fourteen years ago some renewed visitations were reported, including the following:

“The revival began on Saturday the 22 April 2006 among a huge number of people in Mairang, the place where the 1906 revival first broke out. Hundreds of delegates were attending the afternoon service of the Revival Centenary commemoration, whilst a minimum of 150,000 people (with reports of up to 300,000) sat outside on the huge lawns of the of the Mairang Presbyterian Church. The Holy Spirit came in such a powerful way that the delegates continued to sing and pray for hours in driving rain which continued for about half an hour, unmoved and oblivious to the elements.”

Perhaps both the biggest (in terms of numbers) and the most effective (in terms of lasting impact) were the 1859 revival in England and the 1950-54 revival in Argentina. The population of both countries was similar, around twenty million, at the time of the revivals and the estimated number of converts in each was around the million mark, or 5% of the populations. The effect in England lasted about forty years and in Argentina there is still evidence of some fruit today.

THE PAST THREE HUNDRED YEARS

Some historians have traced the passage of revivals since the early church. Many of these revivals, especially in Europe during the pre-Reformation period, are of interest and relevance. For our purposes here, we will begin with the move of God in 1727, when there was a well-attested outpouring of the Spirit on August 13th of that year at Herrnhut (Saxony, Germany). This was a Christian community built on the estate of Count Zinzendorf and it became the home and sending base of many of the Christians known as Moravians.

It was whilst travelling with some of these Moravians that John Wesley was challenged to examine his own life and faith on a stormy crossing of the Atlantic. Wesley and others, especially George Whitefield, frequently journeyed between England and America in the following years and saw many instances of revival in both countries.

Whitefield, who was arguably the better speaker, having trained for the theatre as a young man, spoke in the open air to crowds, at times estimated to exceed 50,000. He, Wesley, and others saw tens of thousands converted and brought into the kingdom of God.

The work of God over the period of Wesley's lifetime (though not accomplished just through Wesley for there were many others involved) and beyond, up until the third decade of the nineteenth century, was particularly studied by W.B. Sprague who published his 'Lectures on the Revivals of Religion' in 1832. This included a collection of twenty, first-hand accounts written by American ministers of various churches. (It is worth noting for those who sometimes see the intellect as a hindrance to revival, that nineteen of the accounts were written by men who were Doctors of Divinity.) Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called Sprague's work 'a volume of outstanding merit and exceptional worth'.

One of the key things that Sprague brings to the fore, is the normality of revival. He never argues for continuous revival, but importantly, he sees it as something which the church should expect to happen from time to time on an ongoing basis; the intervening periods being respite opportunities for consolidation and growth. Based on an historical and personally researched study of the second half of the eighteenth century and the first couple of decades of the nineteenth, Sprague came to this conclusion:

"It has now come to pass in these days in which we live, that the far greater number of those who are turned from darkness to light, so far as we can judge, experience this change during revivals of religion."

At the time of Sprague's writing, the American revivalist, Charles Grandison Finney, was also preparing his 'Lectures on Revivals' where he came to similar conclusions to Sprague, stating that:

"Almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals"

He went on further to suggest:

"It is altogether improbable that religion will ever make progress among heathen nations except through the influence of revivals."

Within thirty years of Sprague and Finney coming to these conclusions, England saw around a million people, and America hundreds of thousands of people, converted in periods of revival.

Many and varied were the people who were involved in ministry both then and in subsequent years. Perhaps the most outstanding of them was D.L. Moody, a young evangelist who began effective preaching in America around the time the 1859 revival began, and who led huge campaigns both in America and in the United Kingdom. By the time he died at the end of the century the number of converts he had brought into the kingdom was estimated in hundreds of thousands. This post-revival period also saw the ministry of men such as C.H. Spurgeon who was preaching to crowds of 2,000 people whilst still in his teens and whose later congregations throughout his life were generally numbered in thousands. This was also the era of the foundation of the Salvation Army under William Booth and many of the great social reforms which were brought about on the back of the revival during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Many of the major children's homes and child care organisations were founded during this period.

Though started some 23 years before the 1859 revival, one which flourished through and beyond it, was the famous Muller Homes, started by George Muller and his wife and in which, over their lifetimes, they were reported to have looked after 10,000 orphans.

In addition they also started 117 Christian Schools serving over 120,000 children. Muller believed the work of God would be supported by the provision of God, And he made it a policy never to solicit money or make his needs known to anyone.

