

God's New Thing

by James Alexander Stewart

THE SALIENT FEATURES OF REVIVAL

What are the distinguishing features of a great awakening? What is there different in the extraordinary days of the Church from the ordinary?

In my own personal revival ministry, I have discovered that the days of "Heaven on Earth" are easily recognised by certain characteristics. It is true that no revival is completely identical with any other in every particular. While each contains elements common to all, yet each contains characteristics also singular to itself. Still, no matter the time, the country, or the circumstance, there are certain salient features which are found in all true mighty movements of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the outstanding features of revival.

A DEEP HUNGER FOR GOD

A Moravian historian writing of the days prior to the culminating day of 13th August, 1797 says:

"A great hunger after the Word of God took possession of us, so that we had to have three services every day; viz., 5:00, 7:30 a.m., and 9:00 p.m. Every one desired above all else that the Holy Spirit might have full control. Self-love and self-will, as well as all disobedience, disappeared, and an overwhelming flood of grace swept us all out into the great ocean of Divine Love."

In 1885, Rev. G. H. Moore pleaded with his congregation to seek after the Lord in a deeper, fuller way. Four young men were stirred up to pray: McQuilkin, Meneely, Wallace, and Carlisle. They met regularly on Saturday nights in the old school house of Kells, seeking the Lord for a fuller manifestation of His power to meet the hunger of their hearts. This was the beginning of a mighty revival that swept all over Ulster.

John Wesley describes a blessed meeting in his Journal:

"Monday, January 1, 1739, Messrs. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles, were present at our love feast in Getterslane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and may fell to the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from the awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice: 'We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord'."

AN AGONY FOR SOULS

An agony for souls is another outstanding feature.

A young Welsh clergyman, in reading the Litany one Sunday morning, came to the words, "By thine agony and bloody sweat," and was seized with great heaviness and agony, and in some manner shared in the awful sorrow of Gethsemane and Calvary. *This was the beginning of a mighty work of grace that shook the little Principality of Wales.* When Daniel Rowlands read these words to his congregation they were overpowered and felt that they also were in Gethsemane with their Lord.

When Murray McCheyne came back from the Holy Land, after six months' absence from his people in Dundee, he discovered that a greater work of God was going on than ever before through the ministry of William C. Burns, a young man of twenty-two years of age. So great was the agony on

behalf of lost souls in his congregation, and so amazing were the scenes, even till four o'clock in the morning at "St. Peter's" that he was asked by the Presbytery of Aberdeen to give a special report of these amazing scenes. Some of the Presbytery wanted to condemn the work going on at "St. Peter's" in Dundee for its emotional aspect. Here is part of his answer:

"Ever since my return I have frequently seen the preaching of the Word attended with so much power, and eternal things brought so near, that the feelings of the people could not be restrained. I have observed at such times an awful and breathless stillness pervading the assembly, each hearer bent forward in the posture of rapt attention. Serious men covered their faces to pray that the arrows of the King of Zion might be sent home with power to the hearts of sinners."

Sometimes in my meetings in Europe the choirs have not been able to sing the closing invitation song because they were so broken down in agony for souls.

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FILLED WITH THE LOVE OF CHRIST

This salient feature is ever present in revival.

A visitor from England visited Christmas Evans in Wales, of whom he had heard much, and with whom he was sore displeased because of his disorderly meetings and unbecoming Zeal. The Englishman preached coldly, fully determined not to countenance any of the wild notions of the Welsh. When he had finished, Christmas Evans commenced, and out of respect to the brother from England, he tried to speak a little broken English as well as he could. While he was describing the sufferings, and the infinite merits of His sacrifice in a most powerful manner, the Englishman quite forgot himself and cried out with all his might: "Oh my God, is this my Saviour?" and fell down on the floor.

The above incident was only a natural sequence of an experience previously known by the Welsh preacher.

While riding on horseback to a preaching engagement over the hills, being weary of a cold heart in the pulpit, in secret prayer, and in the study, he dismounted from his horse and spent three hours in the woods, crying to God to break his cold heart and fill him with a burning love for lost souls. "Having begun," he said, "in the name of Jesus I soon felt, as it were, the fetters loosening and the old hardness of heart softening, and, as I thought, mountains of frost and snow dissolving and melting within me. there stole over me a sweet sense of His forgiving love. As the sun was westerning, I went back to my appointment. On the following day I preached with such power to a vast concourse of people gathered on the hillside, that a revival broke out that day and spread through the whole principality."

