

**Articles and Sermons :: Revival or Reformation ~ T.A.S**

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In the light of all that has been said and implied in these chapters, the question arises as to whether the greater need of our time is revival or reformation. There is very much prayer being made, and appeal being pressed for revival. It is said and believed that if there should take place a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God, all our difficulties would be overcome, our defects and deficiencies made good, our mistakes transcended, and so on. Reference is made to such events in past times and the inferences or conclusions drawn. We would be far from denying the truth of this as to the actual period of its duration, but we do feel that a too superficial deduction or conclusion results in a delaying or staying of what God is really seeking. What have been called revivals have really - in the Divine intention, and in their very essence - been reformations. The high tides of spiritual life have invariably had the effect of making ridiculous many of the things of which the Church was proud; making puerile many things formerly considered essential; ruling out many things prevailing, and generally upsetting the accepted and established system of things. Barriers have gone down; secondary things have been removed from primary place. Indeed the whole standard of estimates has been changed and turned about. This is not only true with regard to great "revival" times, but also true when the Lord's people of all connections and complexions have met on purely spiritual ground, as at great conventions.

Now, the point is this. If the Spirit of God so either ignores or transcends so much that marks the Christian system, and makes it as though it counts so little, (and the Holy Spirit never compromises on what is vital and really of God), does it not mean that He calls for a reconsideration of very much that obtains?

There are several ways of putting this. For instance: The nearer the earth and its temporal life Christendom has got, the more and greater have such things as ritual had a place. Ritual, Rites, Vestments, Ceremony, Formality, and such like externals have always been the marks of low and poor spiritual conditions, and the measure of importance given to them is always an index to spiritual measure. On the other hand, a deep, strong, pure spiritual state has always been marked by simplicity and an absence of the above. History proves this beyond a doubt, and tides of the Spirit are outstanding evidence of it. The days of the Church's greatest spiritual power and impact were days when ecclesiastical forms, architecture and ritual were nil, and the Lord Himself was everything.

Then again, although many such things lie in the background, it is fully recognised and accepted that, in conventions for fuller spiritual life, they must be left behind and for the time being regarded as though they were not. Someone has said what a pity it is that such times and conditions should only last for a week or thereabouts and then there should be a coming down to return to all the earthly distinctions! Yes, and that may very well be the point of all that we are trying to say. One thing is patent; it is that in such times the Holy Spirit does not revive and stimulate these religious things, He very largely negatives them. Does it not, then, become necessary for us to see and take note of the effect of a Holy Spirit movement, and by His works does not the Lord call for some adjustment in this matter?

To put that another way: What will the Lord revive? What will the Lord take note of? We have instances of revival in Israel in the days of Josiah and Hezekiah. The occasion of the revival was a bringing fully into view of Christ crucified (the Passover). The effect of revival was the smashing of the empty and false religious ritual and its objects. But it was superficial; it did not go deep enough, and when they returned to the old level these things were found to be still in their hearts. The correspondence may not be perfect, but there are true parallels. We have referred to ritual and such things, but this is not all. What is true in that matter is just as true in respect of sects and "church" divisions with very much of what characterises them and each one. Here we want to be quite fair and just, and presently we shall say more in this connection.

Our present point is that we have very much evidence borne by the Spirit of God in true spiritual movements that He has weighed this whole matter as it now exists and has written it off as, not only unimportant, but definitely obstructive and limiting. If, when the Lord's people are in a tide of the Spirit, some leader or speaker is unfortunate enough as to bring in something that belongs essentially to his particular church order or system or procedure, something akin to a pang, a shadow, or a shadow is registered in spiritual people, and everyone refers to it as a pity, a mistake, or a serious bit of bad taste. Often the level of the meeting is lowered by such, and it is not easy to recover. The fact is that the Spirit is grieved. We can reason both ways. To get away from the lesser things we need a mighty visitation of the Spirit of God; this, and t

his only, will do it. Most people agree to this, and we have heard very much said along this line. What has always perplexed us is that, while things of this kind have been so repeatedly and strongly stated, the implication seems never to have registered itself with sufficient strength as to result in practical adjustments. So, on the other hand, if we seriously faced the things which the Spirit of God has again and again ruled out when He has had His way, would not the way be opened for a more permanent high level of spiritual life, fulness, and effectiveness?