“Through all this, Müller never made requests for financial support. Many times, he received unsolicited food donations only hours before they were needed to feed the children, further strengthening his faith in God. For example, on one well-documented occasion, they gave thanks for breakfast when all the children were sitting at the table, even though there was nothing to eat in the house. As they finished praying, the baker knocked on the door with sufficient fresh bread to feed everyone, and the milkman gave them plenty of fresh milk because his cart broke down in front of the orphanage.”

It is worth noting, that whilst there were the beginnings of major missionary moves in the previous years running up to the revival, such as in South America, China and the Pacific Islands, these all moved into more productive work running parallel to the revival. Missions to the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), the South American Missionary Society and the China Inland Mission and others, all made progress in these years. This was undergirded by the second and subsequent waves of missionaries going overseas with the revival fires of the Spirit fresh in their hearts and minds, and with Spirit renewed prayers of support from the awakened churches in the United Kingdom. This tends to confirm Finney’s view that revival needs to be the basis for work on overseas mission fields.

By the time the world turned into the twentieth century, it had experienced wave after wave of Spirit filled Christians pioneering into new and uncharted territory. Many of these were the cream of England’s cultural and sporting generation. Lilius Trotter, who was rejected for mission work on health grounds, went to Algeria at the

age of 34 with two other women who had also been rejected as unfit. They were self-supporting financially and turned their backs on lives that have been marked by wealth and ease. Lilius was a painter of such exceptional talent that when the great art critic John Ruskin saw her work, he told her that:

“if she would devote herself to her art ‘she would be the greatest living painter and do things that would be Immortal.’”

When she and her companions arrived in Algeria, Trotter recalled:

“Three of us stood there, looking at our battle-field, none of us fit to pass a doctor for any society, not knowing a soul in the place, or a sentence of Arabic or a clue for beginning work on untouched ground; we only knew we had to come. Truly if God needed weakness, He had it!”

Their converts were never as numerous as those which followed some revival situations, but they often contained elements of the miraculous, with men and women being converted through visions and vivid encounters with the risen Christ. In common with the situation today in some Islamic countries, many of these new Christians were killed by their families.

Born at Spratton in Northamptonshire, C.T. Studd was another of the exceptionally wealthy and talented young people of his generation who went on the mission field. Both he and two brothers played cricket for England and he was in the match between England and Australia that originated ‘The Ashes’. When he left for China as a young man in his twenties, he went as one of a group called the Cambridge Seven; all graduates from the university of that name; all distinguished in sport or society and all destined to be pioneers in the wave of missions which were born out of the revival fires which began in 1859. Studd later pioneered in Africa.

He also founded WEC (Worldwide Evangelisation Crusade) out of which was born CLC (Christian Literature Crusade) which has been foremost in publishing many books on mission and revival, including those by Watchman Nee. The foundations they laid in Africa were built upon and expanded by Willie Burton, who was greatly affected by both the Welsh and Asuza Street revivals, and who, in 50 years of mission in Africa was reported to have been involved in founding some 2,000 pentecostal churches.

“Born in Liverpool in 1886, Burton came from a strong christian background. His parents had dedicated him to God's work in Africa even before he was born and as he grew, servants of the Lord had laid hands on him with a prayer that God would send him to preach the gospel in Africa.”

THE LAST ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS

Many of the main, early pentecostal denominations were founded in the years following revival. Continuing the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, some of them saw decades of growth – especially through the dual outreach ministries of evangelism and healing. Stephen Jeffreys was converted at the beginning of the Welsh revival together with his 15 year-old younger brother, George. Stephen was the first to move out in ministry and saw remarkable results of both healings and conversions. George followed in his footsteps and soon became not only the leader in

their partnership but also the leader of what became known as the Elim Evangelistic Band. George is the recognised founder of the Elim Church which he later left after failing to bring about a change in the form of governmental leadership they had adopted. He then founded the Bible Pattern Church (which operates independent local government of churches as distinct from Elim's centralised government).

Other pentecostal churches such as the Church of God, the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic church and many others also grew at this time, again particularly through the dual tools of evangelism and healing.

The Jeffreys brothers saw remarkable healings. A long gone to glory, elderly friend of mine had been present in some of their meetings, and he told me of an occasion in Swansea, where a local hunchback newspaper boy went for prayer. When prayed for he jerked straight upright – healed. The young man was well known as his pitch was in a busy and highly visible part of the town (I suppose a bit like the man at the Gate Beautiful in Jerusalem.) My old friend Alec, told me that the place went wild – so obviously genuine and spectacular was the miracle. As I came to write this article I read in a book written decades after the event, an account of the very same healing.

I had not really doubted my friend as many of the miracles through the Jeffreys are well documented with written testimonies and photographs taken at venues where they had ministered. Some photographs appear to show walls and tables with crutches, sticks, canes and I believe even an iron lung, left behind by those who had been healed.

