

Perspective Digest

Volume 5 | Number 2

Article 10

4-1-2000

Revival

Orris J. Mills

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

Recommended Citation

Mills, Orris J. (2000) "Revival," *Perspective Digest*. Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol5/iss2/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

REVIVAL

Why does the very word conjure up images of fanaticism? How can we tell the difference between the true and the false?

I heard of a minister who started a revival series by asking this question: "If every person in the Adventist Church had *your* heart, *your* experience, *your* commitment to God, would the church be ready for Christ's return?" He stood a moment before the silent congregation, pronounced the benediction, and left the podium. . . .The next night he directed the same question to a congregation sobered and ready for revival.

As we enter the third millennium, does the church need revival? I'm not talking about the churches that the Revelator calls God's children out of. I'm talking about the church they founded, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I'm talking to you. Do *you* need revival?

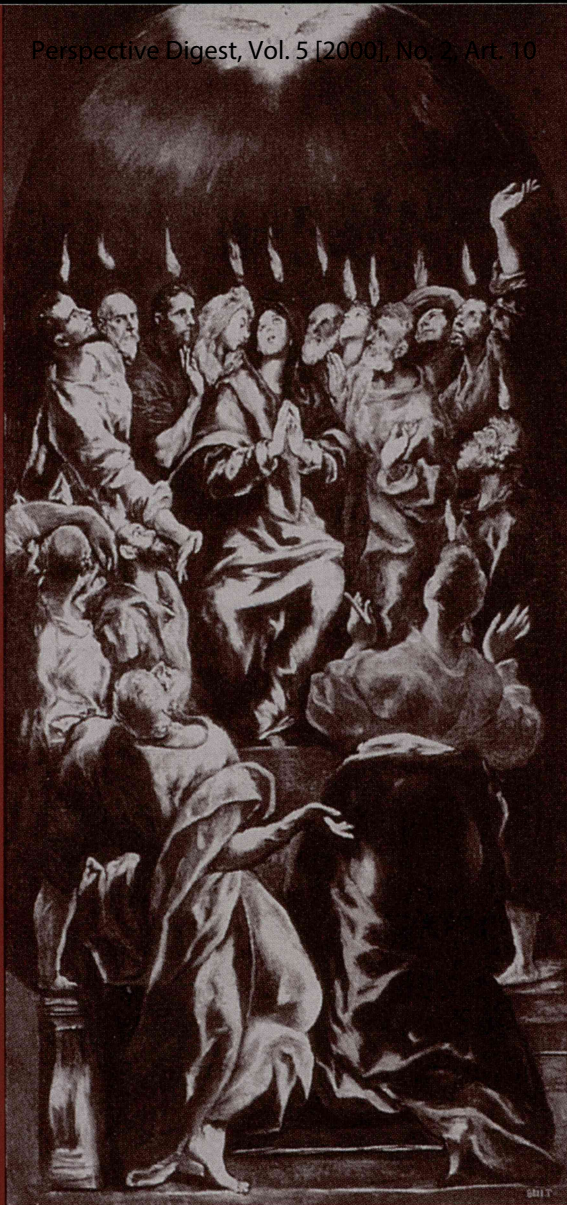
"A revival . . . is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs."¹ Of course, that observation was made

in 1887. Is it true today? And if it is, there's someone who hates the very idea:

"If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time.² Satan will do his utmost to keep [God's people] in a state of indifference and stupor."³

What Is a Revival?

It is a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from spiritual death. Sin not only separates the soul from God but it also destroys both the desire and the capacity to know Him. Unless something from outside takes hold of our heart, we are doomed to death. That some-



**El Greco's depiction of Pentecost
from the Prado in Madrid**

thing is the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin and judgment to come. And through the grace of God, affirming forgiveness, gracious acceptance, and assurance of overcoming power.

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, his hearers were “pricked in their heart.” “What shall we do?” they asked. Peter’s answer: “Repent and be baptized. . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Of those that did, it is written, “They. . . were baptized. . . . And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:37-42, KJV).

A revival doesn’t need a public meeting. Wherever the Holy Spirit visits it can happen—at work, on a Sabbath walk, at home, in a pig pen! It was there that the Spirit touched the heart of the prodigal, and “he came to himself,” responded to the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, and “arose, and came to his father” (Luke 15:17, 20, KJV).

