
The Work of the Holy Spirit in Revival and Renewal

David Smith

Introduction

The subject of the work of the Holy Spirit in revival and renewal and the assumption that the primary means of renewal is through movements of revival, is so central within the Evangelical tradition that it might be claimed that it belongs to the self-definition of the movement. This is not surprising given the fact that Evangelicalism came to birth in the 'Great Awakening' of the eighteenth century. A movement emerging from such a revival naturally enough made the need for, and the expectation of, times of spiritual renewal central to its understanding of the church and its mission in the world. Indeed, Evangelicalism has sometimes been described as 'revival Christianity'.

It is important to notice that the prominence given to the rôle of revivals in the growth of the Christian movement in the world was related to a particular form of eschatological belief which was widely, if not universally, held within the first generation of modern Evangelicals. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Christians on both sides of the Atlantic anticipated an age of unprecedented blessing and the hope was strong that the revival experienced in Britain and America would spread around the globe and usher in the millennial glory in which peoples everywhere would come to worship and honour the living God. 'A time shall come', wrote Jonathan Edwards, 'when religion and true Christianity shall in every respect be uppermost in the world'. The nations would finally abandon warfare as the ancient prophetic promises of universal peace and love at last became reality and 'the whole earth' would become 'one holy city, one heavenly family, men of all nations [dwelling] together'.¹

Postmillennial optimism of this kind played a crucial role in both the spread of Evangelicalism in the West and in the emergence of the modern missionary movement. William Carey reveals the influence of Edward's extraordinary eschatological vision at the beginning of his famous *Enquiry* of 1792, arguing that God had 'repeatedly made known his intention to prevail finally over all the power of the Devil' and to extend his own kingdom 'as universally as Satan had extended his'.² In other words, Carey—who here stands as representative of the first generation of Protestant missionaries—takes it for granted that the prophetic scriptures anticipate an era within human history when Christ would reign over the whole earth and among all its peoples. Not only that, the signs of tile times seemed to indicate that the world stood on the very brink of the dayspring of this golden age when still unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies would at last become reality. An expectation as great as this obviously required powerful movements of revival throughout the world, so that the spiritual awakening which had occurred in Europe and America served as a model for the church, both in its

missionary expansion overseas and in its subsequent historical development in the Western world.

The Concept of Revival in Christian History

It is perhaps surprising to discover that the term 'revival' as it is being used here does not seem to have appeared before the eighteenth century, Iain Murray suggests that it was first used in this sense in the work of Cotton Mather, in which case this particular understanding of 'revivals' would seem to be a modern development.³ It is possible to recognise the newness of this terminology while maintaining that the Evangelical stress on the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit through revivals, was a *recovery* of an aspect of biblical theology which seems to have escaped the notice of the Protestant reformers. This is entirely plausible, after all, as Carey pointed out, those same reformers had failed to recognise the clear apostolic injunction to engage in worldwide mission, Geoffrey Best has said that the Evangelical Awakening 'brought the third person of the Trinity back into common circulation'⁴ and we may argue that this renewed awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit led to the rediscovery of the biblical phenomenon of revival which had long been neglected within Christendom,

Long neglected—but not previously unknown. Six centuries before Jonathan Edwards developed his remarkable theology of revival and linked this with the hope of an era of universal peace and well-being, Joachim of Fiore (1145–1202) had expounded a Christian vision of history in which a new age of the Holy Spirit would result in love, joy and freedom as 'the knowledge of God would be revealed directly in the hearts of all men',⁵ Joachim did not use the term 'revival' to describe the means by which this vision would become historical reality, but his conviction that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would turn the whole world into a vast monastery in which humankind would be united in the praises of God, 'entered into the common stock of European social mythology' and bears a remarkable likeness to the eighteenth century vision of the early Evangelicals.

Thus, if the term 'revival' is something new, the phenomenon to which it points is not. Indeed, it could be argued that the Great Awakening, which challenged the highly cerebral form of Christianity known as Deism in the eighteenth century, was the latest eruption of a long tradition of renewal movements by which the church has been periodically reminded of its true origin and nature. Such movements always stress the empowering work of the Holy Spirit and the crucial importance of eschatology, both themes liable to be neglected or suppressed by churches primarily concerned with the maintenance of ecclesiastical structure and order, or tempted by an unbalanced intellectualism which defines matters of faith in purely rational categories. Movements like this are, by definition, not gentle and even, but rather erupt into history, revitalising the church and frequently resulting in significant social and moral transformation. The question must be asked (and it is one to which we shall return) whether the current surge of Christianity, often in a Pentecostal form, around the world is simply the latest manifestation of this same tradition?

