

Articles and Sermons :: Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/2/17 20:14

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part I

That there has been a large-scale return to religion in the Western world, and more particularly in the United States, is too evident to need much proof. Religion is in vogue again. It is now considered smart to be religious.

This movement toward religion set in about the time of the Second World War and has continued ever since, in violent contrast to the attitudes that prevailed after the First World War. Civilized men came out of that first world struggle bitter, cynical, disillusioned and thoroughly angry with God. False prophets, in and out of the pulpits, had led people to believe that the race had progressed so far in the direction of universal brotherhood that war had become impossible. The arguments they advanced in support of their belief were too fragile to stand up under the battering of facts, but faith in peace and brotherhood had come on the world like a Yo-yo epidemic and everybody that was anybody was playing with it. The only voices that sounded a discordant note in the universal chorus of peace were those of the Fundamentalists who were ignored completely as being unlearned, reactionary and 200 years behind the times. So cheerfully singing a lullaby of "Peace, peace," the world plunged into a blood bath the like of which had not been known or imagined up to that time. What the people did not believe could happen did happen before their eyes. Like Cain of old, the world was exceeding wroth and its countenance fell. God had let the human race down. Religion was a fraud. Piety was hypocrisy and prayer a throwback to the jungle. They would have no more of that.

An embittered world took revenge on the hope that had failed it by debunking everything formerly considered sacred. The popular writers of the period gleefully exposed the weaknesses of everyone in history that had enjoyed a reputation for godliness or even plain decency. The Puritans were shown to be hard, cruel men who hated the human race; the Pilgrim Fathers were tried and found guilty of downright hypocrisy. Washington was a whisky sot and Lincoln a neurotic who loved off-color stories and used religion only as a convenient cloak. And so it was with everyone and everything else associated with religion.

Hardly anyone of any prominence in literary and philosophical circles believed in God. A "new era" was just ahead when the "new masses" would rise up, throw off the yoke of religion and establish a "new republic," a Marxian utopia having most of the characteristics of the Biblical millennium, but with one important difference: this man-made golden age would have no place for God or Christ or the Bible. Or if there were to be a Bible it would not be the Hebrew-Christian book given by divine inspiration, but a humanistic anthology composed of select passages from writers of the stripe of Lucretius, Rousseau and Shaw, compiled very likely by Henry Mencken or H.G. Wells.

A new dream of peace and brotherhood had come to the world, rising this time not from misplaced religious faith, as the previous dream had done, but from a thoroughly mundane secularism that would have no part of God or religion. The spiritual atmosphere between the two wars was materialistic, skeptical and self-confident. The prevailing ideology was a watered-down and disguised communism. The Commies were romping all over the White House lawn, lecturing in our universities and writing for our best magazines. The prevailing mood was humanistic. The motivating philosophies varied from each other in minor details, but they were all "one world" philosophies. This world was all that mattered. Anything beyond it was speculative and unproved. Faith in a world above was mere wishful thinking and could actually slow down human progress by lulling men into inactivity.

In such a soul state the civilized world moved into the unspeakable horrors of World War II. Then the wholesale murder of civilian populations, the incredible iniquities of the Nazis, the shocking collapse of trust among the nations of the earth, the monstrous violations of the spirit of brotherhood, the inhumanity of man to man, the triumph of perfidy, the near ending of civilization, and finally the appearance of weapons potentially capable of bringing a flaming end to the human race itself—all this quite literally scared people into a return to religion. The humanists had failed. The starry-eyed faith in man's ability to find his way alone was bombed and burned out of people's hearts. The world began to look around for God.

So came about the return to religion. The mid-fifties finds the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme from where it was

s in the mid-twenties. Religion is back in style again. People can now talk about their faith without apology. It is intellectually respectable again to believe in God. The religious motif is back in the literary and entertainment world once more. Just everybody and anybody is willing to come forward and say, "This I believe." And no one acts embarrassed or changes the subject. Religion is back in fashion.

The fact cannot be disputed.

Cont.

(Note: Unsure of the date this was written, likely late 1950's)

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Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part II

Religion is again legal in America. It is no longer necessary to whisper about it behind our hand. It is back in season.

The secular press, which of course is always quick to sense trends and give the public what it wants, has found that religion is news. A sufficiently large number of those who buy newspapers and magazines are interested enough in religion to make it profitable to print increasingly generous amounts of religious copy. Religious books are among the best sellers. Prominent people are telling the world what they believe. Religion is woven into sports, politics, the theatre. It is frequently a part of night club chatter, and the radio and TV comedian has learned that a serious word about prayer and church going at the end of his routine will please most of his listeners.

