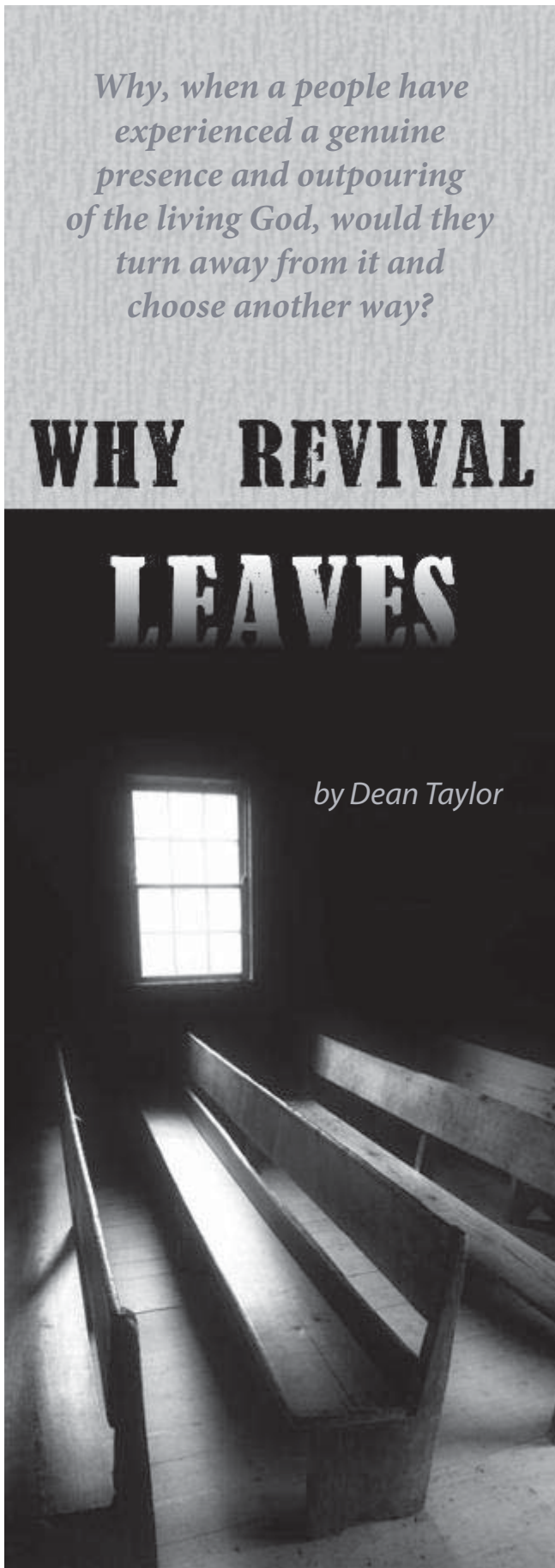


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WHY REVIVAL

LEAVES

by Dean Taylor



Late in the 1950s Leonard Ravenhill wrote a book that quickly became a classic on the subject of revival entitled *Why Revival Tarries*. It addressed the perplexing question: If God earnestly desires to pour His gracious Spirit onto all flesh, then what is preventing it? In other words, what is stopping us from experiencing this outpouring, and what would it take for us to experience real revival like we have read about? I think it is a question that does indeed challenge each of us as we long for more from God and desire to see true revival in our day. But perhaps the thought that should vex us even more than why revival tarries, is the question—*why does revival leave?* Why, when a people have experienced a genuine presence and outpouring of the living God, would they turn away from it and choose another way?