I want at this point to consider the distinction between 'revival' and *revivalism*. The transition from a belief in revival as all outpouring of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, as primarily an act of God, to the nineteenth century emphasis on revivals as events that could be triggered by appropriate human actions has often been noted. However, my

concern here is that even in the context of a Reformed theology stressing divine sovereignty and grace, the danger exists that the category 'revival' can become so dominant in shaping the understanding of the church and its mission in the world, that it eclipses other important biblical perspectives. In other words, revivalism is not restricted to the Arminian tradition, but may also emerge within the framework of Reformed theology,

Let me try to illustrate what I mean by this in relation to the historical experience of William Carey and his colleagues in India. The letters of these pioneers of Protestant mission in the Hindu-shaped culture of India reveals a growing realisation that their earlier anticipations of revival in that context were misplaced. Writing to John Ryland in 1800, Carey said, 'I have often thought that it is very probable that we may be only as pioneers to prepare the way for more successful missionaries'.⁶

Twenty years later Carey's colleague William Ward wrote that 'the restricted progress of Christianity' formed 'one of the most mysterious dispensations of Providence that has ever occupied human attention'.⁷ Like almost all the first generation of Baptists in Asia, Ward had gone to India anticipating the spread of millennial glory over the sub-continent but, confronted with the reality of a deeply resistant culture he was compelled to search for a new model of the church and its mission which might enable him to account for the *absence* of revival and the strange lack of converts. That quest, I want to suggest, has become common to all of us in the Western world as we seek for a broader understanding which places both revival and decline within the overarching purposes of God.

The Biblical Foundations of the Theology of Revival

The Evangelical belief in the phenomenon of revivals has generally been grounded upon appeals to two types of biblical texts. First, and perhaps surprisingly, the doctrine rests upon Old Testament texts in the Psalms and the Prophets which promise the healing, restorative activity of God. For example, in a recent study of revival with the subtitle *What The Bible Teaches The Church for Today*, Raymond Ortlund acknowledges that the term 'revival' cannot be found in scripture in the sense that it is used today, but claims that the Old Testament clearly contains the idea signified by that word. 'The Scripture is clear, God is able to rend the heavens and come down with unexpected demonstrations of his saying power (Isaiah 64)'.⁸ Like many other writers on this subject, Ortlund assumes rather than demonstrates the connection between the prophetic text he quotes and the modern understanding of 'revival'. The deep longing for a greater sense of the presence of God among his people which is evident on every page of Ortlund's book is something with which I identify without reserve, but I am left asking whether it is self evident that Isaiah had in view the phenomenon we have come to classify as 'revival'?

The second type of text to which appeal is made concerns the event of Pentecost and the post-Pentecostal works of the Holy Spirit as described in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Toward the end of his life John Wesley drew a direct comparison between the Great Awakening and the events of Pentecost, arguing that both constituted empirical evidence for the existence and power of God that all reasonable people should acknowledge. In similar vein, the Reformed theologian George Smeaton saw Pentecost as a warrant to pray for further manifestations of the power of God, dismissing as

'mischievous and dishonouring to the Holy Spirit' the idea that day of Pentecost had somehow exhausted the supply of divine life to the church.

Throughout the history of the Christian movement the entrance of new peoples into the kingdom of Christ as the result of the missionary translation of the Gospel, has often been accompanied by experiences of the Holy Spirit so similar to those found in the book of Acts that they have been called 'local Pentecosts'. I recall in this connection my own missionary service in Nigeria, where a powerful spiritual movement among the Annang people in the 1930s became known locally as the 'Annangs Pentecost', a recognition of the crucially important role this movement played in convincing traditional Africans that the Gospel was not mere 'white mans' religion' but was the power of God for salvation in the specific context of a sub-Saharan primal society. Similar phenomena have been recorded in all parts of the world, often attracting the attention of anthropologists who have clearly recognised the cultural significance of such 'revitalisation' movements. Thus, the narrative of Pentecost is clearly of fundamental importance to this discussion since it has been understood to contain the clear promise that the spiritual resources required for the life and mission of the church in the world will never be withheld from the people of God.

