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Global Revival: Should We Be Involved in Concerts of Prayer?

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Iain Murray, in his substantial book to be published in 1994, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750 to 1858*, makes the vital distinction between Holy Spirit revival sent down from heaven and “revivalism” which is merely the outcome of human organization and activity or excitement.¹

Few evangelical Christians in the West today believe in the reality of revival. To most revival is no more than a dream. To them revival of the supernatural kind is something of the past. I remember being present at Westminster Chapel in 1959 when Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached a series of sermons on revival to commemorate the 1859 revival. He believed passionately in the reality of Holy Spirit revival, but to most of his hearers the theme was interesting but did not belong to the world of reality. It is difficult for a Christian to believe in revival if such a thing has never been experienced. Most people I spoke to during that time were polite about it, but the subject seemed academic and theoretical rather than a burning practical issue.

In addition to those who are indifferent there are some who reject the idea of revival completely. Herman Hanko, writing in *The Presbyterian* (now defunct, this small journal was published in Bristol), May 1991, p. 3, is forthright in his opposition, “Is it proper, is it biblical, is it Reformed to pray for and seek revival in the church?” To that question the Reformed faith must needs give a resounding ‘No!’ Revival is wrong. Revival is contrary to Scriptures. Revival is at odds with the Reformed faith.” But Hanko speaks for a minority, Dutch, hyper-Calvinistic school, a group hostile to the doctrine of common grace that God loves all men and desires that all be saved. Also Hanko uses the method of criticizing the excesses of revival which was the stance taken by Charles Hodge. He dismisses as mysticism the personal experiences common in times of revival. The 1857-

59 revival which we will look at in detail was especially a “non-excess, non-dramatic” example of spiritual awakening, happily free from the fanaticism which has marred some revivals.

There are other Hollanders who are certainly not hyper-Calvinist but do not accept our view of revival. Hendrik Krabbendam, for instance, believes that Pentecost was the birthday of the Holy Spirit, fullstop. By fullstop I mean that this school stops there and does not take Pentecost to be a prototype of revivals to the end of the age.² It is important to observe the unique features of Pentecost, but we go further and claim that as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost was the first of many more spiritual awakenings to follow throughout this last dispensation of time before the end of the world.

With this background of indifference or opposition I will now make a three-fold attempt to convince my readers that we should not only believe in Holy Spirit revival, but that we should take united action to pray for such revival, and in so praying not confine our intercessions to our own church or denomination or nation, but should intercede for world-wide spiritual awakening.

This mini-treatise expounding my convictions for the urgent need to implement the biblical concept of a Concert of Prayer is as follows:

1) The idea of a Concert of Prayer described from Scripture and illustrated by example from the past.

2) The history of revival briefly set out. How do those who reject the doctrine of revival explain past revivals? Is there not simply too much explaining away to be done for the anti-revival case to be credible?

3) A look at one revival in detail. I take as my choice the 1858 revival in America and in particular cite the experience of John Girardeau, one of America’s most illustrious preachers. He described the 1858 revival as the greatest event in

his ministry.³

I will conclude with some practical observations: hindrances which face us, dangers to be avoided, how to set about a concert of prayer, and finally a personal challenge.

The Idea of a Concert of Prayer Described from Scripture and Illustrated.

As an orchestra plays in unity, so ought the Lord’s people be united in their intercessions for spiritual awakening among the nations. The word “concert” correctly conveys the concept of praying in harmony of purpose.

It is important at the outset to stress that it is not the volume of prayer, or the activity as such, that brings revival. To continue with the analogy it is not the size of the orchestra or the volume of decibels it produces that make it successful. But the picture of the orchestra is limited. Prayer is a human responsibility, and yet to be effectual it must have its origin in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It is the spirit of prayer that we need.

The reasons I suggest why ministers and churches should unite in concerts of prayer for spiritual awakening are: 1) The biblical doctrine of repentance demands it. 2) The history of the church dictates it. 3) The example of our predecessors encourages it. 4) Our present decline compels it. 5) The promises of Scripture urge it. 6) Present-day revivals inspire it.

Which of the reasons given above should have priority? The answer depends on the situation locally and nationally. When conditions are desperate prayer becomes the only resource. Psalm 102 depicts precisely such a situation.

Eschatological hope (my reason five) is important. Those who hold out no hope for the future are not likely to be motivated to pray for the spiritual prosperity of the church. On the other hand those who truly believe that the earth will be filled with a knowledge of the glory of God as the waters

cover the sea will intercede to that end.

It amazes me that when the majority of expositors, including heavyweights such as Charles Hodge, John Murray, C. E. B. Cranfield, James Dunn and Leon Morris, tell out the plain meaning of God's program according to Romans 11, so few actually believe it and take action in prayer. At the time our Lord was born there were a few who had kept the promises before them and were prayerful and expectant, but only a few.

It was the eschatology of Jonathan Edwards that inspired his writings on this theme together with his actual living experience of the outpourings of the Holy Spirit at Northampton in 1735 and again more widely in 1741. Underlying these reasons is the conviction that concerts of prayer are provided as a means of grace for God's people.