As I have studied revival and church history, the question that often troubles me when looking at a particular work of God is—what happened that made this group lose every trace of all that God had done through them? Why does the glory of God leave? The Lancaster revivals of the 1950s, the Wesleyan revivals of the 1700s and 1800s, the East African revivals of the 1940s, and even the famous Welch Revival of 1904 are all for the most part gone. *Why?*

Ichabod

In the Old Testament, there was just one word that described this tragic state that occurred when the glory of God had departed—Ichabod. In 1 Samuel 4, the Scriptures take us to a tragic scene in Shiloh. It was here that the ark of God and His tabernacle had remained for over 340 years. Through good times and bad, faithfulness and backsliding, God's "glory", at least in some measure, was always there dwelling over the mercy seat of the ark. But that would soon change. The idolatry and the wickedness of God's people, and especially the sins of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had grieved God to such an extent that He allowed them to be defeated by their enemy. *"And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men" (1 Sam 4:2).*

Just as we often are today, the Israelites were completely baffled by God's reproof saying, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?" Then (again, as we often do today) they resorted back to old religious sentiments and grabbed the ark of God and ran into battle with it. They seemed to believe this would fix everything. There was loud shouting and excitement; some might have even called it a revival. *"And when the*

ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again" (1 Sam 4:5). However, the rejoicing soon turned to "the noise of the crying" and "the noise of tumult" when the city of Shiloh heard the news that the ark of God was gone and now in enemy hands.

As Eli, now 98 years old, "heavy", and with poor vision sat on a lookout point to hear the noise of battle, he heard the crying and moaning coming from the city below. When the messenger finally made his way to Eli the old priest already must have expected the worst, "Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead" (1 Sam. 4:17). As bad as

the news of losing his sons was to him, as well as the shameful defeat of Israel, it was the last part of the news that was more than he could bear, "and the ark of God is taken." Scripture states distinctly that when Eli heard the news that the ark of

God had been taken he fell off the wall and died.

Following this sad report the Bible records that Eli's daughter-in-law was near her time to deliver a child when the news made her give up all hope of life. In her pangs, she delivered a son and her midwife tried to encourage her by telling her, "It's a boy." However, over the grief of the loss of God's glory, she didn't even look at the child; but as if vexed with the omen of death, she named the child Ichabod. "And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken" (1 Sam 4: 21-22).

It is sobering how seriously these Old Testament people took it when they realized that the glory of God had departed from them. Oh, if only they had taken heed sooner; all of these tragedies could have been avoided—but at least they mourned. Today when

groups lose God's presence, it often comes with a sigh of relief. The fire and crucible of the earlier days give way to easy lives and halfhearted commitments. Revival is replaced with ritual, and sanctification with sanctimoniousness. Confession is replaced by worldly obsessions and prayer is replaced by play. But what caused these powerful historic works of God to go down and lose their first love? Why does revival leave?

"You Don't Want Him"

In a Keswick meeting preached in the year 1912, Jonathan Goforth rebuked a complacent British congregation about their loss of desire for genuine revival. He had recently come from Wales, and he reported that the revival there was already gone. He had been there in the revival of 1904 and now he had recently returned—that's only eight years after it had begun! Listen to his words speaking about the 1904 revival:



"(In 1904) God was there; you could not mistake it. They have hindered God in Wales since then. It was not God's will to let things go down in Wales. God never got weary in well doing. There was sinning somewhere that hindered God's movement in Wales. God is the same as ever. Why did not you believe that He could do the same for England and Scotland? Did not Scotland need Him then? Did not Ireland need Him then? Did not your life need Him then? He was not acceptable here, so He went away to India. He was acceptable in the Kassia Hills. Beloved, since He moved in Wales, He has moved in those hills among a down-cast people. They had prayed two or three years for Him. The natives speak of His coming as an "explosion." It was not where the foreign missionaries were leading, but the natives were seeking Him in outstations. The heathen were led to fall prostrate at His feet. They cried out, "God is in this place!" and many of them were converted. In two years more than 8,000 men and women gave themselves to God from hea-

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thenism. You heard about that. You let God go to India; you did not want Him. I wonder that, when you heard how He had moved the Indians' hearts, you were not so smitten before God that you invited Him back to England, to your homes and hearts. But you did not. Those who went to Korea had heard of His power in Wales and India; and they humbled themselves before Almighty God, and got rid of hindering things. God came to the city of Ping Yang in 1907, and more than two thousand were converted in two months. The hearthen walking through the streets were awed. God was in that place with tremendous power, and overthrew all opposition. In one year 30,000 were saved in Korea; last year there were 50,000 saved; and this year they are praying for a million. And still you will not believe God.