In a remote village in Cardiganshire, at the meeting of the Christian Endeavour, a young girl, naturally shy, stood up and with trembling lips cried fervently in Welsh: "I love Jesus Christ with all my heart!"

Many deeply spiritual historians believe that this was the beginning of the Welsh Revival of 1904.

I remember when expounding the glories of Christ from Ephesians to a group of young converts in Hungary, that the Holy Spirit so bathed us all in Calvary love that I could not finish the message, but simply wept with the congregation in sheer joy.

It is no wonder that one of the favourite hymns in the Welsh Revival of 1904 was:

Wondrous love! Unbounded mercy!
Vast as oceans in their flood,
Jesus, Prince of Life, is dying –
Life for us is in His blood.

Oh what heart can e'er forget Him?
Who can cease His praise to sing?
Wondrous Love! Forever cherished,
While the heavens with music ring!

AN AWFUL SENSE OF THE MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD

How shallow and superficial are our services today for revival! How little sense of the presence and power of God is manifested in our midst. The apostle John on the Isle of Patmos had a revival meeting all by himself. He had a vision of the majestic Christ in all His matchless beauty, glory and power. He was overcome and overwhelmed.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. (Rev. 1:17).

The awakening of Northampton, Massachusetts, under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, revolutionised the whole area. There was scarcely a single person in town who was left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. In the year 1735, it seemed as if the whole town was full of the presence of God.

The writer remembers how on several occasions in Europe, so great was the awfulness of the presence of God that it was impossible for any of us to have enough courage to stand up and preach to the people. Even sinners were so filled with fear that they left town.

Dr. Jowett said of Moody: "Moody's excellency was in an earthen vessel, and many doctors of divinity have wondered at the strange association. There were thousands of speakers more eloquent than Moody, but the treasure was not there in overwhelming glory. Moody may have been uneducated, untutored, and unskilled in public speaking, but when he spoke, the power of an unseen world seemed to fall upon the audience."

In August, God worked wondrously at the annual convocation of the Calvinistic Methodist Church.

The revivalist, David Morgan, wrote in his diary that it was the most wonderful prayer meeting he was ever in. Thomas John, of Calgerin, was found alone in a field after the service, in deep meditation. A friend approached him and said, "Brother John, was not the sight of the thousands as they silently prayed a most impressive sight. Did you ever see anything to compare with it?"

"I never saw one of them," was the answer, "I saw no one but God!"

One night while preaching in a Lutheran cathedral in Scandinavia a tremendous sense of the presence of God came into the gathering. I was so overwhelmed with the awful consciousness of Jehovah's presence that I was afraid to continue preaching. I could not stand the glory of God any longer and thus suddenly concluded the sermon. I did not know what to do, so I did nothing more than bow my head in silent prayer. The silence was awful. I am sure that if I had not broken it by asking the Dean of the Cathedral to pronounce the benediction, the whole congregation would have cried out in great soul distress, believer and unbeliever alike. The crowd silently dispersed without

speaking to each other. So great was the sense of the majesty of God that many left their automobiles and came back for them later, rather than disturb this holy quietness. In the vestry there were some thirty preachers, precious born-again men. No word was spoken among them. They all silently went home. I did not speak to my own interpreter who was with me until maybe three hours after the service.

A DEEP CONVICTION OF SIN

This salient feature follows on the previous one. Having an overwhelming sense of God's holiness and their sin, believers and unbelievers alike are stricken and smitten of the Spirit. When George Whitefield in February 1739 was preaching to the Kingswood miners in the open air the power of God fell upon the twenty thousand assembled. The first evidence of the Spirit working on the rude, uncouth listeners was the deep silence; the next and still more convincing was the preacher's observation of the *white gutters made by the tears which fell profusely down their cheeks, black and unwashed from the coal pits.*

In the Life of Christmas Evans this was repeated in his mighty ministry. While preaching in the open air on "The Prodigal Son", hundreds of people were sitting on the grass all at once sprang up as if they had been electrified. Some were weeping and others praying in greatest agony of mind. Although the preacher had preached for only fifteen minutes, he had to stop, and with personal workers, take care of anxious souls until the dawn of the next day.