That brings us back to our original question. Is not reformation an essential part of revival? Does not the Lord call for certain drastic adjustments before He can "open the windows of heaven"? (Mal. 3:10). Are we able to agree that what is needed is not so much a "visitation" of God in a passing wave of revival, but a reformation which will make possible a new level of life for - at least - a long time to come?

Is there need for a new reformation now?

If so, what is the nature of that reformation? Perhaps the best way to answer the first question would be to deal with the second. To do this we must look at the situation as it is in Christianity. By "Christianity" we do not mean just Christendom in general, but evangelical Christianity. Three things have come to characterise it, in the main.

1. A system of Doctrines.
2. Denominational, Sectarian, and Missions Divisions.
3. Forms of Work.

#### 1. A System of Doctrines

Evangelical Christianity has very largely become resolved into a crystallised and set system of doctrines. Those doctrines are the Deity of Christ; His Atoning Death; His Bodily Resurrection; His Ascension and Exaltation; and - with some variations as to time and manner - His Personal Return; The Person of the Holy Spirit; The Inspiration and Absolute Authority of the Bible; etc.

Let us hasten to say, lest anyone should jump to conclusions, read no further, and go away to misrepresent us, that we are not implying or calling for a necessary reform in the essential doctrines of the Church as above. These things are rightly and truly basic and governing, and must be maintained in purity and fulness. But when we have said all that could and should be said for them, we are far from having solved the problem of the Church's spiritual life and power. Orthodoxy and "soundness" never was the sign of spiritual life. Indeed "Fundamentalism" as such can be as cold, hard, cruel, bitter, dead, and ugly as the Inquisition, and it often is so. Its weapons are often completely carnal, and it does not hesitate to resort to physical force. This may be its extreme form, but even where these truths are held without these particular features, there is more often than otherwise a rigid legalism resulting in hardness, suspicion, prejudice, and exclusiveness of spirit. Many divisions have followed - not the faithful stand for the truth - but some enforcing of some aspect of a particular truth - hair-splitting. When we say this, we are far from forgetting the costly battles for truth in the Church's history, and how often the situation has been saved by faithful men in this respect. Our point here is another one. The Doctrines of Christianity have become something in themselves, and because this is so a host of unhappy, unholy, and unnecessary elements have gained a strong place in Christianity. It is so easy to gain your point and lose the real spiritual value. We are fully alive to the Devil's age-long work to destroy the Truth and to sow false doctrine, and we are wholly with faithful witness to the essentials of the Faith. Reform in doctrine is not our point at present, but reform in the place or relationship of doctrine. Be patient and follow through. We have a great and vital object in view. Christianity is not necessarily or inevitably established when the sum of its doctrines or tenets is enunciated and assented to. Here 'the letter may kill' rather than make alive. There is that which is not apart from the truths, but much more than they. Without that other and more, the very truths themselves may lack their right meaning. To that other we shall come presently.

#### 2. Christian Divisions

We have said that Evangelical Christianity has become a system of Denominations, Sects, and Sectional Organisations. In fairness and righteousness, we must remember that many of these had an honourable beginning. As to Denominations, in not a few cases it was a conscientious start and for some particular doctrine, doctrines, or form of expression, costing very heavily, that brought these into being. And so with many other institutions, movements, missions, and organisations; some divergence from the truth, or some failure in the responsibility, obligation, and purpose to which Christianity is committed resulted in the rising up of these specific and varied activities. It is no small history of devotion, heroism, sacrifice and service. The story can fill a library. We take nothing from it. That is not our object. What we are saying is that many of these things have now become so largely something in themselves, and are often ends in themselves. It is the thi

ng with which so many are bound up; and here again all the unhappy elements, rivalries, jealousies, competitions, suspicions, etc. have their occasion. The effect of much of this is to make organised Christianity the enemy of Christianity, and a menace to the real work of the Spirit of God.

