

The Law of the Coming Movement

By James Burns

CLASSICS
Time-tested Truths



In Christian history, no phenomenon is more clear than the recurrence of revivals. Such movements witness to us the supremacy of spiritual forces. They reveal the spiritual instincts in humankind that are often clouded by less worthwhile pursuits. They encourage faith by showing God's hand in history and in His guidance of the Church.

These movements prove that God is working through His laws, for the salvation of His people and for the world's good. In a revival, a few, then dozens, then thousands say with David: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me" (Ps. 138:7, NKJV). Loss of Spiritual Power No one pretends that all is well with the Church today. When allowance is made for exaggeration, there are enough problems left to arouse deep soul searching. On every side, there is complaint of the Church's loss of spiritual power, the increasing indifference of its people, and a decrease in membership. While there is not decline, there is a conscious arrest of its influence, and in the world a hostility to its claims.

The Church is still active. Never was there more activity and less result. There is abundant energy, but it is not conquering energy conscious of its power, but feverish energy, conscious of its impotence. The message of the pulpit has largely lost its power to convince, and the preacher his power

to lead to conversion.

Much, if not all, of the message of Christianity has been silenced. Passion is simulated. Energy is directed toward useless things. People in the pew are unconsciously affected by the absence of certainty, and of intense conviction. So pulpit and pew are united in a common misgiving. People find it easy to drift from the Church. Their consciences are unaffected by their relapse, because there is not the atmosphere of reality which makes neglecting the Church a sin.

If this is true, then it is a fact which should awaken the dullest heart concerned about the welfare of the world and his or her own spiritual life. Of course, a weakening Church means that the forces working against the Church are growing stronger. It makes us turn to the future and ask, "What is before us? Is the day of the Church over? Must we live on to see the decline, until it results in death?"

Eve of Revival

From such questions we can turn away with a smile. The Church is not on the eve of destruction. It is on the eve of a revival. Like the day that comes when the long night is over, so every revival comes after times of tribulation. Nothing in the world is more certain than this. The question is not "if," but "when." It is not for us to know the times which God has hidden. At the same time, there is much to give us hope.

The Church today appears helpless to cope with its growing responsibilities. The problems are so great that the Church seems to sink under the weight of them. It is the Church's duty, not to solve the problems, but to give an inspiration. It is a flood of new spiritual life that is needed. When the heart is alive, the hardest problem becomes solvable. Love awakes and finds its own channels. It is the Church's coldness that makes problems unsolvable.

The solution is a revival of spiritual religion—a new breath

which will pass over the valley of dry bones and make them live. The world is ready for this revival, whether or not the Church is. For the Church, revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness, and an open and humiliating confession of sin. It comes to scorch before it heals.

No revival can come from below. All attempts to create a revival fail. Nor can we bring a revival down, since prayer is not the cause of a revival, but the human preparation for one. By prayer we prepare the soil.

Is there a disposition to pray for revival? Are devout men and women everywhere becoming alarmed, not for the success of the Church, but for the glory of Christ? If not, then the night is not far spent, a deeper darkness is yet to come. For what use would a revival be, if we were not prepared for it? It would pass over us without doing its work. J. Hudson Taylor affirmed this when he wrote, "The spirit of prayer is, in essence, the spirit of revival."

Simplicity of Christ Whatever form the coming awakening may take, we may be certain that it will bring us back to the essentials. This is the result of every true revival. It cuts through the trappings until it gets to the core of life. It leads men and women back to simplicity. When the heart earnestly seeks God, it takes the shortest route. Above all, it will bring us back to Christ.

The day may be near. Even now He may be preparing His messenger.

JAMES BURNS wrote *Revivals, Their Laws and Leaders* in 1909. This article is condensed from the booklet *The Laws of Revival*, republished in 1960.

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