Central though the Pentecost narrative unquestionably is for our understanding of the church and its mission, it is important to remember that the picture provided by the book of Acts forms part of the narrative of the progress of the church in the New Testament, not the whole. Indeed, by the close of the apostolic period we are looking at a very different picture: the revival fires have cooled, the love of many has grown cold, and Christians seem to be increasingly at home in a world dominated by Roman idolatry and materialism. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is not absent from this picture, but he comes now not with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, but with a searching, critical voice, seeking for those, evidently a minority, who are still able to 'hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches'. These texts need to be read alongside the Pentecostal story because, taken together, they furnish us with the material for a theology of the Holy Spirit which enables us to account for *decline* as well as advance, placing such periods of recession and struggle firmly within the divine purpose. This perspective seems particularly important for Christianity in the Western world at the start of the third millennium since our churches look far more like those described in Revelation chapters two and three than the exploding missionary community of the book of Acts.

Revival and Mission in the Twenty-First Century

There is no doubt that the topic of revival attracts immense interest and concern among contemporary Christians. Despite the gloomy analyses of the state of Western Christianity offered by sociologists and statisticians, a veritable flood of books offer a perspective that can be described as one of revivalist optimism. Rob Warner, for example, articulates a hope which closely parallels the eighteenth century expectations of the coming of an unprecedented revival on a global scale:

For all the failings and weaknesses of the modern church, we stand at the climax of centuries which have seen, step by step, the restoration of the priorities and practices of the apostolic era. The Spirit of God has surely been bringing a continuing reformation to the church in order to equip us for an advance unparalleled since the first Christian

generation. What is more, the globalisation of modern culture and the speed of modern travel together provide the opportunity for revival not merely on a national, but on a global scale.⁹

Within the western Charismatic movement the belief that we stand on the brink an era characterised by a work of the Holy Spirit that will transcend anything, previously known is widespread. The evidence marshalled in support of this positive assessment of the condition of the churches in the West includes the phenomenon of the Charismatic movement itself which, it is claimed, provides an example of continuous revival. The 'Toronto Blessing', although having faded from view, is frequently cited as a model of the kind of spiritual stirring which can commence almost anywhere in the world and, through postmodern networks of global communication, can spread rapidly around the planet. In the era of globalisation, local awakenings which would once have gone completely unnoticed elsewhere, can quickly trigger similar movements on the other side of the globe. Thus, the next 'blessing' may be experienced in Cape Town, Mexico City or Singapore and will then rapidly criss-cross the planet with the potential to encompass the whole human race.

The language used by 'revivalist optimists' is uniformly positive and hopeful. Gerald Coates takes it for granted that 'we ate in the middle of a colossal revival', while RT Kendall believes that we stand on the edge of a work of God 'greater than anything heretofore seen' which will lead into 'a post-charismatic era of unprecedented glory',¹⁰ Rob Warner goes even further, linking 'the greatest revival in the history of the church' with the eschatological hope of the end of the world, arguing that the coming revival can be identified as that which 'precedes the return of Christ'.¹¹

Questions for 'Revivalist Optimists'

This particular form of revivalism prompts a series of important questions, I want to ask, first, *whether the notion of revival is here in danger of acting as a form of religious ideology which conceals the reality of the condition of Western Christianity and prevents believers from facing the challenges of discipleship and mission in a post-Christian culture?* At the end of the 1960s the Dutch theologian JC Hockendijk made the controversial suggestion that calls to evangelism often concealed a lingering nostalgia for the great ages of faith and were motivated by the desire to preserve the crumbling structures of Western Christianity. The evangelistic activities of churches in Europe and America, he argued, too often concealed the illicit compromises they had made with their host culture and it was simply nonsense to summon these churches to evangelism 'if we do not call them simultaneously to a radical revision of their life and a revolutionary change of their structure'.¹² To put it bluntly, Hockendijk said,