### 3. Forms of Work

A peril is discernible very early in the Church's life. It was in the nature of - on the one side - a giving pre-eminence to one side or direction of Christian interest; and, of course, on the other side, suspicion or reservation where this pre-eminence was not recognised. For instance, there was a strong Jewish strain in the Church and the tendency - at least - was to give pre-eminence to preaching the Gospel to the Jews. When the Gentiles came increasingly into the picture, these reservations and suspicions became almost acute, even between Apostles. The Holy Spirit, Who fortunately had a large enough place and way then, was able to negotiate this dangerous passage and resolve it into a unity. But the tendency has persisted, and with the lowering and lessening of spiritual life, the peril has passed into an actuality, and an established one at that. Evangelisation of the unsaved has become something in itself, and often ends with itself. There is often no vision beyond this. If there are Christians who are not exclusively or primarily engaged in evangelistic work they are often regarded with suspicion and reservation, or even worse. Frequently the Evangelist has no room for or interest in what is beyond the work of saving souls. On the other hand, it is so easy for concern with the spiritual life of believers and the building up of saints to overshadow the Evangel and destroy the "passion for souls". There is no end to the specific and particular activities of bodies of Christians. So the "teachers" and the "Deeper spiritual life" ministries may have reservations as to the evangelistic, with the result that much loss is sustained both ways, and the Church is rendered unbalanced and much weaker than it ought to be, and could be. We have not gone into these matters beyond an indicating of them, but fuller thought must lead to an honest admission that these things are so, and being so they represent a divergence somewhere.

So we are able to get to our second question, and free ourselves from the muddy stream of the things which are wrong, and move out into the clear waters of God's true and full thought.

What is the Nature of the Needed Reformation?

In a sentence, it is all that which is bound up with a new and dominating conception of God's purposes, object, and method. When we ask what that is, the answer is

A MAN!

There is a chapter in the history of Israel which almost perfectly fits this consideration, and that chapter might well have a double title.

"Make us a king like unto all the nations",

or

"God hath found him a man"

1 Sam. 8:5. 1 Sam. 13:14.

The fuller statement of the latter in Acts 13:22 is "I have found David... a man after my heart, who shall do all my will". The innermost nature of these contrasting choices may be stated thus. Saul was man's choice; i.e. the choice of God's people in a day of spiritual declension. The idea of a king was not in itself wrong, for it had been provided for by God Himself (Deut. 17:14-15). The wrong was in the principle of "like the nations" resultant from a lost immediacy of walk with God. "Like the nations" may mean a host of things in its system and outworkings, but it just means doing God's things in the same way as the world does its things. Imitating the world in the realm of God's Church. The King must answer to all the requirements of man. All that this means could be opened out and shown to be just exactly what has so largely come to be the order which obtains in Christianity today. Saul had many things to commend him, and God sovereignly went as far as He could to bless and co-operate with what was right. But, by His full knowledge of things, the Lord always had a big reservation, and foresaw spiritual disaster. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, God looketh on the heart", was a statement which related to the crisis of this history, and it fairly sums up the governing standard of so very much in Christianity. "Man looketh on the outward". How things appear and appeal: how things impress and carry weight: how things attract and secure support: how things imply success and obtain influence. In this direction there is room for all the publicity, commercialism, competition, vainglory, display, and much more with which we have become familiar in Christian work. It is sad to see how many things the Church must have when its spiritual life is low. And it is very joyous to note how little is necessary and how many things are absent when spiritual life is high.

But, from the negative, to the positive. "God has sought him a man". This goes far beyond David the son of Jesse. We cannot give space to considering all that the eye of God saw in David which made him the man after His heart. All that we will say is that God had been watching the hidden life of this young man and had taken full account of motive and standard of values.

We pass on to the full significance of the word - "A man after his heart". We are taken by the full revelation in the Scriptures right back into the Divine counsels before times eternal. There we are allowed to see the resolve that this universe should ultimately be centred in and governed by a Man. But not just officially, as by selection, choice, appointment arbitrarily. The determination was governed by character, type, nature. It would be a certain kind of man. He would embody all the Divine features, manifest them, and determine all values by that standard alone. That Man would eventually have "all things" gathered into and summed up in Himself on the basis of His nature. He would also "fill all things" in the same way. Thus, not by an institution, organisation, movement, scheme, would God reach His end, but by an organic being. The next step in the Divine counsels was "Let us make man in our own image and after our likeness". This, in principle, corresponds to what we have said above. So Adam was created, "a figure of him that was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Then, soon commenced the history which showed departure from the way to that "One Man"; yet still a long line of men who, by their walk with God, each embodied and represented some feature which would eventually be found collectively and in perfection in the One.

