

When the Mountains Flowed Down

(An Account of the Scottish Revival in the Western Isles)

Duncan Campbell

Duncan Campbell (1898-1972) was raised in the Highlands of Scotland. He came to know God as a teenager and served congregations of the United Free Church (Presbyterian) and as an itinerant evangelist. In addition to his involvement in the Lewis Awakening, he was much in demand as a speaker throughout the British Isles.

This article is adapted from a taped message delivered by Mr. Duncan Campbell approximately thirty years ago to the students of the Faith Mission Bible College in Edinburgh, Scotland. It chronicles some of Mr. Campbell's experiences and insights related to the revival from 1949-1953 in Hebrides Islands off the north-western coast of Scotland.

Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. Isaiah 64:1-3

I never read that third verse without my mind going back to what actually happened in the parish of Barvas on the island of Lewis. At the outset, let me make it clear that I did not bring revival to the Hebrides. I had the privilege of being there and in some small way leading the movement for about three years but God moved in the parish of Barvas before I set foot on the island. Revival is still a sign which is spoken against, and you cannot believe every story you have heard about the Lewis Awakening. Down through the years things have been said which have no foundation in fact, however, facts are powerful things.

Revival Defined

First, let me tell you what I mean by revival. An evangelistic campaign or special meeting is not revival. In a successful evangelistic campaign or crusade, there will be hundreds or even thousands of people making decisions for Jesus Christ, but the community remains untouched, and the churches continue much the same as before the outreach. In revival, God moves in the district. Suddenly, the community becomes God conscious. The Spirit of God grips men and women in such a way that even work is given up as people give themselves to waiting upon God. In the midst of the Lewis Awakening, the parish minister at Barvas wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord was resting wonderfully on the different townships of the region. His Presence was in the homes of the people, on meadow and moorland, and even on the public roads." This presence of God is the supreme characteristic of a God-sent revival. Of the hundreds who found Jesus Christ during this time fully seventy-five per cent were saved before they came near a meeting or heard a sermon by myself or any other ministers in the parish. The power of God, the Spirit of God, was moving in operation, and the fear of God gripped the souls of men - this is God-sent revival as distinct from special efforts in the field of evangelism.

A Foundation of Intercession and Vision

How did this gracious movement begin? In 1949, the local presbytery issued a proclamation to be read on a certain Sunday in all the Free Churches on the island of Lewis. This proclamation called the people to consider the "low state of vital religion . . . throughout the land . . . and the present

dispensation of Divine displeasure . . . due to growing carelessness toward public worship . . . and the growing influence of the spirit of pleasure which has taken growing hold of the younger generation." They called on the churches to "take these matters to heart and to make serious inquiry what must be the end if there be no repentance. We call upon every individual as before God to examine his or her life in light of that responsibility which attends to us all and that happily in divine mercy we may be visited with a spirit of repentance and turn again to the Lord whom we have so grieved." I am not prepared to say what effect the reading of this declaration had upon the ministers or people of the island in general, but I do know that in the parish of Barvas a number of men and women took it to heart, especially two old women. I am ashamed to think of it - two sisters, one eighty-two and one eight-four, the latter blind. These two women developed a great heart concern for God to do something in the parish and gave themselves to waiting upon God in their little cottage.

One night God gave one of the sisters a vision. Now, we have got to understand that in revival remarkable things happen. It is supernatural; you are not moving on human levels; you are moving in divine places. In the vision, she saw the churches crowded with young people and she told her sister, "I believe revival is coming to the parish." At that time, there was not a single young person attending public worship, a fact which cannot be disputed. Sending for the minister, she told him her story, and he took her message as a word from God to his heart. Turning to her he said, "What do you think we should do?" "What?" she said, "Give yourself to prayer; give yourself to waiting upon God. Get your elders and deacons together and spend at least two nights a week waiting upon God in prayer. If you will do that at your end of the parish, my sister and I will do it at our end of the parish from ten o'clock at night until two or three o'clock in the morning." So, the minister called his leaders together and for several months they waited upon God in a barn among the straw. During this time they plead one promise, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isaiah 44:3). This went on for at least three months. Nothing happened. But one night a young deacon rose and began reading from Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Psalm 24:3-5). Closing his Bible, he addressed the minister and other office bearers in words that sound crude in English, but not so crude in our Gaelic language, "It seems to me so much humbug. To be waiting as we are waiting, to be praying as we are praying, when we ourselves are not rightly related to God." Then, he lifted his hands toward heaven and prayed, "O God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure?" Then, he went to his knees and fell into a trance. Now, don't ask me to explain the physical manifestations of this movement because I can't, but this I do know, that something happened in the barn at that moment in that young deacon. There was a power loosed that shook the heavens and an awareness of God gripped those gathered together.

Breakthrough in Barvas

Now, I wasn't in the island at the time. I was in another area when word came asking me to come to Lewis for ten days. I had other meetings scheduled and wrote back that I would put Barvas on my calendar for the following year. However, due to circumstances I won't go into, my other meetings were cancelled, and I found it possible to go to the islands as requested. Arriving by boat, I was met by the minister of the church and one of his office bearers. As I stepped ashore, the office bearer came to me and said, "Mr. Campbell, may I ask you a question? Are you walking with God?" I was happy to be able to respond, "I can say this at any rate, I fear God."