That is not all. The three major religious faiths in the United States are spending huge sums in advertising and are competing for attention in the press and on the radio. So many churches and other religious structures are being built these days that the building industry, which once considered such things something of a dead weight, is pretty well steamed up about the whole thing and is now quite eager to have the religious trade. Church membership is growing out of all proportion to the growth of the population. Converts to one or another religion are being sought on every level of society and among all classes and age groups. We have zealous work going on among children and young people. We are using sound trucks, radio, television, streetcar cards, billboards, neon signs, messages in bottles and on balloons. We are using trained horses, trained dogs, trained canaries, ventriloquists, magicians and drama to stir up religious interest. Innumerable professional guilds, industrial clubs and business men's and women's committees have sprung up to provide spiritual fellowship for religious-minded persons engaged in the various pursuits of life. Religious songs are in the repertoire of many professional entertainers. Religion is being plugged by night club entertainers, prize fighters, movie stars, and by at least one incarcerated gangster who has up to this time shown no sorrow for his way of life and no evidence of repentance. Religion, if you please, is now big business.

Unquestionably much of the religious activity of the day is good and in keeping with the ways of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Conversely, a lot of it is worldly, carnal and wholly indefensible in the light of revealed truth. Everything I have stated here is true and is too well known to be disputed. The facts are before us. The questions that are troubling many serious-minded persons are these: Do these facts add up to a revival of true religion? Is this that? Is what we are growing so luxuriantly wheat or tares? or is it a mixture of both? If it is both, do we see a great field of wheat with a few tares? or a wilderness of tares with an occasional stalk of wheat? Is this new interest in religion a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit? Is this resurgence of religious zeal on a level with that which swept over Germany in the days of Luther, or over England in the time of Wesley? In short, is this New Testament Christianity?

To some people these questions are meaningless, and if they bothered to notice them almost every answer would be "yes." The secular press greets the current return to religion with starry-eyed optimism, and even the religious press either hails it as a triumph for the Kingdom of God or ventures no appraisal at all. I think it may be conservatively stated that the great majority of our religious leaders accept the present swing toward religion as a genuine expression of a deep human longing after God and righteousness and want to encourage it all they can. Though some of them privately deplore many things associated with this religious movement they are too cautious to speak out. Their position is: It may not be perfect but it is better than nothing. So let the good work go on.

My purpose in these six chapters is to appraise the religious phenomenon which I have called (appropriating a phrase from Dr. Link) "a return to religion." Knowing that my words will be about as welcome to many persons as were the words

ds of Micaiah at the court of King Ahab, I yet venture to say that I am not too happy about the way things are going. While I thank God reverently for any shreds of true Christianity that may be left among us, I am far from encouraged by what my eyes behold in the religious world. I'll give my reasons in the remaining four chapters in this series.

Cont.

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/2/17 23:22

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part III

At this point it would appear necessary to define terms. Before communication can be established between writer and reader there must be a common understanding as to the meaning of words. I'll explain what I mean by "true religion."

To the convinced Christian there can be but one true religion. The half-converted may shy away from the bigotry and intolerance which he fears lie in an exclusive devotion to Christianity, but the wholly converted will have no such apprehensions. To him Christ is all in all and the faith of Christ is God's last word to mankind. To him there is but one God, the Father; one Lord and Savior, one faith, one baptism, one body, one Spirit, one fold and one Shepherd. To him there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. For him Christ is the only way, the only truth and the only life. For him Christ is the only wisdom, the only righteousness, the only sanctification and the only redemption. He knows that his convictions will bring him into disrepute with the so-called liberals, and he knows he will be branded as narrow and "seventeenth century" in his thinking. But he is willing to bear the stigma. What he has seen and heard and experienced precludes any possibility of compromise. He must be true to the heavenly vision.

When, therefore, I ask the question, "Are we having a revival of true religion?" I have only one religion in mind. I mean the faith of the New Testament as held and experienced by the Fathers. I mean that religion of which Moses and all the prophets did write, that religion which originated in the heart of God the Father, was made effectual through the hard dying and triumphant resurrection of God the Son and is vitalized and propagated among men by God the Holy Spirit. Of this religion the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are the source book, the first and last word, to which we dare add nothing and from which we dare take nothing away.