In my book, *Give Him No Rest*, I enlarge on each of the six above reasons, but will here concentrate on the third, namely, the example of our predecessors.⁴

On January 12, 1748, Jonathan Edwards published a treatise with a long title. Since books of that time did not have dust covers with blurbs as we do, it was needful to tell the contents in the title, which reads:

An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time.

Edwards based his exposition on Zechariah 8:20-22. As a postmillennialist Edwards regarded the promises of success for the gospel during the era of the Messiah as applying to this period in which we now live. In other words he did not transpose the promises to a special era in which Christ would be reigning on earth. His eschatological perspective was very different from that which pertains in North America

today. The result of this has practical implications. According to Edwards' view, we are to strive strenuously in prayer and effort to see the promises fulfilled today. We must not allow them to lose their force by spiritualizing them away or by transposing them to a future age. Zechariah predicts a time of extraordinary prayer (concerts of prayer) and subsequent revival.

Jonathan Edwards' appeal was heeded and implemented and there is historical evidence to show that this led to the Second Great Awakening which was far more pervasive than the first great awakening. With Iain Murray I visited the manse of John Erskine (1720-1803) in Culross, Scotland, in July 1993. Iain Murray said to me, "Can you imagine that it was to that door that Edwards' manuscript came from Northampton?" I certainly could visualize that, and am encouraged every time I think of those stirring times of prayer and awakening. It was later that John Erskine sent a copy of the "Call for a Concert of Prayer" to John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825), who passed it on to another minister, John Sutcliff. At Sutcliff's suggestion Ryland introduced this treatise to the Northamptonshire Association which implemented the concept practically in the form of a monthly prayer meeting for revival.

The call for prayer was taken up by other evangelical groups in other denominations in England and Scotland, and also spread to other nations. In 1792 Baptists in Boston, Massachusetts, adopted it. In 1794 the Baptist leader Isaac Backus adopted it together with his friends, who enlisted support from all the major denominations for a monthly concert of prayer.

In 1795, the directors of the newly formed London Missionary Society recommended that the prayer meeting on the first Monday of every month should be made a missionary prayer meeting. The idea met with immediate success, and prayer meetings in London began to multiply. The

practice then spread to “all the principal cities and towns of the Kingdom,” as well as to “Holland, Switzerland, Germany, America, India, Africa, and wherever there are any missionaries from the Societies in England.”⁵

These prayers were answered in the Second Evangelical Revival (known in Britain as The Forgotten Revival), together with all that flowed from it in the way of enterprise and practical effort. There were concerts of prayer prior to Edwards, but nevertheless there is a strong case to support the view that his enterprise in publishing “The Call” was greatly used to bring about a rising tide of prayer leading to widespread spiritual awakening.

While agreeing entirely with Edwards’ exposition of Zechariah 8:20-22, I believe that the matter of urging a concert of prayer can be made more clear and appealing by exposition of Isaiah 62:6-7 in which there is a clear call to prayer.

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.

The long-awaited commentary on Isaiah by Alec Motyer, one of Britain’s best Old Testament scholars, has just appeared.⁶ Motyer comments helpfully on the above text:

Those who engage in prayer [the watchmen on the walls] are the true guardians, and true prayer is (i) ceaseless (lit.) “all the day and all the night”; (ii) vocal . . . never be silent; (iii) effective . . . our prayers are, by His will, in some way a vital ingredient in the implementing of his promises; (iv) disciplined (give yourselves no rest); (v) urgent and pressing (give him no rest); and (vi) sustained (till he establishes . . . fulfils all that was foretold . . .) (p. 507).

The History of Revival

At the beginning I made a distinction between revival and revivalism, but it will help at this stage to define our terms. Christians can easily be in a state of slumber or lukewarmness (Rom. 13:11; Rev. 3:14-22). I take revival to be a widespread reviving of the Christian church. The word awakening refers to non-Christians who are awakened during a time of revival and added to the church.⁷ A visitation of the Spirit I take to be a powerful work of the Spirit in a local church, in a town or city or school or prison or in any particular grouping. The term renewal is used to describe spiritual quickening, whether in doctrine or worship or evangelistic effort. Often the word revival is used when the word renewal would be more appropriate. We should note that in the Southern states of America the word revival is wrongly used when employed to describe a series of meetings featuring a visiting speaker.

It is preferable to call a local outpouring of the Holy Spirit a visitation rather than a revival, as this preserves the term revival to describe something that covers a wide geographic area. Periods of great spiritual awakening spreading from nation to nation can be regarded as general umbrellas under which innumerable visitations take place. For instance, Brian Edwards, in his popular book on revival, devotes five pages to references to general revivals and to specific visitations, including a one-day manifestation of power in Scotland (John Livingstone at Kirk of Shotts, June 21, 1630).⁸ It would be helpful if a scholar could tackle the mammoth task of collating revival records. Since the decease of Edwin Orr I do not know of any trained historian who is devoting his life to this important subject.