At length the One was brought forth of Whom it was possible for God to say "In whom I am well pleased". Uniquely, as of no other, in nature and in measure, this was One after God's heart. Subjected to every trial and test to which heaven and hell could subject a being; and tested as to faith in God as no other has ever been tested; while being "made sin for us", and being "made a curse for us". He had to be forsaken of God for "a small moment" - which must have seemed like eternity - He triumphed, and came out with "Father"! "Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit". Oh, marvellous triumph of faith! Have you ever had a little sense of God being afar off, and having no interest in you? Has your consciousness of His presence ever passed under a cloud? Do you not know what a test of faith in His love and faithfulness that is? Does not the Evil One at such times hasten to accuse God to you; to malign God; to give all manner of interpretations to the experience, all with a view to destroying your faith? Intensify ten thousand fold as though nothing must be left to destroy faith, for more hangs upon this Case than ever hung upon one, and then you can see what Christ went through, and how great was His triumph.

"Wherefore God highly exalted him". That "Man" has been exalted at the right hand of God and constituted the Representative "Man". God has His "Man", the end of His works, and human destiny is - for good or ill - bound up with Him - the "Beginning and the End", the "Beginning of the creation of God". One of the supreme necessities of the Church is to either recover or have given a new and mighty realisation of the significance of Christ in God's universe. Everything hangs upon our apprehension of Him.

Note. From what we have said earlier no one will think that we are setting aside the Deity of Christ. And in what we are about to say, let no one think that we mean that the Church will share His Deity.

But when we have said this we have not said all. The fuller and further revelation of Scripture shows that in those same Eternal Divine Counsels the fulness and completeness of that Man was to be realised in a corporate way, so that eventually God's universe would be centred in a "One New Man"; universal and countless, yet one and individual in the sense that He would indwell all, and He is one and indivisible. This corporate entity called "His Body" was "foreordained to be conformed to the image of his (God's) son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). This sets forth God's object, and shows His method. The Divine object is not an institution, a religion, a dogma, a fraternity, an organisation, a system of doctrines, a set of works and activities. It is a spiritual man, an organic spiritual body.

Now, to resolve into one issue all that has been stated and indicated, what does it amount to? Just this; that if Christ in His personal significance and in His corporate expression were really dominantly and overwhelmingly present to the eye and heart of the Church, on the one hand numerous things which now limit, hinder, retard, weaken, and defeat the Church would fall away and just cease to have any place of government; and on the other hand there would be the effects - if not the event - of "Pentecost", i.e. life, power, victory, fulness, and great joy with real fruitfulness. What we need - we repeat - is not the transient event of "Pentecost", but the abiding effects; not only revival but reformation.

Yes, the enemy would get busy again, and all the slander, misrepresentation, maligning, distortion, "evil report", etc. would be his means of trying to destroy the testimony. But "the gates of hades" would not prevail. Whenever and wherever, by a new revealing of Himself, His purpose and method, the Lord has secured those who have moved out on to the ground.

nd of Christ only and in fulness, they have always had to meet a great and painful cost. Usually it has been their own brethren in Christ who have exacted it. Fake charges of "forming a new sect"; "seeking a name for themselves"; "dividing the people of God"; becoming "extreme"; "thinking they only are right", etc. have been levelled at them, and they have been "cast out". The truth is that - in many cases - they have only taken the ground which everybody knows is the ground of spiritual fulness; where questions of "church connection" and orders, etc. are never raised; where such things as joining something, or conforming to a special teaching or practice are never mentioned, but "Christ is all and in all"; and the one concern has been that He should have what is His ground and way of continuous increase.

How difficult it is for organised Christianity to believe that anything very much of real value can go on without machinery, publicity, and all the framework of organised work! May it not be well to pause and consider whether God's mightiest and most fruitful works in nature and in grace are not done hiddenly, quietly, unobtrusively, and - in many cases - done before anyone knows about it? What of the resurrection of nature every Spring-time? The law of God's highest work is the biological, the law of life; it is organic.

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