

## Guest Editorial--

# Signs of Awakening

W. CURRY MAVIS

Writing of the religious Awakening at Yale in 1802, and of its counterparts at Dartmouth, Williams and Amherst colleges, William Warren Sweet says:

The spread of infidelity was effectively checked and out of the renewed interest in religion came the beginnings of home missionary effort as well as the foreign missionary enterprise. The founding of numerous academies and colleges, was another result, . . . likewise the founding of numerous interdenominational societies and philanthropic organizations, as well as the beginning of religious journalism, all of which was largely the result of the new emphasis upon religion which characterized this period.<sup>1</sup>

He quotes another witness to the effect that the "revival has confounded infidelity, awed vice into silence, and brought numbers beyond calculation under serious impression."<sup>2</sup> Such appraisals as these represent a newer tendency of the scholarly world to evaluate favorably those occasional, and frequently unexpected, visitations of the Divine Spirit. In a time in which such manifestations are reappearing, it is well to ponder the factors which contribute to spiritual awakening.

There are evidences of a deep-seated wistfulness in the spirit of our time comparable to the desire for a prophet or Messiah at the time of John Baptist. The failure of scientism to 'deliver the goods' in the 'twenties and 'thirties, and the failure of the Brave New World to emerge, has left its mark upon the attitudes of our people. That there is something of a desire for the supernatural is evidenced by the eager manner in which reports of unusual religious phenomena are received.

Beyond this, there are evidences that sensitive men and women are seeing once

more that there is a difference between God's thoughts and man's thoughts. Somehow they are sensing again that things which are unseen and eternal are, after all, the *real* things. Sober individuals are less avid to deny dogmatically that the shell between this world and the spiritual world may be penetrated from without, and that One stands ready to make Himself known.

While Sweet argues that revivals were a phenomena typical of frontier conditions, and hence a thing of the past; and while Kirby Page has suggested that America is too prosperous and complacent to be seriously concerned with spiritual awakening, —now this complacency is vanishing, and the public mind is ready to welcome once more an emphasis upon spiritual revival. More contemplative individuals are considering once more the Old Testament *schema* of apostasy-tribulation-repentance-renewal. There is also a new and welcome concern with the question of prayer as a vital force in men's lives. It is not unusual to find such men drawing parallels between spiritual and atomic power. These are but straws in the wind—but they indicate that the wind *is* blowing.

The study of revivals of the past indicates that while there is a certain periodicity about them, that in the final analysis they are unpredictable, and that the wind still bloweth when it listeth. Moreover, such movings of the Spirit seem to bypass the usual in method and to assume new shapes in keeping with new needs and requirements. Frequently, they are a source of amazement to established Christianity; at the same time, those who would personally be hesitant to participate in them will admit that they leave in their wake a salutary effect upon the morals of those reached by the revival movement.

<sup>1</sup>*The Story of Religion in America*, p. 327

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 334.

In some degree, public expectation contributes to the spread of spiritual awakening. In our day, the public pronouncements of such men as General MacArthur have done much to create a frame of mind favorable to the quickening of spiritual life. Likewise, the threat of disaster, or at least the uncertainty engendered by revolutionary events in the world of science and of politics, has broken the spell of scientism upon the public mind.

It is significant, further, that the media for the transmission of news are increasingly sensitive to unusual happenings in the area of spiritual life. Great periodicals have given prominence to outstanding religious leaders, while radio and television networks have not only granted time to the publicity of revival movements, but have sought to portray these movements with accuracy and sympathy. Such signs as these can scarcely be disregarded.

Let every fervent Christian be heartened! There are evidences that spiritual tides are rising. During the last few months several outstanding meetings have been held. Some of these awakenings have been in cities, e.g. Los Angeles and Boston, in great city wide campaigns. In other cases, revivals have spontaneously broken out in evangelical educational centers. These spontaneous revivals are especially significant as indications that we may be at the portals of a great awakening.

It was the writer's privilege to be in close touch with the recent revival that spontaneously came to the Asbury campus. Inasmuch as this seemed to be a genuine work of the Holy Spirit, the writer is glad to give a short account and analysis of it.