There are some dangers we should avoid. One is to think in romantic terms as though revival will solve all our problems. Jonathan Edwards declared that “revivals are the most glorious of God’s works in the world.” Great numbers

are brought to salvation. Yet there is no such thing as a pure revival. It is always a mixed work. Problems multiply. At Leeds Reformed Baptist Church we have been brought into contact with the revival in Romania, and as a result have seen how mixed a work it is, and also how easily it could go wrong. Every work is tested, and the test facing believers in liberated Eastern Europe is the test of materialism, covetousness and the corrupt moral standards of the West.

Part of the romantic fallacy is the notion that revivals are neat and tidy and will solve all problems, whereas in fact all that we have stored up by way of hard work will be expended in a time of spiritual awakening. There is an analogy in military terms. Professional soldiers are always in training, but an actual conflict may last no more than three months or a year. Revivals are times of intense toil. Seth Joshua at one stage during the 1904 Welsh revival worked at harvesting for a week in which he had less than four hours sleep.⁹ A further extension of the romantic idea is that all revivals are the same. The sense of God's holiness is the same; a heightened sense of the reality of hell and the heinous nature of our sinfulness are the same; the awesome cost to our Lord in His death for us on the cross is the same, and a heightened sense of love for God is the same. But other aspects are not the same. The methods used and subjects employed to arouse the churches and awaken souls out of spiritual death can vary. Christian unity has been a factor contributing toward revival in some instances, but in others revival has healed the disfigurement of disunity. One of the marvelous features of revival is diversity and the sheer ingenuity of the Holy Spirit to solve the insoluble and break through impenetrable barriers. Often the way is the way of the cross. An illustration of this can be found in Russia. G. K. Kryuchkov describes how the church was gray and wrinkled; "80 percent were women and most of them old." Now after twenty years along the path of

revival there is a great contrast.¹⁰ But that path has been costly, with leaders spending the best part of their lives in prison camps. The book, *By Their Blood*,¹¹ provides many examples of the connection between suffering and revival.

The Sixteenth-Century Reformation. This was a time of great spiritual revival. For instance, the Huguenot Church in France increased from small beginnings in about 1555 to three million within the next one hundred years, out of a population of twenty million. It was a church bonded together by one unified system of church government (presbyterian) for the period, 1559-1659. A national synod met twenty-nine times during that epoch, which was terminated by the severity of persecution following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.¹²

The Puritan Times in England (1558-1662). The Puritan pastors and theologians did not use the terms for revival that we use. You will not find the word revival in the indexes of their literature. The Puritans did not formulate the idea of cyclical (successive) revivals in the way that Jonathan Edwards did, although John Owen and John Howe came close to it. From his experiences of the phenomena of revivals Edwards, with his exceptionally astute theological insight, wrote five treatises on revival. The breadth and quality of his work have earned him the reputation of being the "the theologian of revival."

James Packer in his book on the Puritans, which has just been published, devotes a chapter to the theme "Puritanism As a Movement of Revival."¹³ In this chapter he develops three main points. First, he argues that spiritual revival is what the Puritans professed to be seeking. Second, he demonstrates that personal revival was the central theme of Puritan devotional literature, and third, he provides some documentation to prove that the ministry of the Puritan pastors, under God, brought revival.

Under the second point he refers to the extensive suc-

cess of the evangelistic literature of the Puritans. For instance, Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted* sold twenty thousand in the year of its publication. This scintillating exposition of the text from Ezekiel, "Why will you die?" has just been transposed into modern English by John Blanchard to be published shortly by Evangelical Press. Fine work that it is, in today's non-revival climate it will be considered very successful if 5,000 sell in the first year and 3,000 the second and 1,000 annually thereafter. And we need to remember that the national population is about ten times what it was in the mid-seventeenth century. If two hundred thousand copies are purchased mostly by nonbelievers in the first year, that could well be a sign of a new spiritual awakening.

Following the Puritan period we can distinguish four specific periods of spiritual awakening.

1) The First Great Awakening, from about 1735 to 1742.

This is sometimes called the Methodist Revival, which mostly affected Britain and America. This revival, however, includes the Moravian missionary movement.

2) The Second Great Awakening, 1798 until about 1842.

This time of spiritual awakening likewise affected both Britain and America. In Britain this epoch of revival is nicknamed The Forgotten Revival due to neglect by historians. Research is revealing that powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit during this period were more extensive and in some areas more intensive than the previous awakening. It is estimated that 1.5 million (10 percent of the population) were brought into membership with nonconformist churches in that period. The Particular Baptists, mostly bypassed in the previous time of revival, multiplied fourfold. Accounts of revival in America show periods of widespread revival during this period. For instance, there is one book describing revival in New England, 1797-1803, and another covering the period, 1815-18, and yet another de-

scribing how churches of all denominations in Boston (except Roman Catholic) were revived in 1841-42.¹⁴ Sprague's *Lectures on Revival* includes a section of 165 pages devoted to descriptions of the revivals and visitations of this period.