Few will not have heard of Smith Wigglesworth, who again had an outstanding ministry of healing. He preached, and with many good

results, but it was his wife Polly who had been the preacher in the family before God strongly moved on Smith. The stories surrounding the miracles He wrought through him are legendary. On eight occasions it is reported that people were raised from the dead, and it is recorded that one man with no feet was told to go and buy a pair of shoes before Smith prayed for them to be filled. However skeptical we might be on the one hand or credulous to accept everything on the other, it cannot be denied that Wigglesworth has stamped his mark on the pentecostalism of the twentieth century.

I have also heard first-hand, some of the stories of healings and conversions which took place in Northampton (where I live) from the 1950s and 60s when The Assemblies of God and Elim churches were started in our town. I was converted in London in the early days of the charismatic house church movement in the late 60s and there will shortly be a celebration of fifty years of Catholic charismatic renewal, which nearly parallels my own journey. I am sure there are many of us from all spectrums of the church scene who could recount occasions over that period, perhaps rarer than we would have wished, but true nonetheless, of lives changed through physical, emotional and spiritual healing.

One of the important questions we need to ask as we consider revival, is where the earlier evangelism/healing movements and the later renewal movements fit in? Are they in fact revival, but on a lesser scale? Or are they something quite different?

There are other things to consider also. What about the restoration movement which became one of the flagships for some of the charismatic house churches and which has occurred many times before but under different names and guises? Where too does reformation fit in, and the increasingly numerous new expressions of church, which are fast becoming patterns for future programs?

Before we consider these things, let us look at some of the events of the past 100 years, which, by common consent, would be considered revival similar to the things of the past. In the United Kingdom, perhaps the first would be what has been termed 'The Forgotten Revival'.

"We had been praying for showers that night and God gave us a cloud burst, it was just like waiting outside a theatre, there was one queue down this side and another down that, fifty or sixty to start with, the door opened and another batch came in, presently there was quietness and that night between sixty and seventy of the young people we had been praying for, young men and women between the ages of fifteen and twenty, were converted."

It was Lowestoft, March 1921. The most easterly town in Britain with a population of 44,000, Lowestoft had received some of the German bombardment of the First World War, and some said it had caused the people to think of religion. In the Spring of 1921, Douglas Brown, a Baptist minister from Balham in South London, had been engaged to lead a week of mission.

Once a sea-port with a flourishing fishing industry, Lowestoft still had over 300 fishing boats searching for herring in the North Sea and the English Channel, but since the war the industry was in decline. In January of 1921, one of the local ministers, Hugh Ferguson, had preached on the subject; 'What profit is there if we pray?' in which he had made the statement:

"All the trouble and confusion in public work today is due to the fact that men are trying to manage the world without God."

The people of Lowestoft were ready to respond, and the Spirit of God was brooding over this coastal town and began a convicting and converting work. By the end of the summer when around 400

Scottish Herring boats had joined the local fleet for the movement of fish that came down the coast, there was a revival in full flow and the Scottish fishermen and the fisherwomen who gutted the herrings on shore responded in their hundreds. Thousands were converted, both locals and those from the North. The revival spread to neighboring towns and cities such as Yarmouth, Norwich and Cambridge and then, through the fisher folk, up to the home ports on the North-East coast of Scotland.

In the United Kingdom, I am not aware of another revival until 1948 when there was a remarkable move in Lewis and Harris in the Hebrides. Although it only affected a small area, the evident power that was present makes it a time to be remembered. There were occasions recorded when the crews of vessels approaching land came under conviction as they came into shore. Before they were able to cross the beach to their destinations, they were struck down under conviction and thoroughly and permanently converted with no human agency present.

Both Lowestoft and The Hebrides were notable in two points. The first was for the level of conviction of sin that brought about such thorough and lasting conversions to Christ, and the second was for the apparent absence of pentecostal phenomena.

Though not widely reported, there was also the whisper of revival in Bradford in the early 1950s where it was recorded that in three consecutive weeks, three generations of a family were converted – grandmother, mother and daughter. This small revival was one of the many sources that fueled, and later merged into, the charismatic movement some ten years later.

In other countries however, there were a number of remarkable moves. In Sweden under the ministry of Lewi Pethrus, the church in Stockholm where he ministered grew to 6,000 people and was

at that time reputed to be the largest in the world. In China in the 1920s, under the ministries of the Norwegian, Maria Monsen and the Canadian, Jonathan Goforth and a number of Chinese evangelists, the church increased dramatically. Particularly under Goforth's ministry there were some astonishing instances of conviction with people making heart-rending confessions of the most serious of crimes in public meetings. Whilst it appeared that there was genuine fruit following these confessions, Goforth did little to encourage them publicly. At times he actively discouraged some of the physical phenomena which were happening, on one occasion at least, rebuking someone who had fallen down whilst he was speaking, and instructing them to get up and sit on their seat.