On Thursday morning, February 23rd, the Spirit of the Lord came upon the college group, assembled for regular chapel, as the invited speaker and his wife sang. Immediately following their message in song several students arose to testify. As they did so many students presented themselves as seekers for spiritual grace. The regular formalities of the chapel were forgotten as faculty and student body engaged in fervent prayer. That meeting continued from 9 a.m. with a congregation ranging from 500

to 1000 people. The service was finally dismissed but about 300 people remained to pray in the chapel. During the whole night students left their rooms and went to the chapel to seek the face of the Lord. At about 8 o'clock the next morning a large group again assembled and the service ran continuously through the day and evening. After some careful thought upon the part of the leaders, the service was finally dismissed at 11:30 P. M. though a large group again remained for prayer. Most of the time during the next two days was occupied by continuous services with the congregations running up to 1500 people. Meetings were held each night during the succeeding week with scores of people seeking the Lord. This occasion, especially in its early stages, was characterized by fervent prayer, disciplined confession, victorious witnessing and hearty singing.

For several weeks before the meeting started there had been much earnest prayer for an outpouring of the Spirit of God. Groups of students and faculty met in the dormitory rooms, class rooms, and offices to pray. This spirit of prayer continued while the meeting was in progress. Frequently every room in the college auditorium building was occupied by groups of people in silent prayer. At other times, as the main service was in progress, the voice of prayer could be heard in other parts of the building. It was as one reporter said, "Asbury has become an island of prayer."

This was not a preaching meeting as have been most of the revivals during the present century. No sermon was delivered until the evening of the fourth day. Victorious witnessing was a prominent feature of the meeting. Hundreds of people, most of them young, bore testimony to the reception of definite spiritual victory. These testimonies were radiant, natural, and definite; stereotyped testimonies were the exception. The "confession" element in the public testimonies was at a minimum. The writer heard scores of testimonies and not one contained objectionable elements. The press reporters who visited this meeting were deeply impressed with the reports of victory. Some of them quietly walked a-

bout, as if they were on holy ground. After one college girl had witnessed to her personal commitment to God, one reporter, evidently unaccustomed to personal witnessing, stated that it seemed almost an intrusion to be present.

Especially during the early stages of this meeting, the singing was spontaneous and thrilling. It was a marvelous sight to see hundreds of hands spontaneously and sincerely raised in personal affirmation as the great hymns of the church were sung. Little attention was given to the lighter religious songs. "Amazing Grace" was sung more than any other hymn. The writer noted that during one two-hour period this hymn was spontaneously repeated four times. Other hymns that were sung over and over were "There is a Fountain filled with Blood," and "What Can Wash Away My Sin?"

The use of the great hymns was one of the indications that this was not just a religious pep meeting. It did not resemble an enthusiastic get-together wherein zealous collegians cheered "Hurrah for Jesus." One could not attend for even an hour, especially during the first days, without recognizing the profound presence of the Spirit. When the writer first attended, he immediately noted people kneeling along in prayer everywhere in the auditorium. Others sat quietly weeping or remained quiet as the Spirit dealt with them.

This meeting is having a marvelous outreach. During the early days of the revival, telephone lines out of Wilmore were kept busy by students calling home to report their new found joys to their parents. People came from great distances to attend these meetings. Two unsaved brothers of one of the co-eds drove to Wilmore from the state of Mississippi to see their sister because she had called and said she "would like to see them." They arrived on the first Sunday evening of the meeting and in a short time professed conversion. Scores of students and others have gone out to communities in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio and are helping spread the revival spirit. As this is being written there is a report of spiritual awakening in the state of Mississippi. More than 1000 people have sought God in one week-end service there. Hundreds of people feel as one Seminary student said, "We are not being blessed of God to become spiritual ornaments, but to be used of Him." Scores of young people have been called into Christian service.

This meeting, and others like it, bring courage to evangelical Christians. Elements of the apostolic pattern have again been displayed. It indicates that men and women still recognize their need of Divine help. It shows that the "power of God unto salvation" is applicable in the middle of the 20th century. It is a vivid proof that the days of revivals are not over.