3) The Third Great Awakening, 1858-59. Yet again Britain and America were the principal areas affected, but the power and effects of the awakening spread all over the world.¹⁵ We will be looking at this period in more detail presently.

4) The Fourth Great Awakening, 1900-10. This awakening had its rise in small prayer meetings. Visitations began in the churches of Japan in 1900. In 1902, Boer prisoners of war, ten thousand miles apart, in Bermuda and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), experienced extraordinary visitations of the Spirit. In 1904 revival came to Wales, and this was to prove the farthest reaching part of the spiritual awakening of the first decade of this century, for it affected the whole evangelical cause in countries like India, Korea and China. Revival was renewed in Japan and South Africa, and sent an impulse of awakening through the African continent and many parts of Latin America.

When coming to the first decade of this century some tend to think exclusively in terms of the 1904 Welsh Revival, and to harbor popular misconceptions about it. Many seem to think that the 1904 Revival in Wales was ephemeral, something shallow that did not last, a religious excitement in which those who professed conversion soon fell away. The period of extraordinary spiritual power lasted about a year. But the results were enduring. Even critics of the Revival concede that 80 percent of the one hundred thousand converts remained in the churches after five years, which is vastly different from the ratio of one in fifty or one in a hundred who stick in modern crusade evangelism. Edwin Orr points out that converts of the Revival continued to be the choicest segment of church life. Even in the 1930s

when Orr studied the spiritual life of Wales closely, he found this to be so.¹⁶ I remember meeting an aged convert, Powell Parry, of the 1904 Revival in the early 1960s and could sense deeply the power of the Revival that was burning in his heart even then. An elderly believer in Sussex used to tell of the indelible impression made on her mind during the Revival when she witnessed Welsh miners coming out of the coal pits and falling to the ground to plead for God's mercy upon their souls.

Two disasters overtook Wales. World War I tragically removed a high proportion of men in their prime, and then in the 1920s and early 1930s unemployment caused large numbers to leave Wales.

A further misconception is that the Welsh Revival was an isolated phenomenon with no connection to other nations. As intimated above, the facts show that the 1904 Welsh Revival spread to other parts of the English-speaking world.

Church membership in the United States increased by two million in seven denominations, 1905-10.¹⁷

How many Christians today know that Norway was swept by a revival in 1905 as powerful as that which had come to Wales? In the same year Denmark, Sweden and Finland experienced awakening.¹⁸

In 1905-6 parts of the Christian church in India were visited, and in some areas the Christian population increased by 70 percent.¹⁹

The general pattern observed was increasing fervor in prayer, intense conviction of sin and often confession of sin, followed by great joy. Time and time again in reading the accounts there is testimony of the suddenness of the Spirit's coming and that with such power as to defy description. "Suddenly without warning the usual stoical mindedness of our Indian assembly was broken as by an earthquake. Everybody present was shaken." "The Spirit came in like a flood and we had three glorious weeks, which to experience

is worth a lifetime."²⁰

Books could be written on the revivals that took place during the first decade of this century in China, Korea, Indonesia and Japan. There were several waves of revival in Korea, bringing extraordinary numerical growth which has continued to this present time, the calculation being that 18 percent of the population of 42 million is evangelical, with Korea having the largest Bible seminaries in the world.²¹ By comparison the situation in the United Kingdom today is pathetic. In contrast with Korea the story of the evangelical cause in Japan is very depressing, but it should be recalled that a powerful work of the Spirit did take place in Japan during the first decade of the century. One of these started in January 1907 in Tokachi prison in the north island of Hokkaido. The Holy Spirit swept through until almost every prisoner, as well as officers and guards, had made public profession of faith in Christ.²²

The spirit of revival can take root in a Christian's heart and be used in a powerful way many years later. In 1934 revival came to the Baltic States. This can be traced to the influence of William Fetler, who trained at Spurgeon's College and who was profoundly influenced by his experience of the 1904 Revival in Wales. He thereafter never ceased to intercede that his native Latvia would experience spiritual awakening. The story is told by Omri Jenkins in his book, *Five Minutes to Midnight*.²³

There are tokens of the Lord's omnipotent power and infinite mercy in our modern world. The revival in Nagaland, a province of India, 1976-78, when the moral and spiritual climate was dramatically changed, is an example. Now more than 60 percent of the population of just under a million profess faith, Nagaland being the only Baptist country in the world.²⁴

I concede to those who are cynical about the reality of revival that it becomes more difficult to assess revival as we

advance from the nineteenth into the twentieth century.