Following this period in the twenties, a number of Chinese ministers came to the fore, such as Watchman Nee, who led the church into a period which in hindsight, seems as if it was part of the preparation of God for the Communist take-over.

In the years following World War II, there were many instances of significant revival around the globe. The Hebrides in the UK, Rwanda in Africa, again parts of India and in particular Argentina. Rwanda had a worldwide impact through the concept of 'keeping close accounts with God' which required instant repentance, putting away of sin, and reconciliation with others. Roy Hession, who was involved in this and who wrote the book 'The Calvary Road' was seen by many as another who prepared the way for the charismatic movement. Not by teaching or emphasising gifts, but by preaching a close walk with God which stimulated a hunger for both holiness and effectiveness.

Without doubt though, the Argentinian revival was the most significant move of God in this period, not least because there was very little spiritual life in the country and even less knowledge of the bible before the revival came.

“In the summer of 1954 Buenos Aires sold out of bibles. Fifty five thousand were purchased in a matter of weeks and an urgent request was made to bring in more by air.”

As far as we can tell the seeds of God’s moving began in 1948, blossoming into full flower during the first four years of the next decade. Argentina had been locked into a secularised form of Catholicism merged with the Spiritism promoted by Eva Peron, wife of the president, and made famous in recent years through the musical, ‘Evita’. Out of a population of twenty million, Christians were counted in no more than a few thousands, and they were often ridiculed and despised.

Taking hold of a group of students at a bible school, God began to both teach them, and cause them to travail in agonising prayer for the nation. For two years very little happened. Then the floodgates opened. At one stage, the largest sports stadium in Buenos Aires holding 180,000 was rented, and it was filled every day for three months.

Miracles of healing and radical conversions took place in the thousands. The secular newspapers were filled with the news of what was happening and reporters and editors from the papers were among those convinced and converted. Conversations on trains and trams covered little else except what God was doing. By 1955 one in every twenty persons in the country had been converted and the hold of both secular Catholicism and Spiritism was broken.

What happened in Argentina became one of the stimuli for the charismatic movement in both America and the UK. People such as Juan Carlos Ortiz impacted the thinking and practices in the West, both in respect of the significance of the Holy Spirit and in the form and structure of the Church. Some twenty years after the revival, some churches in America, and then England, began to

embrace what became known as restoration theology – the teaching that God has a structure for the Church, especially centered around the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic ministries, and based on a pattern adopted by the churches founded by Paul and the first wave of apostles.

Since Argentina there have been other outbreaks of revival, especially in parts of Asia, such as Indonesia and in parts of the continent of Africa, but not in our country.

Today there are a number of questions we need to ask and issues we need to face. Some will want to query why I have not included such things as the move at Toronto Airport Vineyard, some of the outbreaks in the Southern States of America or the recent, very localised moves in Wales and a few towns in England. Others will simply want to say ‘It just doesn’t happen anymore, people have changed and so the church has got to change with the times and adapt its methods to fit in with a multi-cultural ethos and a secular society’.

It would be foolish to think that we can come up with all the answers, but we feel it important that we at least try to understand what has happened, what is happening and what might come in the future.

WHAT IS AND IS NOT REVIVAL?

Apart from Sprague and Finney, there are others who have undertaken extensive and detailed studies of revivals as they actually happened or as they were recorded first hand. Perhaps the most thorough were J. Edwin Orr and K.S. Latourette. The latter was Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University for nearly thirty years. There are others such as Leonard Ravenhill, Jessie Penn Lewis and R. Edward Miller who have written more popular accounts, but there is remarkable agreement on the major points that have been observed by all of them.

If we are going to define revival as it has been generally recognised by those who have studied it, it is important that we do not pluck our definitions out of thin air or on the basis of recent popular usage of the term, but look at the consensus of those who have proven experience in the field.

On this basis, I would suggest that the agreed marks of true revival are as follows:

1. A clear recognition that this is a visitation of God in a definable geographical area. This does not mean that all respond positively to it, nor that there is agreement without exception, but that the overwhelming consensus, is that 'this is God'.

- 2 A marked, and sometimes astonishing, conviction of sin that results in repentance, restitution and reconciliation. Sometimes those who refuse to respond have to leave the area in order avoid repenting.