When Jonathan Edwards was reading on the words, "Their foot shall slide in due time" (Deut. 32:35), the Spirit of God came down upon the congregation with such convincing power that the unsaved felt as though they were sliding down to hell there and then. In soul terror they gripped the very pillars of the building and cried out in agony: "What shall we do to be saved?"

My spiritual grandfather, David Rea, that mighty Ulster evangelist, tells of his first public service in 1869:

"I went to Dooran. When I arrived, the meeting house was filled with people, notwithstanding the very severe storm. Immediately I entered, I felt the presence of the Lord, and when I commenced to preach, an indescribable power fell upon the whole congregation, and cries for mercy were heard from people in many parts of the building. Afterwards, in some of these meetings I had occasion to stop speaking as some would stand up and shout, 'Glory to God,' while others fell prostrate on the floor and cried aloud for mercy. Eventually, I had to stop preaching altogether and had just to look on and see the Lord working. Sometimes there would be almost one hundred in one place crying for mercy; in another quarter a number were congregated praying for them, whilst others went amongst them, pointing them to Christ. Again, a dozen or so would be standing, after finding peace, praising God aloud."

During the mighty movements of the Spirit of God in the North of Scotland many people fell to the ground in soul agony as Jock Troup preached. They lay as dead men in a scene of battle. When working with him years later I met some of these same people rejoicing in the Lord.

Oh how little sense of conviction of sin there is in our Campaigns today. We have thousands of sham conversions because of this.

Oh how glorious it is to hear the sobs of the anxious souls disturb the meeting!

A SPONTANEITY OF PROGRESS

The two symbols of Pentecost are WIND and FIRE. Both of these speak to us of the mystical, supernatural, sovereign work of the blessed Spirit. THERE IS NO SET PROGRAM FOR A CYCLONE OR A PRAIRIE FIRE. One of the finest descriptions of Revival is given by the Lord Jesus Himself.

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth (John 3:8)

John Shearer says:

“A great Revival is like a forest fire; you may trace its early course, following the first line of flame, but soon its progress is so swift and widely diffused that the eye can no longer keep pace with it. The flame bursts forth at once in many places, and now we see but one great conflagration.”

Revival breaks out in all directions to the utter astonishment of all.

In the blessed days of 1860 and around that period revival fires were burning along the northeast coast of Scotland in a spontaneous manner, apart from all planned evangelistic campaigns. Duncan Matheson, Reginald Ratcliffe and James Turner went down from village to village and town to town, reaping a mighty harvest.

You have all heard of the wondrous work of grace during the ministry of Murray McCheyne and William C. Burns. These men were only twenty-six and twenty-two respectively. Yet, wherever they preached, thousands in Scotland flocked to hear them. Please remember, there was no organization, no committees, no love offerings taken for the evangelists. No money was spent at all in advertising the meetings, and never was it stated how long these men of God would stay in a place. All was under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He was The Lord of the Harvest; He sent them forth and they obeyed His Voice. Sometimes they would stay in a town for two days, but at other times, for three weeks. The churches were packed. Thousands gathered in the open air as an overflow crowd. Hundreds of people followed these two holy men to their lodgings after midnight that they might preach the Word once again unto them.

During the years of revival in Hungary, thousands gathered as if by magic. The police or the pastor would telephone me to come to a town quickly as the crowds had gathered and were waiting for a message, even though no meetings had been arranged in that place. In some places in Europe some 2000 have gathered together without any meeting having been arranged. This is the glory, the mystery, the miracle of revival! It is the irresistible movement of the Holy Spirit. *This is what distinguishes revival days from those of the ordinary evangelistic meetings.* These same spontaneous scenes were witnessed in the Ulster revival under W. P. Nicholson and in Scottish revivals under the ministry of Jock Troup and others.

A RAPIDITY AND SUDDENNESS OF MOVEMENT

Revivals commence suddenly and spread with amazing rapidity, like a prairie fire.

And Hezekiah rejoiced and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done SUDDENLY (2 Chron. 29:36).

The mighty movements of the Spirit begin in the secret place of the Most High. The outward manifestation comes suddenly, to the wonder of all. Saint and sinner alike cry out in perfect astonishment, “It is the Lord’s doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.” God’s people are filled with

holy laughter and they sing with great joy, *The Lord hath done great things for us: whereof we are glad.* (Psalm 126:3).