The transition from thinking in terms of revival to working on the basis of campaign evangelism is one which took place during the latter half of the last century and which gathered momentum. I describe the history of the altar call in chapter six of my book, *The Great Invitation*.²⁵ The way in which we talk about revival one minute and then campaign evangelism the next, as though they were the same, is evident throughout in J. Edwin Orr's book, *The Flaming Tongue*, which documents the way in which revivals spread around the world, 1900-10. Inadequate distinction is made between the advertised results of evangelistic campaigns and visitations of the Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit can work powerfully in an evangelistic campaign, but the difference between inquirers and converts can be very great. Billy Graham has been known to be confused about the difference, referring to converts when he should have said inquirers. He spoke on one occasion of 100,000 new converts in England needing to be nurtured.²⁶ If 5,000, that is one in twenty, of the 100,000 inquirers persevered to prove that their faith was genuine, that would be a grand number. Speaking of the altar call, Ernest Reisinger declares, "This unbiblical system has produced the greatest record of false statistics ever compiled by church or business."²⁷ It certainly does not glorify God when we deceive ourselves and when we exaggerate results.

In his early ministry Charles G. Finney preached during a period of spiritual awakening. The harvest reaped in those times has to be evaluated in the light of those circumstances. Finney appears to have been the first to refine the invitation system. How this came about in 1831 is described by John F. Thornbury in his helpful book, *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and the Second Great Awakening*.²⁸

A further perplexing factor in grappling with the reality of

revival is the rise of Pentecostalism, a twentieth-century development.

Even though the subject of revival is beset with these problems, there is still adequate documentation to show that revival as a phenomenon is real.

3) A Look at One Revival in Detail

I take as my choice the 1858 Revival in America. My principal reason for choosing this particular Revival is that it was characterized by prayer and illustrates the concept of a concert of prayer for revival. It consisted of a great national spiritual awakening which very clearly had its genesis in prayer meetings.

Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier, born in 1809 and converted in 1842, was appointed in July 1857 to be an inner-city missionary in New York and was employed by the Dutch Reformed Church located on Fulton Street. As he sought to evangelize in hotels, boardinghouses and business establishments he encouraged himself in prayer. The thought came to him that it would be good to have a midday prayer meeting to which business men might come and go as they were able. He had some invitations printed to that effect and advertised the fact that at noon on September 23, a room would be available on the third floor at the back of the North Dutch Reformed Church, Fulton Street. These invitations were liberally distributed in hotels, factories and businesses as well as to private residences in the neighborhood.

At the appointed time Mr. Lanphier was the only one present. For the next thirty minutes no one came, but then one by one men arrived to make a total of six persons present.

A week later twenty attended the meeting, and the week after that, the number doubled to forty, at which gathering the suggestion was made that the prayer meeting should become a daily event. This was agreed upon and in the days

which followed there was a steady increase in attendance.

From this point on it becomes evident that the revival had begun with the Holy Spirit being poured out along the lines of Zechariah 12:10, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication." The meetings increased in number and were characterized by "uncommon fervency in prayer, deep humility, and self-abasement and great desire that God would glorify Himself in the outpouring of His Spirit upon them."²⁹

On October 14 it was reported that more than 100 attended the noonday prayer meeting; this included many who were not believers and who were under conviction of sin, inquiring after Christ and the way of salvation.

What followed resembled in nature the waters described by Ezekiel, a gradual increase, first ankle deep, then up to the waist, and then waters to swim in (Ezek. 47). All kinds of people began to attend: professional men, merchants, clerks, butchers, bakers, and laborers, men from every walk of life. At first those who came were men, but gradually women also began to attend. By mid-January the numbers had increased to the point where all three lecture rooms were filled to overflowing with different men leading the meetings in each. The format was flexible. Hymns were sung and portions of Scripture were read. Prayers were required to be brief to allow for participation. Concern for prayer spread to other places in the city. By spring there were at least twenty different prayer meeting locations in New York.³⁰

Evidently the Holy Spirit was being poured out, imparting the desire to pray and at the same time awakening sinners to their lost condition. The revival spirit spread as on wings of lightning to cities throughout the Northern States.³¹ One of the first cities affected was Philadelphia. A prayer meeting was begun there in November 1857, but at

first it was small and did not exceed thirty-six in attendance. But then in February 1858 the venue was moved and gradually the numbers attending increased, reaching 3,000 daily at Jayne's Hall. Other meetings were begun in various parts of the city. By the end of the year it was estimated that 10,000 persons had been converted.

In Chicago 2,000 or more daily attended the Metropolitan Theatre for a prayer meeting. Prayer meetings multiplied throughout the city of Boston.

Not only did the great cities feel the throbbings of this mighty revival, there was scarcely a town or village throughout the Northern States that was not visited with showers of refreshing grace. The presence of God seemed to pervade the land. The minds of men were wonderfully moved and hearts softened. Those outside the churches were drawn to become deeply interested. It was said that there were towns in New England where scarcely an unconverted person remained.³²

The following year a great revival resembling in many ways the one in America came to parts of Britain. The Banner of Truth recently republished a thrilling account of the 1859 Welsh revival.³³ Edwin Orr in his book, *The Light of the Nations*, describes how this awakening spread to many other nations.³⁴

This revival in America was characterized from the beginning by the noonday prayer meetings, but was by no means confined to that. The regular preaching was of course there. Extra preaching services were organized as they were needed.