3. An impact on those who were previously unchurched which results in real, thorough, and sometimes surprising, conversions.

4. A subsequent measurable change in the behaviour and the ethos of the town or area in which the revival happened. The length of time this change lasts may vary considerably but it is always there.

5. A re-emphasis on the work of the Spirit to apply all the benefits of Christ's accomplishment for us in dealing with both the guilt and power of sin.

It may be possible to suggest other marks, but these are the ones generally noted. I would suggest that without all of these, whatever is happening (and it may be good) it does not qualify to be termed as revival.

Whilst some revivals have seen outbreaks of miraculous healings and manifestations of other charismatic gifts, others have not. Also there are well attested instances of the gifts outside periods of revival so this aspect should not be considered as one of the marks.

On this basis therefore such things as the Toronto Blessing would not be included. This has been the conclusion of many bible teachers and leaders, not least David Pawson, who made a careful assessment of the matter.

Neither, on the basis of the marks above, can the charismatic movement be termed revival. I was involved in many aspects of the charismatic movement in the early days (as well as in later years). At Biggin Hill, in Kent during the 1970s, at one stage we were seeing conversions on an almost weekly basis. On at least one occasion, the church became so crowded that people were left outside looking through the windows. Since the church linked up

with (what was then) New Frontiers, several other churches have been planted out in other towns and villages. There were some exceptionally good times, but based on the marks we have considered, not coming within the defined boundaries of revival.

At one time, restoration teaching came to the fore in parts of the charismatic movement, especially in some of the house/new churches. Some have traced the roots of this teaching to what God had done in Argentina in the decades following the revival there. One of the particular links was Orville Swindoll whose book 'Times of Restoration' was published in 1983 with an endorsement by Bob Mumford. Swindoll had been a missionary in Argentina since 1959 and had seen and worked with the post-revival church that had formed in many places on the fivefold ministry basis of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists.

This type of church formation was not new in post-revival situations where there had previously been little or nothing to start with, and several of the early pentecostal churches, especially but not exclusively in Africa, had an apostolic form of church government. However, when the Argentinian model was copied in America and the UK, it was brought into situations where, very often, there were large numbers of people who had been Christians in other churches beforehand.

The results were very mixed. Some churches saw spectacular growth whilst others saw hurt and disillusioned Christians leaving the church altogether. Though some believe (and some still believe) the future growth of the church will be accomplished through restructuring to what is seen as a New Testament pattern, in the UK at least, there is little evidence of this being fulfilled. Few would now acknowledge this as any form of revival, but some did consider it so, and it has left an important impact on the thinking of some church leaders.

SOME DISADVANTAGES OF REVIVAL

I want to make it quite clear that the point of this booklet is to help us move into a place where we might see genuine revival again, but if we have studied the history of revivals we cannot help but recognise that there are some disadvantages, and we would be unwise to ignore them.

Revivals are not a cure all for what is wrong with the church. During a revival God deals dramatically with individuals and brings many into an experience of conversion away from the world and sin and into his Kingdom, but, and this is very important, revivals rarely impact theological faults and can create an environment where poor discernment allows and even welcomes wrong practices.

In particular, it should be realised that revivals are not reformation. Times of reformation will have the greatest long term impact on churches and are absolutely vital for God's full plans but they are of a completely different nature. Revival will deal with sin, kick start the church and bring an ingathering of converts, and it can do it very quickly. Reformation deals with error, wrong practices, and most importantly, wrong thinking about ourselves, the world and God, and it tends to take a while to make the necessary adjustments.

One of the reasons for this is fairly obvious. Revivals usually bring in a wave of new converts, who by the very fact of being new born

are immature in faith and experience. The ministries most needed to nurture the new converts are those of the apostle, pastor and teacher (whatever they might be called in a particular era) and all require many years before they become effective.

Revivals are times of intense experience and should be accepted as such, but there does also need to be discernment so that the good experience is received, welcomed and incorporated, and the false experience identified and dealt with. After the Welsh revival, Jessie Penn Lewis, who was also intimately involved throughout, spent time in reflection on what had happened, and working with Evan Roberts who was one of the main leaders, produced an assessment of it entitled 'War on the Saints'. Their verdict was that most of what happened was positive, but they also agreed that many excesses of the flesh and even the demonic had crept in.

Unless we study the writings of those who have been in previous revivals, we may be unprepared to deal with the inevitable attacks of the enemy that will accompany times of visitation. Many of those who wrote about the revivals in China prior to the Communist take-over, appear to have wrestled sensibly with many issues of discernment, learning how to separate the good from the bad. Of course, we must also immerse ourselves in the word of God in order to understand his ways and the principles upon which he works through his Spirit.