... the call to evangelism is often little else than a call to restore 'Christendom' ... as a solid, well-integrated cultural complex, directed and dominated by the church. And the sense of urgency is often nothing but a nervous feeling of insecurity; with the established church endangered; a flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably past.¹³

What happens if we apply this analysis to the revivalist optimism noted above? Does this kind of focus on revival sometimes conceal a desire to preserve inherited forms of the church and so to evade the real challenges of *mission* in a changed cultural context? The confident announcement that revival is breaking out around us obviously reassured

Christians who are deeply troubled by the loss of a 'Christian culture', and enables them to hang a 'Business as Usual' notice on the door of the church. If revival is occurring, and if we are assured that it will be the greatest such event ever experienced in 2000 years of Christian history, then the radical changes in thought and practice which might be required to engage in the missionary task in a changed culture can be indefinitely postponed.

The connection between revivalism and a Christendom model of the church raises difficult issues. As we have seen, Carey and his colleagues discovered that inherited presuppositions concerning evangelism and revival had to be questioned in the light of experience in a non-Christian cultural context. Consequently, in parts of the world in which Christ had never been named, the category of 'revival' gave place to a new emphasis on 'mission'. Missionary societies which came into being in the nineteenth century were designed to facilitate the spread of the Christian gospel *beyond Christendom* with the result that the terms 'mission' and 'revival' came to signify models of the church and its witness appropriate in different *geographical* locations, the one overseas, the other at home.

Throughout the nineteenth century this dichotomy persisted, indeed it hardened. Mission became the form of witness demanded among primitive peoples overseas who clearly lacked the benefits of a Christian civilisation, while evangelism and revival were the means employed to make nominal Western Christians into real believers. Dissenting voices challenged this distinction and the assumptions on which it rested. Most notably, Søren Kierkegaard launched a blistering attack on Danish Protestant culture-religion, insisting that what went on in the state churches of Europe was a travesty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Britain at exactly the same time, Edward Miall had the temerity to suggest that, at the floodtide of their influence, the Victorian churches had actually lost contact with the teaching of the gospel and had capitulated to a man-centred religion devoid of spiritual power.¹⁴ At the time these dissenting voices were ignored, but they anticipated by more than a century the perception, now common-place, that the demise of the sacral society denoted by the phrase *Corpus Christianum* requires a radical rethinking of the nature and witness of the churches in the Western world. It requires, in other words, the rejection of classic distinction between 'evangelism' and 'revival', on the one hand, and 'mission' on the other. Whatever the prospects for revival may be, the greatest priority of the churches in the Western world is surely missiological in nature, and this will involve a process of biblical reformation through which churches may become communities 'worthy of attention and respect' and marked by a way of life 'that prompts curiosity, questioning and a new searching'.¹⁵

The second question prompted by revivalist optimism concerns *underlying assumptions about the growth, expansion and success of the Christian movement*. As we have seen, the first generation of modern Evangelicals was inspired by Jonathan Edwards' vision of the dawning of an era of divine blessing which would result in the evangelisation of all the peoples of the earth. This wonderful prospect found expression in the hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley and was a vital source of early Protestant missionary motivation. When Kenneth Scott Latourette began writing his massive, seven volume history of the Christian mission in 1937 (a task completed in 1945), he gave it the title *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. Clearly, such a

notion of Christian missionary progress is entirely compatible with the biblical concern to see the reign of God extended throughout the earth. Indeed, the tap root of such concern can be traced to Jesus' instruction to his followers to pray that the will of God might be done 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

However, problems arise when this biblical vision becomes distorted through a one-sided focus on progress and conquest which ignores the realities of setbacks, sufferings and those periods of decline and loss which seem to form an integral part of the wider divine purpose in the world. More seriously still, there is a real danger that an optimism owing more to secular models of 'progress' than is often recognised, fails to reckon with the terrible reality of the divine holiness in relation to the failure and compromise of the church, and so overlooks the apostolic insistence that *judgement begins 'with the family of God'* (1 Peter 4:17).