The only satisfactory way to establish the nature and extent of revivals is to read the eyewitness reports published at the time. The *Presbyterian Magazine* (USA, volume 8, 1858) describes the extent of the revival as follows:

A remarkable feature in the present religious movement is

the great extent of the work. It is not confined to a single sector of the country, not to a single Christian denomination; but with few exceptions, it extends to all. From the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean there is not a state or territory in which the gracious steppings of Jehovah have not been more or less visible. If any one great center can be designated as the radiant point from which the mighty movement has proceeded it is the principal commercial metropolis of the United States, the city of New York. But the work has been so nearly simultaneous in different places as to indicate the influence of the Holy Spirit.

This witness goes on to suggest that the character of the work was more like rain falling evenly over the land than irrigation whereby water is channelled from one source. He goes on to say, "All evangelical churches have enjoyed in common this merciful visitation, coming like showers from heaven direct from the throne of God." He also notes that Jews were affected as well as Gentiles, fishermen in large numbers were converted at a place called Rockaway, Indians were included as well as college students, and literally every sector of society.

John L. Girardeau of South Carolina described the revival as the greatest event of his life. Girardeau's life is recorded in a superb book authored by Douglas Kelly and published in 1992 by the Banner of Truth.³⁵ Kelly provides four fascinating biographies of illustrious preachers in the South: Daniel Baker, James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Morgan Palmer and John L. Girardeau. Girardeau was a preacher of extraordinary spiritual unction who devoted the first part of his life to preaching and pastoring among the black slave community. He had a congregation of about 1500 which was about 90 percent black and 10 percent white. After the Civil War (1861-65) Girardeau was called to the work of training men in the Columbia Theological Seminary for the ministry. But to return to his ministry in South Carolina, this is the

description given of the revival which he esteemed as the greatest event in his life:

The revival in the late fifties began with a prayer meeting that constantly increased until the house was filled. Some of the officers of the church wanted Girardeau to commence preaching services, but he steadily refused, waiting for the outpouring of the Spirit. His view was that the Father had given to Jesus, as the King and Head of the church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus in His sovereign administration of the affairs of His Church, bestowed Him upon whatsoever He pleased, and in whatever measure He pleased. Day after day he, therefore, kept his prayer addressed directly to the mediatorial throne for the Holy Spirit in mighty reviving power.

One evening while leading the people in prayer, he received a sensation as if a bolt of electricity had struck his head and diffused itself through his whole body. For a little while he stood speechless under the strange physical feeling. Then he said: "The Holy Spirit has come; we will begin preaching tomorrow evening." He closed the service with a hymn, dismissed the congregation, and came down from the pulpit; but no one left the house. The whole congregation had quietly resumed its seat. Instantly he realized the situation. The Holy Spirit had not only come to him—He had also taken possession of the hearts of the people. Immediately he began exhorting them to accept the gospel. They began to sob softly, like the falling of rain; then, with deeper emotion, to weep bitterly, or to rejoice loudly, according to their circumstances. It was midnight before he could dismiss his congregation. A noted evangelist from the North who was present said, between his sobs, to an officer of the church: "I never saw it on this fashion!" The meeting went on night and day for eight weeks. Large numbers of both black and white were converted and joined the various churches of the city. Girardeau's church was wonderfully built up, not only in numbers, but also in an experience that remained in the church. He was accustomed to say that he could always count on those who were converted in that meeting. This

was probably due to the deep work of conviction of sin, the protracted period of the conviction, the clear sense of pardon, and the joyful witness of the Spirit to their adoption.

His sermons during the meetings, as shown by his notes, were very instructive. He dealt with the great doctrines of sin, regeneration, faith, justification, repentance and other subjects. None of those who went through these meetings ever forgot the wonderful preaching.

About this period revivals occurred over practically the whole country, and large numbers of young men were brought into the church. Dr. Girardeau frequently referred to this as the Lord's mercy in gathering His elect, for the great war was soon to sweep so many of them into eternity.³⁶

Having examined one period of revival in particular we will conclude with practical considerations.

Hindrances to Revival

A main reason why prayer for revival is not offered in the way it used to be, is the fact that evangelical churches today are ridden with an Arminian mentality and enslaved by an Arminian method of evangelism which by its very nature is antithetical to revival. Arminianism displaces the sovereign grace of God and makes salvation the work of man. When the Lord is dethroned in so central a place as redemption it is not long before He is dethroned in other places as well. Wherever Arminianism takes over it is not long before the church is taken over by unbelief and its seminaries possessed by liberals, which is the way in which the pulpits also come to be filled with liberals.

We must not imagine that if the church is purged of Arminianism, times of revival will automatically return. We can assume nothing. The God of revival is to be sought in the way the Scriptures urge.