They had arranged for me to address the church at a short meeting beginning at nine o'clock that night. It was a remarkable meeting. God sovereignly moved, and there was an awareness of God which was wonderful. The meeting lasted until four o'clock in the morning, and I had not witnessed anything to compare with it at any other time during my ministry. Around midnight, a group of young people left a dance and crowded into the church. There were people who couldn't go to sleep because they were so gripped by God. Although there was an awareness of God and a spirit of conviction at this initial meeting, the real breakthrough came a few days later on Sunday night in the parish church. The church was full, and the Spirit of God was moving in such a way that I couldn't preach. I just stood still and gazed upon the wondrous moving of God. Men and women were crying out to God for mercy all over the church. There was no appeal made whatsoever. After meeting for over three hours, I pronounced the benediction and told the people to go out, but mentioned that any who wanted to continue the meeting could come back later. A young deacon came to me and said, "Mr. Campbell, God is hovering over us." About that time the clerk of the session asked me to come to the back door. There was a crowd of at least 600 people gathered in the yard outside the church... Someone gave out Psalm 102 and the crowd streamed back in to the church which could no longer hold the number of people. A young school teacher came down front crying out, "O God, is there nothing left for me?" She is a missionary in Nigeria today. There was a bus load of people coming to the meeting from sixty miles away. The power of God came into the bus so that some could not even enter the church when the bus arrived. People were swooning all over the church, and I cannot remember one single person who was moved on by God that night who was not gloriously born again. When I went out of the church at four o'clock in the morning there were a great number of people praying alongside the road. In addition to the school teacher, several of those born again that night are in foreign mission work today.

In Church, Meadow, and Moorland

From Barvas, the move of God spread to the neighbouring districts. I received a message that a nearby church was crowded at one o'clock in the morning and wanted me to come. When I arrived, the church was full and there were crowds outside. Coming out of the church two hours later, I found a group of 300 people, unable to get into the church, praying in a nearby field. One old woman complained about the noise of the meetings because she could not get to sleep. A deacon grabbed her and shook her, saying, "Woman, you have been asleep long enough!"

There was one area of the islands which wanted me to come but I didn't feel any leading to accept the invitation. The blind sister encouraged me to go and told me, "If you were living as near to God as you ought to be, He would reveal His secrets to you." I agreed to spend a morning in prayer with her in the cottage. As we prayed, the sister said, "Lord, you remember what you told me today that you were going to save seven men in this church. I just gave your message to Mr. Campbell and please give him wisdom because he badly needs it." She told me if I would go to the village, God would provide a congregation. I agreed to go, and when I arrived at seven o'clock, there were approximately 400 people at the church. The people could not tell what it was that had brought them; it had been directed by the Spirit of God. I spoke for a few minutes on the text "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). One of the ministers stopped me and said, "Come see this." At one end of the meeting house, the most notorious characters in the community were on their faces crying out to God.

On a trip to a neighbouring island I found the people were very cold and stiff. Calling for some men to come over and pray, I particular requested that a young man named Donald accompany them. Donald, who was seventeen years old, had been recently saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit about two weeks later on a hillside. As we were in the church that night, Donald was sitting toward

the front with tears falling off his face onto the floor. I knew Donald was in touch with God in a way that I was not. So I stopped preaching and asked him to pray. Donald rose to his feet and prayed, "I seem to be gazing into an open door and see the Lamb in the midst of the throne and the keys of death and hell on his waist." Then he stopped and began to sob. After he composed himself, he lifted his eyes toward heaven, raised his hands, and said, "God, there is power there. Let it loose!" And at that moment the power of God fell upon the congregation. On one side of the room, the people threw up their hands, put their heads back and kept them in that position for two hours. It is hard to do this for ten minutes, much less two hours. On the other side, the people were slumped over, crying out for mercy. In a village five miles away, the power of God swept through the town and there was hardly a house in that village that didn't have someone saved in it that night.

In one area of the district there was bitter opposition to the movement because I preached the baptism of the Holy Ghost as a separate and distinct occurrence following conversion. Those who opposed me were so successful in their opposition that very few people came to the meetings. One night, the session clerk came to me and said, "There is only one thing we can do to correct the situation which now prevails. We must give ourselves to waiting upon God in prayer. I have been told there is a farmer who said we could meet in his home. He is not a Christian and his wife isn't saved, but they are God-fearing people." About thirty of us, ministers and elders from the district, met in this farmer's house. I felt the going very, very hard. I prayed. All the ministers prayed. One felt that the very powers of hell were unleashed. About midnight I turned to one of the elders and told him I thought the time had come for him to lay hold of God. This man rose to his feet and prayed for about half an hour. (Of course, you must remember that we were in revival, and in revival time doesn't exist. Nobody was looking at the clock.) The man paused, lifted his hand toward heaven and said, "God, did You know that your honour is a stake? You gave the promise that You would pour water on the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground, and You are not doing it." I wonder how many of us could approach God with words like that on our lips? Then he said, "There are five ministers in this meeting, including Mr. Campbell, and I don't know where a one of them stands in Your Presence. But if I know anything about my own heart, I think I can say that I am thirsty for a manifestation of Your power." He paused again, then cried out in aloud voice, "God, Your honour is at stake and I now challenge You to pour water on the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." And in that moment the stone-built house literally shook like a leaf. I immediately went to the Acts of the Apostles where it is recorded that they prayed and the place where they were assembled was shaken. As soon as this dear man stopped praying, I pronounced the benediction a little after two o'clock in the morning and went out to find the whole village ablaze with God. I went into one house and found nine women on their knees in the kitchen crying out to God. One woman saved that night has written some of the finest Gaelic hymns in our Gaelic hymnal. On the following Sunday, the road was black with the people walking two miles to the church. The drinking house in that particular village closed that night and has never reopened since. This is God at work. A God-sent revival is always a revival of holiness.

Conclusion

It takes the supernatural to break the bonds of the natural. You can make a community mission-conscious. You can make a community crusade-conscious. But only God can make a community God-conscious. Just think about what would happen if God came to any community in power. I believe that day is coming. May God prepare us all for it. Amen

Source: International Revival Network: www.openheaven.com.

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