These things must happen in the years between revivals, times when for most of us we will have the least inclination to do so.

Prayer for revival must include prayer that God will equip apostles, pastors, teachers and discerning leaders to be ready when it comes. Generally speaking, revival has little long term effect on the nature of the church. Those who were Presbyterians, Anglicans or Baptists before revival, will tend to revert to those forms after it, however

much they might have walked in unity and co-operation during it. The exception to this tends to be where a new church is founded on the basis of a shared experience, such as the pentecostal denominations which arose after the 1898 – 1908 revivals around the world. Such a foundation is not necessarily the best on which to form long-term church relationships, and overall the pentecostal denominations have since become the most diverse and divisive of any church group in history.

Another thing to note, is that a superficial knowledge of revivals can give rise to poor thinking and false expectations of what we should be looking for. It would seem that many who are praying for revival are primarily looking for the experience of the revival (that is a sense of God's presence) rather than the fruit of revival (exposure of and dealing with sin leading to radical conversions).

One of the major concerns about what has happened in some of the minor visitations that have taken place over the past few decades, such as some aspects of the Toronto Blessing, is the concentration on outward manifestations rather than inward conviction and repentance. Whilst manifestations have occurred in many, if not most revivals in the past (even in the non-charismatic Hebridean revival people were struck down and fixed in trance like positions), those who have been in situations of leadership, have not usually encouraged manifestations, have sometimes actively discouraged them, and have usually called for discernment about the matter.

But, in some of these recent moves there has been disagreement about the validity of some of the things that have been happening.

Without trying to pass any overall judgements on the matter, what should be of concern to us is that if we do not have clear discernment in these minor events, how can God trust us with a major move of his Spirit that will require mature discernment?

I believe that revival is good – but I am concerned when I hear prayers that concentrate on an anticipated experience, without prayers for conviction, conversion, discernment and wisdom.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF REVIVAL?

There is considerable agreement on the matter by those who have studied revivals over the centuries. Whilst there may be some room to discuss an exact order of things, the most likely appears to be the following:

1. Faith that God actually wants to give revival and that it is within the scope of his promises to the church. Sometimes this aspect of faith already exists in the church as an ongoing belief that revivals are a normal (though not continuous) part of the life of the church. This may be seen particularly in the mid and second half of the eighteenth century and especially in the new American Colonies. Two of those involved in this period (sometimes called the First Great Awakening) were David Brainherd and Jonathan Edwards. They, and many of those who followed on in that period, *expected* revival. Indeed, toward the latter end of the century in America,

some ministers would question whether something was wrong if revival did not happen. During most periods, this understanding has not been to the fore in christian thinking, and faith has only come through the special stimulation of testimony (often of other revivals) or of preaching that God should be believed.

2. Prayer. If faith is looking to God to fulfill his promises, then the logical next step is to pray to that end. The prayer that has prevailed in times past has been focused, persistent and sacrificial. Ten minutes tacked on to the end of a meeting has not sufficed. Quite frankly, some of the testimonies of pre-revival prayer are scary. There have been individuals who have devoted themselves to weeks of prayer full-time, daily meetings of hundreds or, (in Melbourne Australia in 1901) 40,000 meeting regularly, often for half nights of prayer, in 2,000 different homes. But, this is where the mystery of human and divine interaction comes in; what is not possible with us (for who could bear it?) is nonetheless possible with God. One thing to be stressed here is that it is not simply the amount of prayer (nor the volume of it), but prayer that is rooted in faith and based on a clear understanding of the promises of God.

3. Affirmation of the bible as the word of God. I have not been able to discover any revival where the bible was not seen as God's vehicle of truth.

4. Preaching, and in particular preaching of the cross. Jessie Penn Lewis, one of the main chroniclers of the Welsh revival, records that at the Keswick Convention in 1902, two years before the revival started, there was a call for prayer groups to be formed to pray for a world-wide revival. Many had already been praying and seeking God and some were in a place of high expectancy. However, Lewis says that when God was asked why revival had not yet come, He indicated that the church was not ready. The apparent lack being that the message of Calvary was not preached.

His followers as being workers in the harvest, and Paul took up a similar theme when he wrote to the Corinthians saying that he planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the harvest.

Traditionally, especially among the early Church Fathers, but also through teachers of most eras of the Church, there has been an understanding that revelation comes from God by the Holy Spirit through nature as well as through the word. Because all true revelation is from God, we may expect agreement between these different ways. Jesus appeared to confirm this by His repeated use of natural illustrations to give understanding on spiritual matters.