Do you believe that you need God? Remember that as good churches as ever England knew have gone down in awful night. All along in North Africa, every ten or twenty miles, you will come upon the ruin of a church if you dig deep enough in the sand. Once they had the Holy Spirit, whom they honoured and magnified. In North Africa and around Damascus many churches have also been blotted out. Even Capernaum, which was exalted to the skies, now has not one stone left upon another. We need not think that the churches of Great Britain will be free from the wrath of God, if they obey Him not. There is nothing to protect us but God Himself. God's Spirit broods over us.

Pride



When the historical accounts are reviewed, it seems time and time again that one of the biggest reasons for revival to leave is pride. When God pours His Spirit and power onto a life, or even a church, the tendency is very great that they begin to take some of the credit to themselves. The Apostle Paul recognized his fleshly tendency to take glory in what God had given him; and so he actually saw his sicknesses as a gift from God to crush his pride. *“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (II Cor. 12:7).*

Too often we men (or even churches) can somehow begin to think that God cannot go on without us. We soon forget that, *“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now*

if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it” (1 Cor 4:7)? When the glory is robbed from God and given to any man, church, movement, or denomination then it is not long before Ichabod is written across the front door. *“I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images” (Is 42:8).* As Jesus Himself said, *“He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (John 7:18).*

Another catastrophe of pride is that it causes the praying to stop. And when the praying stops, so does the revival. In the Lancaster revival of 1951, Bro. Maurice E. Lehman, the praying pastor at the beginning of the revival, encapsulated the secret of the Lancaster revival and all other revivals when he said, *“We believe that it was prayer that brought the revival; and it will take prayer to continue it.”*

Pride in The Ministry

The 17th century preacher Richard Baxter made a scathing rebuke about pride in the ministry that still rings in the ears of earnest pastors today, over 350 years later. Writing his warnings in the book *The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter says:



Oh what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly and subtle insinuating enemy, is this sin of pride! It goes with men everywhere they go: to buy a home, to buy clothes, etc. It chooses the clothes one wears, their trimming, and fashion. ...And I wish that this were all the damage it does to a minister, or the worst. But, alas! How frequently does it go with us to our study, and there sit with us and do our work! How often does it choose our preaching subject, and, more frequently still, our words and manner of preaching!

BUT EVEN THIS IS NOT ALL, NOR THE WORST, IF IT CAN GET ANY WORSE THAN THIS! Oh, that ever it should be said of godly ministers, that they are set upon popular air, and on sitting highest in men's estimation, that they envy the talents and names of their brethren who are preferred before them, ... as if God had given them his gifts, to be the mere ornaments and trappings of their persons, that they may walk as men of reputation in the world, and as if all his gifts to others were to be trodden

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down and despised, if they seem to stand in the way of their own honor!

The more I live my life and walk with the Lord, the more I am convinced that God does not give us anything that we can possess apart from Him—I mean *anything*—be it revival, holiness, sanctification, wisdom, or even salvation. God gives us nothing that we can simply slide into our pocket and say, “OK, now I’ve got it...” and walk away from a constant need of His presence.

Sin

One of the more obvious killers of revival, which Goforth already mentioned in the quote above, is sin. One of the reasons God sends revival in the first place is to call His people to deal with sin. Jesus, speaking about what happens when He sends the Holy Spirit says, “*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*” (John 16:8). When revivals stop dealing with sin, and start focusing on personalities and entertainment, Ichabod once again rears his ugly head.

Dealing with sin hurts. Just like dealing with a physical disease, it takes faith to believe that a surgeon, by anesthetizing you and cutting you open, is actually going to do you good. Likewise, trusting the searching hand of God to cut into your secret and hidden areas, also takes trusting faith. The loss of preaching about sin in modern conventions and seminars has been a death-blow to genuine, lasting revival. “*Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD*” (Jer 8: 7).