It can come to *you* as you read this article. . . .

Is Our Church in Need of Revival?

Yes, for five reasons.

1. Because of the condition of our hearts. They are lukewarm. Indifferent. When we take inventory, when under the Spirit’s probing, we are confronted by our selfishness, our harshness, our penchant to criticize, we must acknowledge, “I need revival!”

2. Because of the condition of our homes. What does your spouse know about you that you wouldn’t want published in the church bulletin? Parents, what would your children have to say of your commitment to Christ? Youth, is Christ’s will foremost in your life? In your dormitory room?

3. Because God says so: “I have this against you, that you [God’s last-days’ church] have left your first love” (NASB). Wrote Ellen White: “I am instructed to say that these words are applicable to Seventh-day Adventist churches in their present [1902] condition. The love of God has been lost, and this means the absence of love for one another. Self, self, self is cherished, and is striving for the supremacy.”⁴ Are things better today—when the world comes daily into our homes via television, videos, magazines, and newspapers? When worldly appetites have deadened our taste for the Word of God? When the scenes of Sodom appear on the TV screens in our homes?

It would not be surprising if your answer is: “Things *are* better!” Said the Revelator: “[Y]ou say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17, NKJV).

4. Because conditions in the church demonstrate it. We pack the church school auditorium for Sat-

urday night entertainment, but hardly a handful appear for prayer meeting. We fill the church from the front back for entertainment, but from the back forward for the 11 o'clock services. We have become "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (NRSV). "The church has turned back from following Christ her Leader and is steadily retreating toward Egypt. Yet few are alarmed or astonished at their want of spiritual power."⁵ "The slumbering Church must be aroused, awakened out of its spiritual lethargy, to a realization of the important duties which have been left undone."⁶

It would seem that such messages from one we believe to have been inspired would impel us to reform. But Ellen White wrote that in her day, "Doubt, and even disbelief of the testimonies of the Spirit of God is leavening our churches everywhere."⁷ (Of course, that was in *her* day . . .)

5. Because revival is imperative. "God calls for a spiritual revival and a spiritual reformation. Unless this takes place, those who are lukewarm will continue to grow more abhorrent to the Lord, until He will refuse to acknowledge them as His children."⁸

Two Dangers

Wait a minute! Doesn't what you're reading sound a bit fanatical?

Maybe even dangerous? Yes. Do you know of anything of great potential power that isn't dangerous? Electricity, for example. Are you willing to give up its convenience because someone occasionally gets shocked or even killed by contact with it?

Every revival from the time of the apostles has had to contend with fanaticism. The Prince of Evil contests every inch of our advance toward a relationship with Christ. Luther, the Wesleys, William Miller, the Whites, others—all true reformers who have blessed the world with their faith and influence have been beset. From the right has come the fanaticism of the over-zealous, unbalanced, and unsanctified. From the left, revival has been thwarted by the cold formalists, who, while remaining aloof from the work of reform, point their finger at the reformer. These evils will appear again—in our church! "I was instructed that fanaticism similar to that which we were called to meet after the passing of the time in 1844 would come in among us again in the closing days of the message."⁹

Here, then, are two cautions. First, watch out for sensationalism on the right. For religious hysteria. For the bizarre and fanatical. For the new and novel. Seek instead for that reform resulting from earnest and prayerful study of God's Word. Let it be study and prayer rather than fanaticism that rocks the church.

Nothing sparks a false revival faster than a true revival!

When souls long to be one with Christ, “then those who are content with the form of godliness, exclaim ‘Be careful, do not go to extremes.’”—Ellen G. White.

“[B]e careful and do not go into or try to create human excitement.”¹⁰

Most of us have gotten a missive from an Adventist brother or sister who demonstrates intense desire to startle the world with a “Made in my study” original. Or from another who has a program to lift fellow members into a state of spiritual ecstasy. Paul admonished the church of his day: “From such turn away.” He also wrote: “For the time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander off after man-made fictions” (2 Tim. 4:3, 4, Phillips).

