

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE 1859 REVIVAL IN IRELAND (2)

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Critique of the Revival's Results

Most insist that the results of the 1859 revival in Ireland were permanent. Scott says, for example,

The bodily manifestations passed away from the scenes of the Revival after only a few months, while the beneficial characteristics remained, some of them regular Sabbath observance, church attendance, temperance, a strong sense of Protestantism and a keen interest in spiritual things being the most notable a century later.¹

The fact that the results of the revival were not lasting did not go unnoticed at the time, though it is largely ignored both by contemporary and modern historians of the revival. Rev. R. H. Carson, pastor of the Tobermore Baptist Church, wrote in 1869, ten years after the revival, a most telling criticism:

The past year has been with us here one of great spiritual drought ... there may have been hindrances to success now that did not formerly exist. Indeed, I cannot but think that the comparatively small results of the past few years may be traced, at least for the most part, to what we all regarded at the time as a great spiritual movement, the Revival of 1859. As it now appears and so far as we here are concerned, that movement was anything but a blessing. Out of some 80 to 90 individuals at that time scarcely one remains to us at this moment. And what is worse than their mere exclusion or withdrawal, their evil conduct or their spiritual apathy while among us, did not fail to leave its mark behind. I have often wished they could all have been taken away in one day. They have been our Achan in the camp, and till we see the last of them, or nearly so, I scarcely venture to hope for success.²

¹Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 129.

Nor was he alone in his complaints. The Templepatrick Presbytery reported to the Synod of Belfast in 1861:

What a great hindrance we meet with in those who call themselves Christians and yet make light of spiritual religion, living piety and faithful witness-bearing for Christ. What difficulty we have had to encounter in the falls and inconsistencies of God's professing people.³

Especially telling are the church membership statistics before, during and after the revival. They show very clearly the decline in religion which followed hard on the heels of the revival and which, in a few years, wiped out the supposed successes of the revival. Since the records of the Presbyterian Church are the most readily available, and since it was one of the largest denominations in Ireland—600 ministers and half a million members in Ulster—its statistics are a good measure of what happened in the years following the revival.

While it may be true, as suggested, that the Presbyterian Church gained some 10,000 new members as a result of the revival, and while it is true that the statistics show a jump in membership at the time of the revival, the fact is that these 10,000 new members are nowhere to be found in the membership rolls of the Presbyterian congregations in Ulster within a few years of the revival. Nearly every congregation suffered a decline in membership in those years.

The congregation of Connor, the village next door to Kells, numbered 870 families in 1857, two years before the revival. In 1869, ten years after the revival there were 849 families.⁴ First Ballymena numbered 644 families in 1855 and 610 in 1864, only five years after the revival. Wellington Street, Ballymena, numbered 467 families in 1854. By 1865, it had split into two congregations and the two together numbered 480 families. The Cullybackey congregation, whose minister, Hugh Hamilton, was one of the chief promoters of the revival, and the place where the largest number of convictions ever recorded took place, declined from 463 families in 1856 to 397 families in 1862, a loss of 66 families in six years during which the revival took place. Scott says,

²Extract from the Letter Copy Book of Tobermore Baptist Church, quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 202. Scott notes this criticism but dismisses it.

³Synod of Belfast Minutes, 1861, quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 199.

⁴Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 202.

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“Consideration of these figures does not suggest that there was a great lack of endurance of the results of the revival,”⁵ but one is forced to ask, “Where were all the new converts?”

And lest anyone say that the statistics of a few congregations reveal nothing as far as the whole denomination was concerned, it should also be pointed out that the statistics for nearly every presbytery declined or stayed nearly the same in the period following the revival. From 1859 to 1866 the Armagh Presbytery declined from 2658 families to 2587, Monaghan from 1397 to 1293, Cavan from 743 to 619, Clogher from 1086 to 1012. Dungannon Presbytery stayed about the same, going from 1252 in 1859 to 1286 in 1866.

Nor was this confined to the Presbyterian Churches. Tobermore Baptist, whose minister’s comments are recorded above, went from 176 families in 1858, the year before the revival, to 269 in 1860, to 223 in 1865 and to 213 in 1869, when the Rev. Carson commented on the evil results of the revival. This is not, in our opinion what one would call a “revival of religion.” It seems to us rather to be a decline of religion.

