

## Time for Revival in the Church

Since we have been in the Philippines, we have discovered that letter writing is not a forgotten art. Our daily trip to the post office is seldom in vain. We enjoy receiving letters.

Some time ago we received a letter from a pastor-friend. He wrote about his work. He was somewhat discouraged and told about his longing to see a revival in his congregation. I am sure that my friend is not the only pastor who longs for a revival. Why a revival? Revivals presuppose that the church has fallen asleep and needs to be awakened. The churches have always known ups and downs in spirituality. Scholars have documented some of the great revivals in the history of the church. Dr. J. Edwin Orr for example, specializes in revival histories.

The Great Awakening, in the Thirteen Colonies in America during the early years of the 18th century, is usually said to have begun under the preaching of the Dutch Reformed pastor Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-c. 1748). He proclaimed the necessity of the conviction of sin and repentance as preliminary to conversion, and as the only door to eternal life. His forceful and able preaching brought conviction to many.

In the 1970's and in the beginning of the new century the revival fires were burning even brighter than in the first part of the 18th century during the Great Awakening. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), a grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale University was greatly used by God. Under Dwight's leadership revival after revival swept the campus "and young men went from it to further revivals in various parts of the country." Holland also witnessed revivals in the 19th century. They often started with "the people in the pew." The emphasis was on the Word of God and the historic Reformed confessions. Personal conversion was stressed. These Christians experienced the joy and love of Christ in their daily walk with God.

One of the great 19th century preachers, who longed and prayed for a revival, was Charles H. Spurgeon. Preaching from Habakkuk 3:2 and subsequently entitling his sermon, "A Message from God to His Church," he remarked that the prophet's prayer "is for a present and immediate revival of genuine religion," and he made Habakkuk's prayer his own. Some years afterwards he said, "The great necessity of the church is her being moved vigorously by the power of the Holy Spirit."

I recall reading a church sign that said, "Revival every evening at 8:00," Spurgeon didn't believe that a revival could be "worked up" or announced ahead of time. His belief was that ultimately revival was all of God's sovereignty and of His Holy Spirit. In a sermon on Isaiah 41:1, he said, "It is God the Omnipotent, who can make His Church mighty if He will, and that at once." Of the power of the Holy Spirit, he said, "What cannot the Spirit of God do? He sent tongues of fire at Pentecost ... and men of every nation heard the Gospel at once. He turned three thousand hearts by one sermon to know the crucified Saviour to be the Messiah. He sent the apostles like flames of fire through the whole

earth, till every nation felt their power. He can do the like again. He can bring the Church out of darkness into noonday."

Does a revival lead to overcharged emotions? Of course we have heard of excesses. But excesses shouldn't make us overlook the benefits. The great Awakening in the Thirteen Colonies led to the initiation of Christian schools and colleges. And I think of the revivals that took place in Holland during the end of the last century. They led to the establishing of Christian organizations and furthered the cause of Christian day schools. We hear so much talk about "revival in our time". Many long for one. But we make a mistake if we look only at the extra-ordinary revival movements as norm, as if God can be found only then and there. God in Christ is present in the church, in the proclamation of His Word, the administration of the sacraments and in the covenant of grace from generation to generation. Sure, we may plead for a renewed outpouring of the Spirit, but you cannot force Him.

What would you do as a pastor, if in God's sovereign grace no revival visits your congregation? Just keep on going! Charles Spurgeon, who so earnestly desired a revival, didn't think a church should be inactive and just wait for "something to turn up." He said that "the church's task was to pray for a revival."

I join my pastor friend in praying for a revival. But, in the meantime, we are to continue with the regular "routine" work of the ministry.

"O Lord, refresh us by Thy grace,  
Revive and quicken all our powers.  
As failing streams are made to flow,  
Replenished by abundant showers." (Hymn 268:3)

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