Dealing with sin in our life is fundamental. Jesus said that to ignore sin is the very judgment call that will send someone to hell. “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather*

than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21). We all say we want the “fire”, but we soon forget that the fire only comes down when we stay on the altar.

No Church

Finally, one of the most common reasons why revival leaves is when people forget why revival comes in the first place. Revival is a means, not an end. Let me say that again—revival is a *means* not an *end*. Revival comes to usher in the Kingdom of God—the Church. Remember that Pentecost, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts, was not the birth of seminars, conventions, or even men’s support groups. Pentecost was the birth of the Church—with everything that Jesus meant her to be.

We all remember that Jesus said in the end of Matthew’s gospel, “*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...*” But He also followed that command with the equally important directive, “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen*” (Matt 28:19-20).

The damage that has been done by taking only a part of Jesus’ words is incalculable. Discipleship is an essential component of a successful revival. This is seldom a problem in the early days of a genuine spiritual outpouring. Discipleship and

intensive counseling are simply the expected norm during such times. Stories abound with things like all-night prayer meetings, reconciliations, ungodly jobs and habits forsaken, time spent searching the Scriptures, hungrily seeking God’s will, etc., etc. However, if a called-out assembly of believers—a church—does not rise up and continue with that same accountability and discipleship,

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then the revival never accomplishes what it was sent to do in the first place.

Lessons from History

I believe that one of the most drastic examples of incomplete revival would be the famous revivals of East Africa during the 1930s and 1940s. By all accounts that I have read, these revivals were powerful, life-changing, and genuine. God poured out His Spirit in these places. The East African Revival spread from Rwanda and Uganda, to Kenya and parts of Tanganyika. After the revivals some were even calling Rwanda and Uganda “Christian nations”. However, what followed these revivals was discouraging.

By the 1940s one of the things the Africans were fed up with was Western colonization and control. With a Gospel message tightly bound with the State, Western “Christians” had exploited the Africans for centuries. Crippled by such things as the slave trade, hard labor camps, broken treaties, and land stealing, it was hard to distinguish the missionaries from the mercenaries. The colonizing style of 19th century missionaries had left a poor testimony.

Consequently, when reading the historical accounts of the revivalists and missionaries of the 1930s and 40s, one of the things you quickly pick up on in the discussions and sermons is a lot of emphasis on not making the Africans “Western”—and who could blame them! However, as it often does in history, it would appear to me that the pendulum swung way over to the other extreme. Along with their caution of not “Westernizing” the Africans, also came a strong reluctance to disciple them at all. It was repeatedly said that the Western church “could not be the Africans’ Holy Spirit.” It was taught that they should simply let the Africans figure out things on their own—almost as if the job of the preachers and missionaries was merely to drop the Gospel message and run. This often resulted in evangelism without discipleship. Was it the way of Christ? Did they “*Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*” (Matt. 28:20)?

The outcome was heartbreaking.

One of the saddest accounts I read actually came from the Mennonite missionaries sent from Lancaster County during the 1940s. Admittedly, these early Mennonite missionaries had a hard job. Finding their way be-

tween Lancaster County culture and genuine biblical truths was a real challenge for them. Soon after the revivals broke out, many Lancaster County missionaries started to feel that their biblical doctrines of life were merely “Mennonite denominational distinctives”. David W. Shenk reports in *Mennonite Safari* that even fundamental Anabaptist teachings such as nonresistance and nonparticipation in warfare were left out of the indoctrination of new African converts. Furthermore, as these Mennonites linked up more and more with Evangelicals, the job of discipleship became only further remote.

The consequences were tragic. Not long after the revivals, WWII broke out and multitudes of young African converts, including scores of Mennonites, joined up with their country to fight in the war. After the war, the bloodshed did not cease. Just at a time when a true Christian witness could have made an international testimony, the generation following these revivals was bathed in blood, full of countless disastrous civil wars and battles in these very regions.