Nor are such results unique in Ulster. In America in 1744, Jonathan Edwards wrote of the revival of 1740-1742, in which he was one of the main figures,

’Tis probable that you have been informed, by other correspondents, before now, what the present state of things in New England is: it is, indeed, on many accounts very melancholy; there is a vast alteration within these two years; for about so long I think it is, since the Spirit of God began to withdraw, and this great work has been on the decline. Great numbers in the land, about two years ago, were raised to an exceedingly great height in joy and elevation of mind; and through want of watchfulness, and sensibleness of the danger and temptation that there is in such circumstances, many were greatly exposed, and the devil taking advantage, multitudes were soon, and to themselves insensibly, led far away from God and their duty ... and the consequence has been, that the enemy has come in like a flood, in various respects, until the deluge has overwhelmed the whole land.⁶

⁵Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 202.

⁶“Letter to the Rev. Mr. M’Culloch, March 5, 1744,” quoted in Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner, 1965), vol. 1, p. lxxvii.

Ironically, Edwards' answer to all of this was that another revival like the last one was needed, the answer also of the modern believers in revival.

Critique of the Revival's Manifestations

The physical striking and prostrations that were such a prominent feature of the revival are another clear evidence that the revival was something other than the work of the Holy Spirit, all claims, contemporary and modern, to the contrary. Hamilton makes quite a point of this, using different passages that speak of demon possession (Matt. 22:22; Mark 9:17-26) to show that "Prostration is Satan's work, and throughout Scripture, from beginning to end, such a work is not be ascribed to the Spirit's agency."⁷

He is correct, of course. Blindness, dumbness, deafness, paralysis, convulsions, are in Scripture, if not ascribed to "natural causes," are the result of demon possession or in a few cases an act of God's judgment on person, as the example of Bar-jesus reminds us (Acts 13:8-11). Never are they part of the saving work of the Holy Spirit or an evidence of God's grace. The example of the Apostle Paul himself might be cited to the contrary, but Paul was struck blind while still in a state of unbelief and before his conversion under the ministry of Ananias.

In the revival of 1859, special reference might be made of the reports of young women convulsed and rolling about on the floor or the ground, tearing out handfuls of their own hair, and the question asked whether the Holy Spirit could possibly be the one to move them to act so immodestly and to tear out what Scripture calls a woman's glory (I Cor. 11:15)?

Woman put into such states of body and mind by Him who made her, the final created work, the perfectness or the beauty and happiness of this world! And is this a work of grace in this honoured one, and does the Spirit who gave her her hair for a covering cause her to tear it away with her own hands? May we not well ask—Can it be?⁸

Interest in and excitement over these "manifestations" was often at the expense of the Scriptures and the preaching of the gospel. There are accounts

⁷Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 251.

⁸Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 34.

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of ministers trying to read the Word or preach the Word and being cried down in the meetings:

A steady observer of the movement, who has been to nearly all the nightly meetings (in a large town in the north of Ireland) says he never saw the Bible opened, or heard one word read out of it, except once in a Methodist meeting, when a [Presbyterian] Minister tried to read the parable of the Prodigal Son, but was put down by cries of, “You are spoiling our meeting.”⁹

The same criticism applies to the manifestations that are claimed today at revival meetings: dental miracles, laughing in the Spirit, being drunk in the Spirit, etc. None of them are biblical, none of them are the means the Holy Spirit uses for the conversion of sinners, and they are sought at the expense of the Word of God. We do not think it profitable, however, to enter into the question whether these “manifestations” were psychological or the direct result of Satan’s work. It is enough to point out that they were not and cannot be the work of the Spirit of God, not if Scripture itself is our measuring stick.

Even Spurgeon, who spoke favourably of the 1859 revival, said,

Things are allowed to be said and done at revivals which nobody could defend ... If, for a moment our improvements seem to produce a larger result than the old gospel, it will be the growth of mushrooms, it may even be of toadstools, but it is not the growth of the trees of the Lord.¹⁰

Critique of the Revival’s Methods

When we speak of the revival’s methods, we are referring to the popularity of personal testimonies, revival meetings, lay preaching, prayer meetings, ministry by women and children, insistence on total abstinence—all the means that were used to spread the revival and to “save souls.” These were often accompanied by a strong de-emphasis on the Word of God and the preaching of gospel, the God-appointed means of grace and salvation.

⁹Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 102.

