

THE REVIVAL

The Christian Church is faced today with the challenge from some within her ranks and those without that the day of revivals is past. In studying church history we find that the Christian Church has been a church of revivals.

It is for revivals that the church is continually praying. The praise of revivals is upon her lips. She looks back on the days of Edwards, Finney, Whitefield and Wesley and eulogizes those days.

Before we agree with the modern church and say that the day of revivals is past, and that we must add to our church exclusively through the Sunday School, Junior Leagues, etc., let us find out what constitutes a revival. If the church is so much interested in the subject, and revivals have such a vital effect upon the church, then the church should understand its nature.

What is a revival of religion? First, what is the nature of religion? Religion, according to Dr. Sprague, consists in a conformity of the heart and life to the will of God. It consists in a principle of obedience implanted in the soul, and in the operation of that principle in the conduct. Religion is substantially the same in all worlds; though the religion of the sinner is modified, in some respects, by his peculiar character and condition. In common with the religion of the angels, it consists in the love to God to his law, to his government, to his service; but in distinction from that, consists in repentance of sin; faith in the merits of a crucified Saviour; resignation under trials. Religion in the angels is an inherent principle; it begins with their existence; but in the human heart it is superinduced by the operation of the Spirit of God. Hence a revival of religion is a revival of spiritual knowledge; of vital piety; of practical obedience.

The term revival of religion has sometimes been objected to on the ground that a revival of anything supposes its previous existence; whereas in the renovation of sinners, there is a principle implanted which is entirely new. But though the fact implied in this objection is admitted, the objection itself has no force; because the term is intended to be applied in a general sense, to the condition of Christians, who, at such a season, are in a greater or less degree revived; and whose increased zeal is usually rendered instrumental of the conversion of sinners. Wherever then you see religion rising up from a state of comparative depression to a tone of increased vigor and strength; whenever you see professing Christians becoming more faithful to their obligations, and behold the strength of the church increased by fresh accessions of piety from the world, there is a state of things which you need not hesitate to denominate a revival of religion.

One objection to the revival is that too much of the human is evident. The evangelist uses psychology on his audience and the feelings and emotions are wrought upon to a too greater extent.

But I maintain that there must be the presence of the supernatural plus some natural manifestation. If history establishes any fact, it is that modern civilization, imposing as it is, if divorced from an evangelical Christian faith whose vitality depends upon its contact with supernaturalism, will be involved in a gloomy hopelessness as the proud attainments of Babylon and Nineveh, or of Greece and Rome. The salt that is to save this world is not

human nature alone, nor in the improvements of civilized life.

The normal forces in human nature, though under both the highest form of intellectual culture and the best conditions of modern society, and though still further centralized and protected by the most flourishing ecclesiastical organization in Christendom, be they Popish, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, are, if we read history correctly, utterly powerless in producing essential, desirable, and permanent revivals and reforms.

One of the most imposing church constitutions of antiquity was the Jewish Theocracy. Its fundamental dogmas were correct; it had strength and majesty in its ceremonial observances; it had teachers, prophets and reformers; it had even the special admonitions of Jehovah, yet, in spite of all its greatness and its excellence, its defences and its duration, the lapses of the Jewish people, their corruptions, infidelities and hypocrises, are startling to contemplate.

Even those who presided over the priestly function and administered the civil authority fell to devouring widows' houses and for a pretence made long prayers; they made clean the outside of the platter, but within were full of extortion and excess; they were like whited sepulchres beautiful outside, but within full of dead men's bones and of uncleanness of whom Christ said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?" Such is the united product of human nature, Jewish civilization, and Jewish Theocracy.

When the Christian Church has been taken possession of by human nature, or when the tendencies of human nature held sway within its precincts, then even its comely and beautiful shrines likewise have been prostituted to the basest ends and uses man's ingenuity could invent.

The solemn and repeated lesson of history is, that those who trust to mere culture in art or science, or to the improvements and conveniences of modern civilization, or to the magnificence of church organization, edifices, or ritualism, lean upon nothing—but a broken staff.

We pity the poor heathen who puts his faith in a stick or a stone; we compassionately smile as the Romanist counts his beads and bows before candles; but essentially what better is the Christian Church if it half superstitiously idolizes "the altar" and "the anxious seat," "the church meeting," "the exhortation," or the judgment hymn?

I am not discountenancing these in the least, for I believe in these means of grace heartily. But I do believe with "Townsend," that they will be detrimental rather than beneficial, if such efforts are prompted by the feeling that salvation is impossible without them. The extra is no more pleasing to Heaven than the ordinary nor so much so, only as prompted by a more absorbing feeling of utter helplessness and dependence.

Some have the mistaken idea that the pastor can cause a revival in his church, or that evangelists carry them around in their grips. They look about and decide that if they can get Rev. So and So, they will have a revival. This very thing happened under my own observation. An evangelist was called to a certain community for special services. The pastor had been preaching searching messages, and the church co-operated for a revival. People were saved who lived many miles away, who never heard a message preached

by the evangelist. A few years later the same evangelist was called to another church for special services. Every one was confident that there would be a gracious revival. A few were helped, but the evangelist, the pastor, the people and God were disappointed because the church depended upon the human.

In the salvation of men there are three agencies often put in operation, two always, viz., those of God and those of the sinner. The sinner cannot save himself without God, and God will not save him without his consent, and co-operation. When these agencies harmonize the work is effected at once.

But it is not generally accomplished without the intervention of the third, viz., the agency of the Christian. He is a sort of mediator between the parties, and is expected to plead with God in the sinner's behalf, as Moses plead for Israel; and to teach, exhort, and entreat the sinner, with all long-suffering and patience. Hence the great importance of Christians praying at an altar of prayer when seekers are seeking forgiveness. I have seen a message frustrated and an altar service defeated because of the indifference on the part of the professed Christians toward prayer around the altar.

A revival is not a miracle. There is a supernatural power present, but acting normally, within the lines of cause and effect. Nor is it merely the work of man, created and destroyed at his will, and by his power. There are phenomena connected with it which indicates that this cannot be, and revelation confirms it. It is rather a work both of God and Man—the result of a combination of divine and human agencies, according to certain fixed laws, which govern in the administration of the great "Head of the Church." A revival is philosophical and not miraculous.

Finney wrote, "The connection between the right use of means for a revival and a revival is as philosophically sure as between the right use of means to raise grain and a crop of wheat. I believe, in fact, it is more certain, and that there are fewer instances of failure. Probably the law connecting cause and effect is more undeviating in spiritual than in natural things, and so there are fewer exceptions."

Let us discuss the place of preaching in the revival. The original design of preaching was to convert men to Christ. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." I. Cor. 1:21. The commission reads: "Go preach," not forgive. The power of the ministry to convert the sinner is nothing more than its power to persuade him to come to Christ.

There are a number of qualities which preaching must possess in order to have the required effect. First, the subject matter of preaching must be true. If ministers make less of religion than what it really is, or lower the terms of it to accommodate the depraved taste of their hearers, they may make converts, but they will be converted to their doctrine and be deluded and deceived. Second, preaching should be aimed directly at the conversion of sinners, if we would have it effective in promoting a revival of religion. If sinners were to be converted under the ministrations of some evangelical ministers they would be astonished. They aim to preach able sermons, to instruct, inculcate morally, explode heresy. The conversion of the sinner does not enter into their plans, and they experience no disappointment at his continued indifference.

Revivals of religion are not produced by