In 1994 Rwanda, the country that was actually beginning to be identified by some as a “Christian nation”, broke out into heinous acts of violence, culminating in a genocide of Old Testament proportions. 800,000 people were slaughtered between two rivaling tribes, the Hutu and the Tutsi.

On some days during the worst of the fighting, it is reported that over 1,000 bodies a day floated down the Kagera River as an act of racial cleansing.

Today, as Living Hope Christian Fellowship and Harmony Christian Fellowship scout out some of these Tanganyikan territories in modern Tanzania, we find

ourselves upon the scene of scores of unreached nationals, or completely untaught and confused Christians. Recently, when one of the missionaries challenged an African Mennonite why they allow their young men to go off to war, the African Mennonite answered that they had bigger issues to deal with, like gross immorality.

The Lesson

Now, I’m certainly not putting the blame for these atrocities on the Evangelical and Mennonite revivalists and missionaries. But I don’t want to lose the lesson from this tragic bit of history. While I don’t blame them, I do look back with remorse that a church on which God had so obviously poured His Spirit, did not take better ad-



vantage of the Pentecost example, and follow revival with true Christian discipleship. Could it have been different if the revivalists and missionaries would have continued to teach “all things of Christ”? Could it have been different if the Gospels were opened up and the words of Jesus were bellowed from the housetops with Holy Spirit anointing and passion?—We will never know.

What about us now? We often miss this point in American revivals as well. Let me say it again— revival is a *means*, not an *end*. Pentecost is the birth of the Church, not a social club or a prayer breakfast. In some ways the East African example demonstrates that a partial Gospel is worse than no Gospel at all. Breaking up their way of life without establishing Christ’s Kingdom in its place is to make havoc of their entire society.

“It suited the white man to break the tribe...”

In a novel written during the tumultuous years of apartheid and severe racial segregation, Alan Paton wrote a book entitled *Cry, the Beloved Country* in which he portrays the story of an old, black Anglican priest who has come to Johannesburg in search of his prodigal son and wayward sister. All around him he sees his little village deteriorating. He grieves deeply as he sees sin and wickedness proliferate among his people. In his weak moments, he blames the Western influence. In one particularly touching scene the old priest cries to another minister from Johannesburg about the inner turmoil he is experiencing. The reply from the other minister is profound...listen to this scene:

“...My friend, I am a Christian. It is not in my heart to hate the white man. It was a white man who brought my father out of darkness. But you will pardon me if I talk frankly to you. The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again. The white man has broken the tribe. And it is my belief—and again I ask your pardon—that it cannot be mended again. But the house that is broken, these are the tragic things. That is why children break the law,

and old white people are robbed and beaten.”

He passed his hand across his brow.

“It suited the white man to break the tribe,” he continued gravely. But it has not suited him to build something in the place of what is broken. I have pondered this for many hours, and I must speak it, for it is the truth for me. They are not all so. There are some white men who give their lives to build up what is broken. “But they are not enough,” he said. “They are afraid, that is the truth. It is fear that rules this land.”

“It suited the white man to break the tribe, ... But it has not suited him to build something in the place of what is broken.” When real revival comes it must not only break down that which is wrong, it must likewise build up that which is right. As the prophet Jeremiah put it, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer 1:10).

Let us never stop praying for revival. But when God, in fulfillment to His Word, stoops down from heaven to heal our land and pour on us another Pentecost—let’s go all the way. Let’s not ever forget Shiloh. God’s glory is nothing to be trifled with. If we walk in the ways of Christ, He has promised us “*I will be with you, even unto the end of the age*” (Matt. 28:20).



Why does revival leave?

To answer this God told us to go to Shiloh, and remember what was done there—remember their mistakes—remember the consequences—remember Ichabod—and most importantly, He told us to go to Shiloh to remember—His PROMISES.

*But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel... But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: **and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you**” (Jer 17:12, 23).*



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