If the reader does not agree with my definition of true religion, then communication between us breaks down. There is no point in using words which mean one thing to me and another to the reader. Unless we agree to let the Scriptures tell us what true religion is, there is no way for us to find out. Each man is thrown back into the depths of his own dark ignorance and must feel his way along the steep sides of the abyss from which there is no escape.

If, on the other hand, we agree to let the Word of God decide what is and is not the religion of Christ, an inspired pattern is established for us and we are saved from tragic and costly errors concerning this all-important matter.

Once this standard is acknowledged it is not too difficult to test a given doctrine or practice to determine whether it is of God or not. We have only to compare everything that professes to be New Testament Christianity with the New Testament itself. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa_8:20 1, KJV).

Every activity now being carried on in the name of Christ must meet the last supreme test: Does it have biblical authority back of it? Is it according to the letter and the spirit of the Scripture? Is its spiritual content divinely given? That it succeeds proves nothing. That it is popular proves less. Where are the proofs of its heavenly birth? Where are its scriptural credentials? What assurance does it give that it represents the operation of the Holy Spirit in the divine plan of the ages? These questions demand satisfactory answers.

No one should object to an honest examination of his work in the pure light of Scripture. No honest man will shrink from the light, nor will he defend beliefs and practices that cannot be justified by the test of truth. Rather he will eagerly seek to build according to the pattern shown him in the mount.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. (Mat_7:24-25)

Are we today building on the rock? Upon the answer hangs our little all. We had better be sure.

Cont.

Re: Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/2/18 14:56

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part IV

In an attempt to discover whether the present increase in religious interest indicates a genuine revival of biblical Christianity I propose some easy tests. First: *Is the spiritual content of current popular religion identical with or even close to that of the New Testament? Is this that?*

I do not mean to imply that a true religious revival must be free from faults. To require perfection in the work of God among fallen men would not be realistic. Though God is perfect, men are not, and God must deal with them as He finds them. The work of Christ was flawless, but the response of His followers was imperfect and full of faults. The New Testament Epistles and the seven letters of the book of Revelation reveal that the first Christians were not always models of perfection. Every reformation and revival from Pentecost to modern times has had its faults, its vagaries and excesses along with its purity and its power. All this we freely admit. We do not require perfection as a proof of the genuineness of revival.

What we do require before we will admit its authenticity is that the spirit, the temper, of a religious movement must be scriptural. The color and flavor must be that of the New Testament. The spiritual essence of the Gospels and Epistles must appear in any religious phenomenon or it is instantly disqualified and must be rejected as spurious.

By this test it is plain that the current return to religion is not a return to the faith of Christ and the apostles. The temper is not the same; the spiritual content is of another essence; the quality is not only inferior but of another kind altogether. By every spiritual test this is not that.

True, the voice is Jacob's voice. The current return to religion is ostensibly a return to the faith of Christ, for the language employed is that of the Bible. But the hands are the hands of Esau. The practice is not consonant with the testimony. The two are not only different from, they are hostile to, each other.

Except in rare and isolated instances current Christianity is not producing godliness. And where an example of true saintliness appears occasionally it will be found to be a throwback to another and more serious type of religion than that to which people have "returned" in such numbers today. My own observation has taught me that the few who are yearning to be Christlike are being forced to dissent from most of what they see around them and go it alone in their holy longing after God. Scarcely any religious activities today conduce to holiness. The hungry seeker after personal godliness must look beyond the current "revival." He'll not find much help there.

If anyone should wonder what I mean by godliness, saintliness, holiness, I'll explain. I mean a life and a heart marked by *meekness* and *humility*. The godly soul will not boast nor show off. I mean reverence. The godly man will never take part in any religious exercise that shows disrespect for the Deity. The cozy, cute terms now applied to God and Christ will never pass his lips. He will never join in singing religious songs that are light, humorous or irreverent. He will cultivate a spirit of complete sincerity and discuss God and religion only in grave and reverent tones.

Further, I mean *separation* from the world unto God in an all-out, irrevocable committal. The holy man will not envy the world, nor will he imitate it or seek its approval. His testimony will be, "I am crucified unto the world and the world unto me." He will not depend upon it for his enjoyments, but will look above and within for the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

In short, any true work of God in the churches will result in an intensified spirit of worship and an elevated appreciation of the basic Christian virtues as they are set forth in the New Testament. It will result in self-denial and cross carrying among the people. It will make men Christlike, will free them from a thousand carnal sins they did not even know were sins before. It will free them from earthly entanglements and focus their whole attention upon things above.