The historian Kirkton writes concerning the Scottish reformation:

“In Scotland the whole nation was converted by lump within ten years after Popery was discharged in Scotland. There were NOT TEN PERSONS OF QUALITY TO BE FOUND WHO DID NOT PROFESS THE TRUE RELIGION, and so it was among the common people in proportion. Lo! Here is a nation born in one day.”

Again, Jonathan Edwards, writing concerning the Great Awakening in 1740, says:

“This is certain, that it is a great and wonderful event, a strange revolution, and unexpected surprising overturning of things suddenly brought to pass... Who that saw the state of things in New England a few years ago would have thought that in so short a time there would be a change?”

I, myself, have witnessed, not only the suddenness but the rapidity of the mighty movement of God in different parts of Europe. For example, in the Russian part of Poland around 1935 mighty revival fires began to burn and they spread all over different provinces. In places where there was absolutely not a single evangelical church, in a short space of time glorious New Testament churches sprang up everywhere. In a short space of time, some had even one thousand members! Sometimes we baptised 200 in one day. Also in other countries in Eastern Europe, revival fires were burning simultaneously.

The true spirit of Revival eludes the grasp of the organiser and the advertiser. IT CANNOT BE CREATED BY MACHINERY NOR PROMOTED BY THE PRINTER’S INK.

AN OVERFLOW OF SONG

One of the characteristics of a great awakening is its wonderful outburst of joy. When the night has passed with its agony of conviction, the grief and terror of sin, there breaks upon the agonised heart the blessed peace of forgiveness. No joy that earth has to offer can compare with this mysterious and ineffable gladness which is awakened in the new-born soul. At such a time the imagery of Isaiah – that the mountains and the hills break forth into singing and all the trees of the fields clap their hands – does not appear extravagant. An overflowing joy comes also to the believers as they are lifted to greater heights of holiness. SONG IS THE NATURAL EXPRESSION OF THE JUBILANT HEART. Scotland found in the Psalms that which answered to her triumphant mood, while Wesley’s hymns remain today long after the revival has spent itself.

During these mighty stirrings hundreds of new songs abound expressing the pent-up feelings of the people. Ordinary old hymns that have been sung so coldly and mechanically in years gone by now take on a new meaning. Yes, the spiritual singing of the congregation is always the barometer to test the revival.

Duncan Matheson used to leave the revival services of Scotland singing aloud with holy joy the metrical version of Psalm 126:

Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. (V.2)

When God’s people are filled with the Holy Spirit in revival blessing, they “speak to themselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord.”

I NEVER KNEW A SONG LEADER TO BE NEEDED IN REVIVAL. His ministry is unnecessary as the people again and again must be restrained from singing for hours in one service. I have known the people to sing for two hours before the service began, without any human leader.

One evening I pronounced the benediction at a crowded prayer meeting in Czechoslovakia three times over. The people simply ignored me and went on singing under the mighty anointing of the Holy Spirit until midnight. They would have continued until the early morning had not the manager of the building asked them to leave.

Thou anointest my head with oil. MY CUP RUNNETH OVER (Psalm 23:5)

This is not the singing of quartets, solos, or groups from different churches. It is the Spirit's spontaneous overflow of praise in the believers, to the Father and to the Son.

Such an experience is fervently described in the favourite hymn in the '59 revival in Ulster, when in revival meetings in the streets, the factories, the fields and the homes, the people sang lustily:

Whene'er we meet, you always say,
What's the news? What's the news?
Pray, what's the order of the day?
What's the news? What's the news?
Oh, I have got good news to tell:
My Saviour has done all things well,
And triumphed over death and hell;
That's the news! That's the news!

The Lamb was slain on Calvary –
That's the news! That's the news!
To set a world of sinners free –
That's the news! That's the news!
'Twas there His precious blood was shed;
'Twas there He bowed His sacred head;
But now He's risen from the dead –
That's the news! That's the news!

His work's reviving all around –
That's the news! That's the news!
And many have salvation found –
That's the news! That's the news!
And since their souls have caught the flame,
They shout Hosannah to His name,
And all around they spread His fame –
That's the news! That's the news!