A further complicating factor with regard to revival is

the rise of Pentecostalism in this century. Pentecostalism is a twentieth-century development. Pentecostal denominations have increased in size just as the Methodists increased during the second and third great awakenings. Speaking in tongues, prophecies and healings were not features of revivals prior to the twentieth century. Edward Irving during the last century sought supernatural gifts, but that did not lead to revival, and the movement he inspired has almost become extinct in Britain. Today a substantial proportion of evangelicals are enamored with the notion that a recovery of supernatural gifts is the way to revival in this last decade of the twentieth century. A concerted attempt has been made to bring about the wedding of the noncharismatic evangelicals with charismatic evangelicals, a wedding which would spell the end of the distinctive noncharismatic stance of the evangelical church.

Allied to the Pentecostal movement is the more recent charismatic movement which has since the 1970s invaded most denominations. Charismatic emphases differ. Sometimes the emphasis is on prophecies and tongues, sometimes on healings. As far as revival is concerned these emphases cause perplexity because revival is in no way dependent upon the recovery of a new order of supernaturalism. The genius of revival is its nondependence upon any system whatsoever. Revival can and often does result in phenomenal acts, but these are secondary to the great primary work in which the Holy Spirit gives repentance and saving faith through his superlative work of regeneration.

Preoccupation with prophecies, healings and tongues is a distraction. In some places where the charismatic movement has invaded liberal churches it has resulted in evangelical renewal, but in other places, because of its experimental or feeling-based outlook, it has resulted in an anti-theological mentality and contributed toward making evangelicalism shallow. The charismatic movement has

sidetracked many pastors and leaders from the central task of toil in prayer and the Scriptures.

The glory of Jesus as the God-man is at the heart of every true revival, not wonders which may or may not attend times of power. Such manifestations would constitute the wrapping paper, not the gift. The charismatic movement, by its extravagant claims, divides the evangelical cause. Ecumenism and the charismatic movement constitute the two most divisive issues confronting evangelicals today. How can we identify ourselves with that which we believe is spurious and so far removed from the phenomenon of the New Testament wonders and miracles? The charismatic movement has seriously retarded the cause of genuine revival because those who espouse it have already set the agenda. You cannot set the agenda for the Lord. This is a perplexity to be noted as we pray for revival.

Dangers to Be Avoided

I draw attention to two dangers.

The first is that we fail to join prayer to practical effort to evangelize. We must never allow prayer to be an excuse to do nothing. We must not fall into the trap of saying, "Oh well, there is nothing we can do until revival comes." We are always under marching orders. The great commission to reach the world applies day and night.

The second danger is that we try a concert of prayer, and when we find there is indifference or very lukewarm interest then we give up. Perseverance is required. We may give up too easily when we see no stirring and no answers to our prayers. Our sincerity will be tested. Do we truly believe the promises of Scripture? Will we exercise that faith which is believing and prevailing?

How to Organize a Concert of Prayer

Sensitivity is important. If anything is to be achieved it

will be by the moving of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is not flamboyant but modest (Matt. 6:1-8). We must avoid advertising well-known names as participants.

Yet some organization is needful. Is it possible to interest the leaders of your local church? If they are sympathetic then the need to pray for revival can be presented by means of carefully prepared descriptions of living situations. Often prayer meetings are dull or lethargic simply because those present are not stirred up by facing the grim realities of our world. The church's own outreach in evangelism should be reviewed constantly, and imploring petition made for spiritual awakening and especially for the preaching ministry to be effective. But in addition to the needs of the local church a world vision should be engendered and encouraged constantly. In some churches there is a weekly, five-minute factual focus on different areas or nations of the world, presented in order to encourage specific prayer. A new edition of *Operation World*, by Patrick Johnstone, is due to be published in October 1993.³⁷ This book is a wonderful compendium of information on all nations and is specially designed to encourage prayer. Recommended is David Bryant's book, *Concerts of Prayer*, which contains many practical suggestions.³⁸

A further way forward is to organize a prayer meeting in unity with other like-minded Christians specifically to pray for missionary fields and for revival. The goodwill of your church officers should be sought, assuring them of your loyal support in prayer. In various areas pastors burdened for revival meet for an hour in the morning once a month or perhaps every second month. Some turn this day into a day of fasting, setting further time aside for specific prayer during the day. Such meetings do not need to be confined to pastors but can be open to those who are free to attend and who share the same concern.

The ideal way is for churches to join together once or

twice a year. Such united meetings require to be well led with information and exhortation. Brief telling descriptions of past revivals help stir faith and prayer. The meeting might take place on a Saturday morning and terminate with open air preaching if a suitable venue is available.

A Personal Challenge

I have described the concept of a concert of prayer, outlined the history of revival, and described in detail the prayer revival of 1857 onwards. What is your response to this? Do you believe in revival? Are you persuaded? You may believe in revival as a theory, but are you prepared to take action? Are you prepared to encourage others to pray with you? If you are a minister are you prepared to preach on this subject and bring it before your church and other churches? Are you prepared to join with others of like mind and meet say once a month or three or four times a year to consider the promises of Scripture, the blessings of past revivals, the pressing needs of our modern world sunken into a morass of sins, and the prospect of answered prayer. In short do you believe to the point of action that praying in concert is a means of grace provided for the church, by which the victory of Christ may come to this world in the form of mighty and extensive spiritual awakenings?