One thing that is clear when we observe the natural growth of plants, is that the process from seed to flower to fruit, is not one that happens at an even consistent pace. We understand that in the natural world you do not plant lettuce seeds in the middle of winter and you do not look to pick snowdrops in August. The seasons, heat and cold, length of days, rain and sunshine all work together in creation to produce fruit at the right time. Continuous heat or cold and unending rain or sunshine, are not what is required. Each stage, some more pleasant than others, are all needed.

There are times and seasons, periods of cold and sun, times of drought and times of rain. In the scriptures Israel looked for the former rain and the latter rain to bring their crops to maturity, and when God instituted the feasts, whilst commemorating His acts, they also coincided with the passage of the seasons for Israel. Just as in the natural world there are distinct and different times and seasons, so too in the spiritual realm. All times are not, and should not be, the same. The book of Ecclesiastes records that there is a time for every matter under heaven; including opposites such as breaking down and building up or scattering stones and gathering them together.

Whilst there may be exceptions, it would seem that the normal process of growth God has built into life, incorporates both different times and different intensities. We are all aware of the verses in Peter and James where trial and hardships are presented as opportunities for maturing and growing. We need them. We need the times of process where a long journey in the same direction under hard and adverse circumstances, will slowly but surely build our spiritual muscles and christian character. But few of us could survive in an environment of continual unremitting hardship. We also need times of comfort, joy and encouragement.

What is true for us as individuals, is also true for the corporate people of God. When we read the Old Testament we see times and seasons, hardship and blessing, barrenness and fruitfulness. Some of these were for the chastisement of God's people as they moved through times of disobedience, but others were for growth and the focusing of faith on the way that God was leading.

Throughout the Old Testament, especially through the prophets, God points his people forward to the era of the New, which would be marked by times that are spoken of as streams in the desert, the desert blossoming as the rose, as showers in a dry land. It was to be the era of the Spirit. Growth and progress require testing and hardships, but these scriptures also speak clearly that, at least some of the time, there will be some spectacularly good and fruitful times as well. The ministry of Jesus and the early church clearly enjoyed some of these good times.

It seems that God's use of times of revival is entirely consistent with His revealed methods of growth. We might ask why God chooses to use showers as well as sunshine, and we may not fully understand why. What we can do though, is observe His ways and note the consistency of them. In both the natural and the spiritual we see that there are fallow times and times when life bursts forth.

IS THE AGE OF REVIVALS OVER?

To deny that God has used times of revival in the history of the Church would be to call into question both the integrity and accuracy of countless men and women of God. It would be on par with denying the existence of Julius Caesar or the fact of the Wars of the Roses. More pertinent perhaps is the assertion made by many, possibly most, of those in the church today who, accepting that God may have moved in this way in the past, have no real hope or expectation that he will do so again in the future.

It is not generally suggested that God has changed, but it does appear that some sections of the church, argue or assume by word or action, that people and the times have changed, and changed to such an extent that methods which God has used in the past will no longer be effective today.

C.S. Lewis observed that all generations and cultures have areas of correct understanding and areas of error. When a particular generation only compares itself with itself, some of the good points might indeed flourish, but so do the bad. He considered it unlikely that different generations would share similar errors to the same degree, and so any particular generation could obtain some safeguard against its own mistakes by constant and wide comparisons with other generations.

Possibly more than any other, our generation has failed to embrace this good advice, and so stands in a position where its only point of reference is itself.

Again it was Lewis who, in the 1940s, predicted what he considered to be a near fatal shift in thinking, especially in the West – the universal rejection of absolutes. A wide range of intelligent, thoughtful, christian thinkers of his era saw the trend coming. Dorothy Sayers, Francis Schaeffer, Jacques Ellul and others all spoke prophetically that the very nature of how we think and understand things was under threat.

At the heart of the shift away from absolutes, was the rejection that something could be defined as being what it is in its own nature. Instead it was insisted not only that it could, but that it should be defined by whatever we determine it to be. This stance has now become a bedrock of society and influences many of the laws and foundations of our education system.

When we look at Christianity in our country, it mirrors the thinking of our society rather than opposing it with the word of God. We have become culture embracing rather than counter cultural.

We need to understand that many Christians have no expectation of revival, not because they consciously reject God's purposes or will, but because they have accepted the world's insistence that things need to be re-defined, not on the basis of what they are but on what we decide them to be.