The second caution refers to the cold formalism on the left. “If Satan sees that the Lord is blessing His people and preparing them to discern his delusions, he will work with his master power to bring in fanaticism on the one hand and cold formalism on the other.”¹¹ However, though we should be alert to the pit-

falls of excitement on the one hand, “we should not be among those who will raise inquiries and cherish doubts in reference to the work of the Spirit of God; for there will be those who will question and criticize when the Spirit of God takes possession of men and women, because their own hearts are not moved, but are cold and unimpressible.”¹²

Actually, those thus deceived will come to believe that their very conservatism is testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit! “Formality, worldly wisdom, worldly caution, worldly policy, will appear to many to be the very power of God, but when accepted, it stands as an obstacle to prevent God’s light in warnings, reproof, and counsel from coming to the world.”¹³

Nothing sparks a false revival faster than a true revival! When souls long to be one with Christ, “then those who are content with the form of godliness, exclaim ‘Be careful, do not go to extremes.’”¹⁴

Seeking revival sounds dangerous, doesn’t it? Cannons to the right of us, cannons to the left of us volley

and thunder. But we need not worry so long as we are students of the Word, humbling our soul as we learn at the feet of the Master Teacher. If we follow His example, we will not be numbered among the extremists of either right or left.¹⁵

Revival's Aftereffects

A few years ago I heard a report of a revival that had occurred in one of our colleges. It went like this: "There was a real stir in the church; families were united, old feuds were settled, confessions were made, people corrected wrongs and gave up their bad habits. But it was a false revival, for it was only temporary."

Does a revival's duration prove its quality? I am reminded of a revival born and buried at Battle Creek College and Ellen White's comments on its demise:

"There have been things written to me in regard to the movings of the Spirit of God. . . at the college, which clearly indicate that because these blessings were not lived up to. . . that which was light from heaven has been called excitement. . . . We must be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in pronouncing the ministration of His Holy Spirit a species of fanaticism. . . .

"That God did abundantly bless the students . . . and the church, I have not one doubt; but a period of great light and the outpouring of the Spirit is generally followed by a

time of great darkness. Why? Because the enemy works with all his deceiving energies to make of none effect the deep movings of the Spirit of God. . . . "When the students at the school went into their match games and football playing, when they became absorbed in the amusement question, Satan saw it a good time to step in and make of none effect the Holy Spirit of God in molding and using the human subject. . . .

"It is an easy matter to idle away, talk and play away, the Holy Spirit's influence."¹⁶

How, then, can we retain the blessing?

First, let this be confirmed: It is not enough just to be moved by the Spirit. We must repent of our sins and set about to reform our practices. God's desire is that a revival should lead to genuine reformation—of the mind, the home, the church. Our ideas, theories, habits, and practices must be surrendered to God for His acceptance or dismissal. The struggle for mastery over self, for purity of heart and holiness of soul is lifelong. As Paul put it: "I die daily," and so must we if we would be God's children.

The Word of God offers a wonderful promise: "[I]f we follow on to know the Lord. . . he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hosea 6:3, KJV). From revival to downpour, we

shall grow in character, obedience, and service.

Revival Is Coming!

Regardless of how we relate to it, revival is coming!

“In visions of the night, presentations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God’s people. . . . Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families, and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest.”¹⁷

What great news! But it has its limits. The entire church will not be revived. “That time will never come.”¹⁸ During revival, the unstable will go to the right and the formalist to the left. Those who “follow on to know the Lord” will go on from triumph to triumph, prepared to meet the awesome challenge of closing events and to rejoice at last as the radiance of the coming Christ turns the midnight sky into a dawn of eternal splendor!

How can we ensure that revival will come for us? Our private personal devotion should be a daily revival experience. We must make time to be alone with God. Daily we must hear Him as He points out unconquered territories in the homeland of our hearts. Every day we must pray: “Lord, show me myself and show me my Saviour,

and make your Book live in me.” Only as awareness of our great need grows will we reach out for divine power. And it is only when we reach out that Christ can help.

We should gather and spontaneously pray for the blessing of God upon the church. We should talk with each other of the matchless love of Jesus and lift our thoughts above the vain and trivial. Paul pleads: “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth. . . . Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1, 2, KJV). “It is time to seek the Lord till He come and rain righteousness upon us” (Hosea 10:12, KJV).

God’s goal for us is that we be “purified. . . by obeying the truth” (1 Peter 1:22, NIV). With Jeremiah we must acknowledge: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9, KJV). With David we must pray: “Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant. . . from presumptuous sins” (Ps. 19:12, KJV).