¹⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (London: Banner, 1965), pp. 375-376, quoted in Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1994), p. xvi.

None of these methods, including strikings and prostrations, are the means the Holy Spirit uses to convict sinners and to bring them to repentance and faith. In fact, many of the methods and means used in the revival were unbiblical practices. We refer especially to lay preaching, to leadership by women and to the promotion of total abstinence. Hamilton says of all these,

Hence we infer—1st. That conviction and conversion are produced by believing the Word; and emotion, or feelings, or any supposed direct agency of the Spirit without the Word is not to be relied on or encouraged.¹¹

Lay preaching and leadership by women and children are so common today that little thought is given to the possibility that they are not biblical. Apparently that was also the case in 1859, for Hamilton was one of the few who raised his voice in protest for he considered lay ministry “direct interference with the divine arrangement.”¹² He warns,

PARENTS and MINISTERS are the alone divinely-appointed instructors in the truths of salvation; others, however they may run, are uncalled and unsent, and however good their intentions, as they enter not by the door into the sheepfold, they cannot accomplish any good—nay, but the reverse ...

That for any one to take upon himself to instruct others, or lead in religious exercises, except in his own family, where it is his duty to instruct, rule, and lead in worship, is to usurp to himself an office, and to take upon himself the discharge of duties, for which in the very nature of things he must be unqualified; at the same time he is obstructing and setting aside God’s appointed ordinance, and introducing disorder and confusion, if not error, into the teaching of the things concerning the kingdom and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³

As the *Westminster Confession*, Q. & A. 158, teaches,

Q. By whom is the word of God to be preached?

¹¹Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 31.

¹²Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 19.

¹³Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, pp. 136-138.

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A. The word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.¹⁴

Of “ministry” by women, Hamilton says,

Surely, if Scripture language conveys ideas in the ordinary way, women are neither to teach nor ask instruction in the assembly. “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection; but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”—1 Tim. ii. 11, 12.¹⁵

Indeed, it never ceases to amaze us how those who claim to have the Spirit of God, even an extra measure of the Spirit, so quickly set aside the Spirit-inspired testimony of God’s Word on this matter.

Not only are these unbiblical, but they were the cause of much trouble during the revival. Scott mentions a meeting in First Ahoghill early in the course of the revival, when the minister, David Adams, tried to restrain someone who was speaking, but then “converts declared that he spoke by the command of a power superior to any ministerial authority.”¹⁶

Hamilton reminds us,

It is not to be forgotten that salvation comes by *hearing*, not by reading, not by singing, not by praying, not by feeling, not by seeing, but by *hearing*. Hearing the Word ... Rom. x. 13-15—“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not *heard*? and how shall they *hear* without a preacher?” Verse 17—“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Repenting, praying, praising, reading, meditating, all come by believing, but believing by hearing.

The revival of 1859 made the same mistake that the whole Pentecostal and Charismatic movement makes when it looks for signs and evidences of the

¹⁴More quotes against lay preaching are on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/laypreaching.htm).

¹⁵Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 143.

¹⁶*Ballymena Observer* (26 March, 1859), quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 62.

Spirit's work that are extra-biblical, that is, that do not involve the ministry of the Word. Hamilton reminds us of this as well:

What we affirm is, that in all his saving work in the heart and life, the Spirit uses, and will use, the Word. He quickens, teaches, guides, strengthens, comforts, by or in accordance with the Word. There have been, and no doubt will be, operations of the Spirit without the Word ... But in the present dispensation, believing is the receiving of the Word.—Rom. x. 1-17.

These principles, Hamilton says, were “more or less set aside by this movement.”¹⁷

Critique of the Revival's Theology

Generally speaking the theology of the revival was the Arminian, free-willist theology of Wesley, Moody, Finney and Sankey, and the other prominent revivalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was not Calvinism. It was not the theology of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* or of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England.

This meets with approval in some quarters. Scott, himself a “Presbyterian,” sums up a chapter on “The Message of the Revival” with this quote:

In a word, the message of the Revival “brought a new sense of assurance and of joy into Christian living. Hitherto a fairly frigid Calvinism had very generally been held, and the seeming arbitrariness or inscrutability of God's will therein depicted, gave little certainty of assurance; one could not be sure whether one was among the elect or not. Now faith was re-informed by feeling, by a consciousness of surrender and a joy in God; and a note of certainty entered into the life of the church along with a new sense of evangelical responsibility.”¹⁸

He adds,

¹⁷Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸J. E. Davey, *The Story of a Hundred Years* (Belfast: W. & G. Baird, 1940), p. 42, quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, pp. 165-166. This was especially true of the Presbyterian Church where “the strong Calvinism of the Synod of Dort was softened” (p. 158)!