At one of the most obvious levels, it appears that the Church is no longer thought of as the dwelling place of God created primarily for his purposes and pleasure, but somewhere where those who have little or no faith in God can come and be happy. Unbelievers may be encouraged to think that Christians are just like everyone

else: perhaps just a little nicer and happier. This may sound cynical but some denominational magazines appear to be full of stories of how welcome non-Christians are being made in many churches, but are noticeably missing stories of how those who have been welcomed are being converted. I recently heard an excited report of a messy church where half of those attending were Muslims – but there appeared no expectation that they would encounter Jesus and be converted.

Much of the energy in some churches has been diverted to making the world comfortable, rather than firstly ministering to God. Because we do not focus on serving God, we lose sight of the reality of who He is and we no longer expect His total support. The result of this may be that instead of depending on Him, we look to the world for the provision of our needs. Our efforts then move toward finding the best methods for making friends with the world and cooperating with it.

In such a situation, without a complete change of direction, it will be impossible to discover faith for revival. We will no longer pray for it with assured faith, no longer argue and act on the basis that the bible is the word of God and we will no longer preach the cross. The cross is far too offensive for the world. Instead of proclaiming Jesus as the one who can and will transform lives, we teeter on the edge of unbelief, no longer expecting people to radically change, but rather adjusting the church to accommodate them so that they can come in and stay just as they are.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO SEE REVIVAL AGAIN?

If churches are not in a position to move forward as they should, and as they need to, we have to consider whether it is possible for them to sufficiently recover to see revival again.

I believe they can, because the outcome is not based on the fitness of the Church but on the promises and power of God. However, the churches must stir themselves to respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to deep repentance and then to action. There are several things that need to happen:

First and foremost, we must rediscover the promises and purposes of almighty God. Faith can only operate effectively when it is based on what God has said He will do. If we do not know His purposes, we will not be able to believe them and if we do not believe them we will not pray for them to be accomplished. If we do not know that God intends times and seasons of visitation (what we call revivals), we will never be able to pray persistently for Him to act in this way.

Secondly, we must re-dedicate ourselves totally and unreservedly to God. We can then begin again to recover faith that God – the unchanging God – can and will bare his arm of power again, in

line with his promises that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Thirdly, we must reject all known sin in our lives and recover the truth that God is able to preserve us in holiness for Himself.

Fourthly, we need to be certain that we are filled with the Holy Spirit and yielded entirely to Christ through him.

Fifthly, we must repent of the notion that preaching has had it. By all means let us get rid of bad preaching, self-centered preaching, people pleasing preaching and uninspired preaching; but the preaching of Jesus Christ, man and God, crucified, buried, risen, ascended, glorified, Lord of all and coming again, must be proclaimed and become central again. It is an absolute lie of the devil that people today will not cope with real, biblical, Christ centered preaching, for it is this that God himself has ordained as the method to reach human hearts and He will own it, and send the Spirit to witness to it. Without this there will be no true revival.

Sixthly, we must recover an understanding of prayer which brings it into a place of priority in our lives.

Seventhly, we must be renewed by the transforming of our minds, not letting the world squeeze us into its mould, but rather receiving from God the mind of Christ. This will be more difficult than many of us expect. The strategy of the devil has been to consistently attack and destroy our understanding of truth. Jesus said that the devil is the father of lies and that he was unable to speak truth. There has been a battle going on throughout history, but the last seventy years have seen the Church in retreat and many of us no longer have any accurate understanding how to distinguish between truth and lies.

Eighthly, we need to address the imbalance of faith and works that has come into churches in recent years. The Church is in a strange position, insofar as we are balancing on an edge between gratitude and acceptance by the world for the increasing good works that are being done, and rejection and persecution for any presentation of Jesus however slight or innocuous it is. Good works are essential, but they are only of significant value when they are produced as the fruit of faith, rather than something accomplished by partnership with the world.

Finally, we must recover the worship and service of God in Spirit and truth. If we order our times together and choose the content of our services in order to please people, whether visitors, the young, the old, the singles, the families or ethnic groups instead of holy and almighty God, then let's forget about asking for revival and just form religious clubs.

If we set our hearts to see these matters put right, whether in our generation, the next, or those to come, we need to be aware that it will cost us everything. Many of us will find that friends and family will become distant, and that we will be thought extreme. If our friends think us extreme then we can be fairly certain that the world will also, and the waves of legislation that have come in already and which are also in the pipeline, will bear down heavily upon us.

When I became a Christian fifty years ago it was just before my 21st Birthday. At my birthday party I shared some of my testimony and I remember one of my aunts taking me aside afterwards. 'This is very good', she said, 'but just don't take it too seriously.' My main regret in life is that it has taken me so long to take it as seriously as I should have done back then.

LORD, SEND REVIVAL! FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS AND THE FURTHERANCE OF YOUR KINGDOM