Consequences

And what if we do not seek this purification? The Holy Spirit will sadly pass us by. And we will talk of the revival and glory to come, but not even recognize it, because it will not meet our expectations. And as the church is sifted by trials, the “great proportion of those who are

**A period of great light and the outpouring of
the Spirit is generally followed by a time of great darkness.
Why? Because the enemy works with all his deceiving
energies to make of none effect the deep movings
of the Spirit of God. . . .**

supposed to be genuine will give heed to seducing spirits, and will turn traitors and betray sacred trusts. They will prove our very worst persecutors.”¹⁹

Church members “who did not join with those who prized victory and salvation enough to perseveringly plead and agonize for it, . . . were left behind in darkness, and their places were immediately filled by others taking hold of the truth and coming into the ranks.”²⁰

Revival’s Result

Revival shall have its glorious conclusion. The Revelator points us to a message of such Spirit-filled power that the earth is lightened with its glory (Rev. 18:1). What is this glory? “The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.”²¹

Picture the last-day Adventist church you belong to. If it has accepted the revival offered by our gracious God, its members will be active in loving ministry. They will

give bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked. They will bring the poor to their house (see Isaiah 58:1 to 8). With the Word of God in hand and in heart, they will witness to their neighbors. Then will be seen the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:1 to 3: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and the Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (KJV). Adventists have referred to this witness as “the loud cry.”

It can start for you now.

Dear Lord, may it be so for all who seek revival. Raise up a standard against the enemy. Raise up a people who reflect the glory of God. □

REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 27, 1887). Hereafter abbreviated as RH.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* (November 22, 1892).

- ⁴ Ibid. (February 25, 1902).
⁵ _____, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 217.
⁶ RH (February 25, 1890).
⁷ *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 217.
⁸ _____, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 128.
⁹ Ibid., p. 221.
¹⁰ Ibid., book 2, p. 57.
¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.
¹² Ibid., p. 57.
¹³ Ibid., p. 19.
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 57.
¹⁵ See *Selected Messages*, book 2, page 22.
¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 130, 131.
¹⁷ *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 126.
¹⁸ *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 122.
¹⁹ Ibid., book 2, p. 19.
¹⁹ _____, Ellen G. White Comments, in *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1065.
²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 271.
²¹ _____, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

F O L L O W T H E L E A D E R ?

The priests and rabbis in Israel “would not stoop to be instructed by those whom they termed heathen. . . they led the people to regard the interest in Jesus as a fanatical excitement. Here began the rejection of Christ by the priests and rabbis” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 62, 63).

The people often were brought to conviction by the teachings of Jesus but there was such a “contrast between His teaching. . . and that which they had heard from their elder,” that “[i]f they obeyed the words of the new rabbi, they must go contrary to the opinions of the great thinkers and teachers of the time” (Ibid., pp. 238, 242).

Could it happen again? In our time? In our church?

Yes. “The great danger with our people has been that of depending upon men, and making flesh their arm. Those who have not been in the habit of searching the Bible for themselves, or weighing evidence, have confidence in the leading men, and accept the decisions they make; and thus many will reject the very messages God

sends to His people, if these leading brethren do not accept them” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 106, 107).

The point is not that all leaders will reject light—any more than that all laymen will apostatize. The point is that everyone must study for himself or herself and be prepared to stand for truth regardless of who rejects it or through whom it may be revealed.

God has placed consecrated men and women in positions of trust and responsibility. He is not leading one off this way and another off that way. All who have a living connection with God through study, prayer, and service will have the testimony of the Spirit and will discern truth from error.

But let us never forget that position does not guarantee infallibility. “Talent, long experience, will not make men channels of light unless they place themselves under the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and are called, and chosen, and prepared by the endowment of the Holy Spirit” (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 23, 1890). Sadly, “many a star that we have admired for its brilliancy” will reject light and mislead all who have placed implicit confidence in them (see *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 81).

How can we be sure what is truth? “There is to be in the churches a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, but it will not move upon those who have not humbled themselves before the Lord, and opened the door of the heart by confession and repentance. In the manifestation of that power which lightens the earth with the glory of God, they will see only something which in their blindness they think dangerous, something which will arouse their fears and they will brace themselves to resist it. Because the Lord does not work according to their ideas and expectations, they will oppose the work” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 23, 1890).—O. J. Mills).