This is not a dreamer's view of the Christian faith. The New Testament abundantly supports what is written here. In the light of the facts, may we conclude that the current wave of religious interest is an indication that a revival is on? Obviously not. And there are other and more convincing tests to come.

Cont.

(Italics extant)

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/2/20 22:30

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part V

Were a resurgence of the true faith of Christ to occur anywhere in the civilized world we would have every right to expect those affected by it to become more spiritual, more saintly, in the best sense of these words. The present wave of religion is having no such effect. Indeed the whole concept of saintliness is absent. The yearning to be holy can scarcely be found among the busy religionists of the day.

Christianity once set out to convert the world and ended by undergoing a reverse conversion. The world converted the Church, and after the passing of sixteen centuries we are still suffering from the disgraceful surrender. Rome introduced her pagan ways into the pure stream of the Christian faith and the waters are still muddy after how many noble efforts to purify them. And that great half-Christian, half-pagan institution, the Roman Catholic Church, which took its rise at the time of that historic reverse conversion, moves on from victory to victory and continues to spread itself across the face of the whole world.

The rise of a new religious spirit in recent years is marked by disturbing similarities to that earlier "revival" under Constantine. Now as then a quasi-Christianity is achieving acceptance by compromise. It is dicker with the unregenerate world for acceptance and, as someone said recently, it is offering Christ at bargain prices to win customers. The total result is a conglomerate religious mess that cannot but make the reverent Christian sick in his heart.

Without the remotest intention to accept the authority of Christ many religious leaders nevertheless use His name as an attractive front to give them entree to the masses. Whether or not it is the fulfillment of that odd passage in Isaiah, still it reminds one of the words, "In that day seven women/ will take hold of one man/ and say, 'We will eat our own food/ and provide our own clothes;/ only let us be called by your name./ Take away our disgrace'" (Isa 4:1). Doctrines wholly foreign to the Scriptures are being taught in the name of Christ (as, for instance, the strange humanistic hodgepodge of Norman Vincent Peale); and His name is being pronounced over deeds as carnal and earthly as any ever performed under the sun. The "Man Upstairs" of war days is now being invoked to bring success to the selfish schemes of unregenerate men.

One movie star, after a half hour of fighting, shooting and general mayhem closes his radio show with the folksy benediction, "May the good Lord take a likin' to you." A night club gossip monger ends his broadcast with the exhortation, "And go with God." A disc jockey who broadcasts from a saloon has been known to interview religious persons on his program and to draw them out to tell of the power of prayer. A famous night club comedian publicly testifies that he became a thousand-dollar-a-week success after praying to a statue and promising to contribute generously of his income to humanitarian purposes. The sight of the Virgin and the Holy Child in a tavern window surrounded by whisky bottles is not uncommon at the Christmas season in the large cities.

The sum of all this is that religion today is not transforming the people; rather it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society; it is descending to society's own level and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smilingly accepting its surrender.

What too many religious leaders are overlooking is that the faith of Christ makes no concessions, accepts no compromises, allows no terms and makes no deals. Christ offers Himself to men as Lord and Savior and receives returning sinner only when they turn against themselves and come fully over on God's side. Fallen men escape the judgment of the world as Lot escaped the destruction of Sodom, by forsaking it altogether, not by getting adjusted to it.

The current vogue religion never says, "Thou shalt not;" that would be negative thinking and contrary to the best psychology. It does not command men; it smiles and cajoles and suggests and ends by letting the man have his own way. Anything goes as long as a sop is tossed to God in the form of "devotions" after the unreconstructed rebel has had his fun. God thus becomes a servant who stands ready to help in a pinch but who will not make any embarrassing demands or expect anyone to live a life much different from the customary easy life made familiar by the radio and the public press.

S.

Undoubtedly here and there a happy exception may be found. The Holy Spirit has His few, as indeed He has always had, and their holy walk and tear-drenched prayers may yet save the day.

Cont.

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/2/20 23:27

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

Part VI

In the darkest days of Israel's history God never left Himself without a witness. Even when the worship of Baal was supreme in the land there were "seven thousand" who remained true to Jehovah.