The great temptation of the kind of optimistic revivalism discussed here is to limit the possibility of decline, loss and recession in the experience of the church to mere temporary blips in the otherwise inevitable progress toward the final and undoubted triumph. The mood of this kind of religion is almost always one of celebration, rarely of lament, with the result that entire swathes of the biblical tradition in which the faithful pour out their hearts on account of the apparent *absence* of God and the ambiguities of history, become functionally redundant. Moreover, these scriptural resources are bypassed at a time when precisely such modes of prayer and devotion are most desperately needed by a church which struggles to retain its hold on life close to 'the precipice of the valley of death'. This phrase comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, preaching in 1933 on the very day that the German Christians who sought an accommodation with Hitler appeared to triumph, provided a biblical and theological perspective on these questions which, it seems to me, cannot be bettered:

We must confess—he [Christ] builds. We must proclaim—he builds. We must pray to him—he builds. We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for him times of great building. It may be that the times which from the human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is pulled down. It is a great comfort which Christ gives to his church: you confess, preach, bear witness to me, and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is my province.¹⁶

There is a third question which optimistic revivalists should consider very carefully. What are the biblical and ideological criteria by means of which we might assess whether or not a movement of revival contributes toward the extension of the reign of God in Jesus Christ? The assumption is sometimes made that any movement identified by the category 'revival' is bound to be a positive phenomenon. This must be rejected. In his valuable historical and theological survey of revivals, Richard Lovelace concluded that 'the purity of a revival is intimately related to its theological substance. A deep work cannot be done without the sharp instruments of truth'.¹⁷

Anyone who doubts the correctness of this statement should reflect carefully on the unspeakable tragedy of Rwanda. Christians in all denominational traditions have found themselves asking how it was possible that a region of Africa noted for its evangelisation and often lauded as an example of 'continuous revival' provided the cultural and ethnic context for a holocaust of unimaginable barbarity and wickedness. A distressed Catholic bishop commented: 'The Christian message is not being heard.'

After a century of evangelisation we have to begin again because the best catechists ... were the first to go out with machetes in their hands'.¹⁸ For Evangelicals the questions here become especially painful, but they lead one missionary to conclude that the massive numerical growth resulting from the 'East African revival' failed to instil in converts 'a quality of costly discipleship' and resulted in a church that proved 'empty and powerless to confront the pressures of evil'.¹⁹

Roger Bowen says of the catastrophe which befell the churches in Rwanda that the issues raised by this experience 'touch us all and nearly all of them impinge all too closely on the churches in the United Kingdom'.²⁰

Dangers Confronting 'Sociological Pessimists'

I turn now to consider an approach to the subject of revival which is located at the opposite end of the spectrum to that which we have surveyed above, one which I propose to describe as sociological pessimism. Perhaps the leading exponent of this view is the French thinker, Jacques Ellul who viewed Western Christianity as a massive perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ and argued that, given such apostasy, the present situation could only be understood in terms of the withdrawn-ness and judgement of God. In similar vein, Michael Riddell regards talk of revival as an almost insane whistling in the dark. Referring to his native New Zealand, he comments,

I have lost count of the number of revivalist movements which have swept through my homeland promising a massive influx to the church in their wake. A year after they have faded, the plight of the Christian community seems largely unchanged, apart from a few more who have grown cynical through the abuse of their goodwill, energy and money.²¹

Sociological pessimists like Riddell do not dissent from the revivalist assumption that God is still at work in his world, and in the church, including the church in the West, but what the revivalists have missed is precisely the fact that the divine purpose includes judgement as well as blessing. Indeed, throughout Christian history the will of God has often been hidden to human perception and has included times of extreme, crisis and decline, Kenneth Scott Latourette, whose magisterial history of Christian missions was mentioned earlier, understood very well that Christian expansion cannot be marked up on a map of the world in the manner in which multinational business corporations chart their growth across the globe. Latourette realised, according to Andrew Walls, that 'advance and recession, not irreversible progress, was the pattern of Christian expansion, just as Bunyan saw that there was a way to hell even from the gate of heaven'.²²

For the 'sociological pessimists' then, the category of 'revival' may actually be unhelpful if it is used to pander to the fear and conservatism of those who refuse to move forward into God's new future. In language that echoes that of the revivalists he opposes, Michael Riddell says that 'the Western church stands at the fringes of radically new terrain'. However, what lies beyond this new horizon is not, as revivalists so often seem to assume, a boom in old-time religion, but the much more difficult and demanding task of a *radical reformation* which will result in the emergence of entirely new models of the church and its mission.