It is true that revival is the absolute prerogative of a sovereign God. Yet in a strange way His purposes are joined to the prayers of His people. We do need to be stirred about our responsibility in this matter. As far as I am concerned revival is long overdue. The church languishes. The people perish eternally in hell in their multitudes. Let us encourage each other in prayer.

We are living in the global age. Information about what goes on in our world is detailed and free to obtain. Knowledge enables us to pray intelligently. Let us intercede personally and in groups that the Lord will send revival of

unprecedented power so that this globe may be filled with a knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea. There are promises of Scripture which constrain the most urgent intercession.

Why dost thou from the conquest stay?
Why do thy chariot wheels delay?
Lift up thyself, hell's kingdom shake;
Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!

Author

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End Notes

1. This book is scheduled for publication in 1994 by the Banner of Truth.
2. Hendrik Krabbendam expressed this position at the annual Carey Conference for ministers in Ripon, England, 1990.
3. *The Life and Work of John L. Girardeau*, edited by George Blackburn, Columbia, South Carolina, 1916.
4. Erroll Hulse, *Give Him No Rest*, Evangelical Press, 144 pp., 1991.
5. I have cited this paragraph from R. E. Davies, *I Will Pour Out My Spirit, A History and Theology of Evangelical Awakenings*, 288 pp., Monarch, 1992. Davies is scholarly in his writing and is careful to document his thesis from original sources.
6. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 544 pp., InterVarsity Press, 1993.
7. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue*, Moody Press, 1973, p. 6. Orr writes: "The logic of words suggests revival for the revitalizing of a body of Christian believers, and awakening the stirring of interest in the Christian faith in the unbelieving community."
8. Brian Edwards, *Revival!—A People Saturated with God*, Evangelical Press, 1990, pp. 271ff.
9. *Ibid.*, J. Edwin Orr, p. 4.
10. G. K. Kryuchkov, *Twenty Years Along the Path of Revival*, Published by Friedensstimme, P. O. Box 11, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 1EG.
11. James and Marti Hefley, *By Their Blood: Christian Mar-*

tyrs of the Twentieth Century, Baker Book House, 1979, reprinted 1988.

12. Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the USA*. Vol. 1, p. 15ff. Two volumes are bound into one. (American Presbyterian Press, Box 46, Sutton Street, Uxbridge, MA 01569, \$25 U.S. includes postage). The first volume covers the period 1705-88, and the second the period of the great revival, 1741-88. In volume 1 (214 pp.) a survey of church government is provided for that period. In part 2 (420 pp.) Hodge engages in an analysis of the excesses which characterized the revival and the damage done as a consequence. Jonathan Edwards was aware of the excesses. His book, *The Religious Affections*, has never been bettered in the handling of the problems. *The Log College*, by Archibald Alexander (Banner of Truth, 1968), provides a memoir of Gilbert Tennent and enters into the issues arising out of the revival.
13. J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Puritan Life*, Kingsway, 447 pp., 1991.
14. Bennet Tyler, *New England Revivals*; Joshua Bradley, *Revivals in the USA*; Martin Moore, *Revival in Boston in 1842*; all published by Richard Owen Roberts, Wheaton, Illinois.
15. J. Edwin Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, Paternoster Press, 1965, pp. 156ff.
16. J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue*, p. 189ff.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-52.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 140ff.
21. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, WEC, 1986, pp. 269ff.
22. *Ibid.*, J. Edwin Orr, p. 176.
23. Omri Jenkins, *Five Minutes to Midnight*, 120 pp., Evan-

- gelical Press, 1989.
24. *Ibid.*, Patrick Johnstone, p. 225.
 25. Erroll Hulse, *The Great Invitation*, Evangelical Press, 1986.
 26. John Blanchard, exposition given at Carey Conference, Swanwick, 1991. Documentation is carefully presented in this paper.
 27. Ernest Reisinger, *Today's Evangelism*, Craig Press, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1982.
 28. J. F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival*, Evangelical Press, 1977, chapter 33.
 29. Samuel Prime, *The Power of Prayer, The New York Revival of 1858*, First published 1859; Banner of Truth, edition 1991, 265 pp.
 30. Frank G. Beardsley, *History of American Revivals*, 1904, pp. 222ff.
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
 33. Thomas Phillips, *The Welsh Revival*, 147 pp., 1860. Republished by the Banner of Truth, 1989.
 34. J. Edwin Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, Paternoster Press, 1965.
 35. Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power, Four Stalwarts of the South*, 192 pp. Banner of Truth, 1992.
 36. *The Life and Work of John L. Girardeau*, edited by George A. Blackburn, Columbia, South Carolina, 1916.
 37. David Bryant, *Concerts of Prayer*, Regal Books, 1985, pp. 250.
 38. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, STL.
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