It is a matter of deep personal gratification to me that I can and do believe that there is even in these degenerate times an elect remnant which seeks to know and do the will of God at any cost. And there is a slight possibility that that remnant may be larger today than it was a few years ago. I pray that I may have underestimated the number of the truly saved and that things may be brighter than I think. But making all allowance for what may be a too low view of the matter and drawing upon all Christian hopefulness and charity, I still cannot accept the idea that we in the United States are enjoying today a revival of the true Christian faith. A widely quoted British magazine about a year ago informed the world that we in America were indeed experiencing a "religious revival amounting to a social revolution." It is hard to imagine a more erroneous report, though undoubtedly it was published in good faith. The editors made the mistake of printing encouraging rumors without checking on the truth of them.

A genuine revival would raise the moral standards of society; instead, those standards are at a dismally low level everywhere. A genuine revival would check the divorce rate and bring back the sanctity of the home; instead, the divorce rate is higher than ever and the home is becoming little more than a place to sleep and watch television. A revival of true religion would discourage crime and juvenile delinquency; instead, the crime rate is higher than at any time in our history and youthful gang wars have become major police problems in our large cities.

Were the faith of our fathers exercising a major influence in society there would be a revolution in moral values among all Christians and a change in the outlook of multitudes who, while not themselves Christians, would nevertheless feel the strong pressure of Christian ethics and ideals around them. So it was in Italy under Savonarola, in Geneva under Calvin, in Germany in the time of Luther, in the England of the Wesleys and on a smaller scale in many places where revivals have broken out in cities and communities over the past centuries.

But in America no such change is found. The present flair for religion has not made people heavenly minded; rather it has secularized religion and put its approval upon the carnal values of fallen men. It glorifies success and eagerly prints religious testimonials from big corporation tycoons, actors, athletes, politicians and very important persons of every kind regardless of their reputation or lack of one. Religion is promoted by the identical techniques used to sell cigarettes. You pray to soothe your nerves just as you smoke to regain your composure after a sharp business transaction or a tight athletic contest. Books are written by the scores to show that Jesus is a Regular Fellow and Christianity a wise use of the highest psychological laws. All the holy principles of the Sermon on the Mount are present in reverse. Not the meek are blessed, but the self-important; not they that mourn but they that smile and smile and smile. Not the poor in spirit are dear to God, but they who are accounted somebody by the secular press. Not they that hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled, but they that hunger for publicity.

If I were describing only the nonevangelical religions the whole thing would not be so shocking. The fact is that the most popular gospel groups are deeply affected with this antigospel decay. To a tragic degree evangelical Christianity is now scriptural only in name. It has a name to live but is dead.

This has been an honest effort to understand the religious situation in the present critical hour. It is not meant as a denunciation, but as an appraisal. Surely there are a few names even today who have not defiled their garments and they shall walk with God in white, for they are worthy. Possibly we are coming near to a time when those who are on the Lord's side may be forced to withdraw from the religious hodgepodge and form a company of believers that will insist upon New Testament doctrine and New Testament practice. The temple waits to be cleansed. We should pray day and night till that happy event takes place.

End.

From ~ *The Price of Neglect*
A.W. Tozer

Re: Are We Having a Revival of True Religion? ~ Tozer - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/2/24 13:12

Brother Mike,

Thank You for this series, The Price of Neglect, by A.W. Tozer.

In answer to the question asked,

Are We Having a Revival of True Religion?

I believe to be no. The answer was no at the time that this was written, and no today as well.
This is evident in Tozer's closing statement.

Quote:

“The temple waits to be cleansed. We should pray day and night till that happy event takes place.”

It is also evident today; “the temple waits to be cleansed.”

Why do I say the temple waits to be cleansed? If one only looks at the methods being used in trying to bring it about; politics, laws and the kingdoms of this world, the church has embraced them all.

All these, are man trying in his own might to change things, and history is proof these do not bring souls into the Kingdom of God, or as well, hardly keep them there.

Ezekiel 9 came immediately to mind, when reading Tozer's closing comments.

Ezekiel 9:1-7

He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood beside the brasen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth, and slew in the city.

How is true revival brought? By men and women that sigh and that cry unto God for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

Crying unto unregenerate man changes nothing, but when the Church cries unto the Lord, He hears and He moves.

He, the Lord God, is the only One who can and He will begin at His sanctuary.

Hebrews 12:25-29

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifyeth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

“The temple waits to be cleansed. We should pray day and night till that happy event takes place.”

In His Love
pastorfrin