Just as there are questions to put to 'revivalist optimists' so too I wish to suggest that there are very real dangers in the position just outlined. The awareness that past glories have gone and that there is need to readjust our focus and develop new forms of witness

appropriate to the calling of a 'remnant' community can easily slide over into a loss of faith in the over-arching purposes of God and a retreat from the obligations of the Christian mission. In these conditions, the biblical language of *lament* which, as we noted, is often neglected by revivalists, can become the exclusive and normative language of worship. This seems to be precisely what happened to the post-exilic community in Israel. The psalms of lament, composed at times of deep anguish and confusion, became with the passing of the years the basis of a liturgical tradition which was increasingly divorced from reality and prevented those locked into it from recognising the glorious *new things* that God was about to do. This pessimistic spirituality was challenged by the living word of God; 'Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"?' (Isaiah 40:27). The recognition that the old theocratic institutions had come to an end, that there was indeed no way back to things as they had been, should have opened the way for the reception and embrace of the radically new thing that the Lord was bringing into being. Instead of this, too many of the exiles were yielding to the temptations presented by an alien world, *either* by accepting Babylonian definitions of reality, and so to sliding into a functional atheism, or by turning this 'liminal' stage into a permanent condition, and so becoming a withdrawn Jewish sect with nothing to offer the wider world. These are, I suggest, precisely the dangers confronting 'sociological pessimists' today and both of are paths that, if taken, would lead to the extinction of biblical faith and hope in the Western world.

Revival and the Emergency of World Christianity

The revivalist claims that we stand on the cusp of the greatest spiritual awakening in history may appear bizarre in relation to the contemporary Western church, but they have much greater credibility when considered in the light of the surge of the Christian movement elsewhere in the world. Any contemporary theology of the work of the Holy Spirit in revival must take account of spiritual movements in the southern hemisphere which, when considered carefully, do look like 'great awakenings'. In Africa, for example, a whole succession of charismatic preachers have had a huge impact over large areas of the continent and have been instrumental in bringing thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ. To cite one example almost at random, the wandering prophet-teacher, William Wade Harris, trekked across vast areas of West Africa in the early twentieth century, summoning people to repentance, with results that may well parallel, if not surpass, the impact of George Whitefield in eighteenth century Britain. This extraordinary ministry, together with very many others, remains a well-kept secret in the West.

Similar phenomena can be discovered in China where the growth of the Christian movement, and its rootedness within Chinese society and culture, has compelled Western sinologists to reassess their earlier judgements concerning what was then felt to be the 'marginal' impact of the Christian faith on this people.²³ The same thing can be said regarding Latin America, where the growth of an indigenous form of Pentecostalism has resulted in the dominant paradigm within the sociology of religion concerning the supposed inevitability of the process of secularisation being challenged. The British sociologist of religion, David Martin, testifies to the manner in which his

discovery of this explosion of Christianity in the southern hemisphere compelled a re-evaluation of some of the basic assumptions governing sociological theory:

Writing as one benevolently thrust into the epochal changes in contemporary Latin America, I can testify to the restrictive power of the governing [sociological] paradigms. Indeed, the epochal events concerned were well nigh forbidden by the paradigm, and if they were not forbidden, their recognition was seriously occluded. Forty million Latin Americans just could not have been converted to a genuinely indigenous version of Pentecostal and evangelical faith.²⁴

But of course, they were, and if these empirical facts concerning world Christianity compel reassessment within secular, academic disciplines they surely demand the most serious and sympathetic attention from theologians and missiologists. What are we to make of this still emerging global Christianity, largely Pentecostal in character, and how does this extraordinary phenomenon fit into the analyses of both the 'revivalist optimists' and the 'sociological pessimists'? Of course, the kind of evaluative questions identified earlier in relation to Western claims for the appearance of revival also apply here, so that the surge in non-Western Christianity is subject to biblical-theological evaluation. Nonetheless, the historian, Mark Noll acknowledges that the growth of Christianity across so many cultural barriers at one time is something historically unprecedented and he concludes

Such multiple translations of the Christian faith at the same time in different parts of the globe can only appear chaotic, especially to those whose Christian experience is deeply rooted in the long Western appropriation of Christianity. What will become of the simultaneous translations of the Christian faith into so many of the world's cultures, God alone knows. But a long historical perspective can inspire considerable confidence.²⁵

Conclusion

I conclude this discussion by returning to the typologies introduced earlier. I suggest that the evidence to which reference has just been made indicates that revivalist optimists are not far wide of the mark when they propose that a spiritual movement of immense proportions is taking place around the world. It is worth noting here that the empirical evidence concerning the growth of non-Western churches compelled the American theologian Harvey Cox, who once advocated an extreme version of 'sociological pessimism', to radically reassess of his earlier views. Cox, who in the 1960s famously (or perhaps, infamously) adapted his theology to fit the paradigm of secularisation we have just noticed David Martin repudiating, now asserts that 'we are definitely in a period of renewed religious vitality, another "great awakening" if you will...'²⁶

However, it would be a grave mistake for Christians in the Western world to imagine that they are somehow in a position to predict, far less to control, the precise shape and nature of the twenty first century Christianity which is emerging with its centre of gravity firmly located among the poor peoples of the southern hemisphere. As churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America mature and seek for biblical answers to the pressing issues that arise in contexts characterised by poverty, sickness and oppression, their theologies and spiritualities are likely to take unpredictable forms and they will pose, questions for believers in the West that are likely to be challenging and disturbing. Thus, while the emergence of 'world Christianity' begins to look like a phenomenon of

world-historical significance, it would be deeply misleading to interpret it as nothing more than an extension across the globe of the kind of revivalist religion made in America and at home with Western cultural and economic values.

So far as the *sociological pessimists* are concerned, I believe they are correct in observing that Western Christianity is in the throes of a massive paradigm shift and that, in this situation, it must renounce the delusions of grandeur inherited from a now defunct Christendom and accept a genuinely missionary vocation in the context of the fragmented, hollowed-out cultures of Europe and North America. Whether the churches in the West can anticipate fresh movements of revival in a matter that lies within the sovereign purposes of God, but one is increasingly struck by the close analogy between our context at the heart of the global economy, and that of the churches of Asia Minor as described in Revelation chapters 2–3. These churches faced the temptations posed by the Roman empire and were summoned in that situation to a costly and decidedly counter-cultural stance. They were promised spiritual resources adequate to their calling in a deeply pagan and materialistic society, but it is clear that suffering to the point of martyrdom is the price they had to be willing to meet,

No doubt times of great awakening bring much blessing, but the wilderness belongs to God as much as does the well-watered garden arid sometimes his purpose of renewal may take the church into the former rather than in the latter. God only knows when the compromise and apostasy of the church reaches such a level that it requires purging through judgement. What is indisputable is that the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised to the saints whatever the terrain through which they pass on their God-ordained pilgrimage; whether in the desert or the promised land, whether facing the great tribulation or standing on the edge of the millennium, our task is listen to what the Spirit says to the churches today, and in fellowship with all who follow the Lamb of God, to overcome those many temptations and powers that would lead us into fateful compromise. Meantime, we anticipate the unfolding purposes of God with hope and joy, knowing that the One who declared to a bewildered and dispirited people, ‘Behold, I am doing a new thing’ (Isaiah 43:19) remains the Lord of our history, ‘Revivalist Optimists’ and ‘sociological pessimists’ should talk to each other, learn from each others’ contrasting perspectives, and together await the coming of God’s kingdom to which, it is to be hoped, they will respond with neither carnal triumphalism nor detached intellectualism, but rather with an awed worship of him who really does *make all things new*.

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David Smith is Co-director of the Whitefield Institute in Oxford

Book Brief

I would like to draw readers attention to the new edition of *Operation World* by **Patrick Johnstone** and **Jason Mandryk** (Carlisle 2001). Many will already be familiar with earlier editions of this most invaluable directory for prayer for world missions. Theology is nothing if not about mission. The purpose of salvation is to bring the Triune God glory through the worship of people from all nations. I particularly commend Johnstone's short essay on prayer and world evangelisation. Here is a quote: 'It is a mystery that our loving Father has somehow mimited His omnipotence to teaming up with His redeemed people so that His actions in the world are inextricably linked with prayer'. Use this book in your prayer times and with your church. **KB**