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This modified Calvinism, with its message of Christ's dying for all and not merely for the elect, brings to the fore the doctrines of Wesley and the Arminians with their joyful choruses,

For all, for all, the Saviour died,

For all my Lord was crucified.¹⁹

There were those involved in the revival who were Calvinists and who faithfully preached and taught the doctrines of grace, but, overall, the theology of the revival was not Calvinistic. Scott describes the theology of the revival as a modified Calvinism, when in reality it was not Calvinism at all, but Arminianism. He quotes an Anglican, Rev. Isaac Ashe, who said,

The Scriptural doctrine of our church "that Christ died for all mankind" is far better suited for the state into which the mind is brought in this gracious Revival, than the limited atonement maintained by the Presbyterian Church. They long for, and rejoice in, a full and unlimited exhibition of the Saviour's love, and I feel persuaded that many of their ministers have learned a sounder and more Scriptural theology from those who have been awakened among their own people.²⁰

Thomas Toye, one of the "preachers" of the revival, wrote,

God has made a grant of His Son Jesus Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour, to a lost and perishing world. God has made this grant absolutely free, independent, in every possible manner, of the worthiness of men. God has made this grant indiscriminately to all the hearers of the Gospel, and to every one of them in particular. God has made it the duty of every hearer of the Gospel to receive the Saviour thus given, and the hearer can only reject Him at the hazard of his soul ...²¹

There were strains of perfectionism and of antinomianism (opposition to the law)²² as well in the theology of the revival, but its main error, doctrinally, was Arminianism and free-willism.

¹⁹Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 158.

²⁰Quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 208.

²¹Thomas Toye, "Saving Faith," p. 4, quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 158.

A Mrs. Colville, who was instrumental in the conversion of the four men with whom the revival began, expressed the general doctrinal tenor of the revival when she said that she did not want to talk about mere points of doctrine and felt that the doctrine of election and hyper-Calvinistic Presbyterianism stood in the way of the revival.

The revival doctrine of conversion was also unbiblical and uncalvinistic. Scott says of the conversions recorded during the revival, “In many instances, unless they conformed to a certain pattern, that of a sudden conversion, these were questioned.”²² The view of conversion that lay at the heart of the revival is that which pervades evangelicalism today, but it is both unbiblical and dangerous. That view of conversion, popular then and now, sees conversion as the sudden quickening of a dead sinner into spiritual life, on the order of what happened to Paul on the way to Damascus. If one has had such an experience and can put a time and day to it, then he is “converted,” and nothing else matters. If he has not had such an experience and cannot name a day and time, his conversion is doubted.

What is forgotten is that conversion, turning from sin and evil to God, is not merely a one-time thing, but continues in the life of the Christian until the day he departs this life. That continual conversion is so important that when and how it begins matters little. An experience similar to Paul’s is meaningless if the person who was supposedly converted under such circumstances is not *now* turning from sin to God. The question in conversion, to put it simply, is not “When?” but “Whether now?” By the same token, the person who cannot put day and date to the beginning of his spiritual life, but who is with all his heart turning to God and repenting of his sins, is truly converted.

This view of conversion as one-time thing at the beginning of a Christian’s spiritual life is dangerous in that it promotes “carnal security:” the person who has been thus “converted” is viewed as “saved and safe” no matter what may happen with him subsequently. It is dangerous also in that it is not a life of repentance and holiness that matters, but some kind of sudden and wonderful “experience.” The revival doctrine of conversion, in other words, was fundamentally antinomian.

²²Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, pp. 164-165.

²³Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 190.

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Critique of the Revival's Effect on the Churches

The revival had a profound effect on the churches in Ulster, and not for good. As Hamilton says, "principles have been developed and practices strengthened, which remain and will remain."²⁴

The most notable effect of the revival on the churches was in the "sects" and groups such as the Salvation Army. The overall membership of the larger denominations either decreased or remained the same in the years following the revival. The census of 1871 showed a decrease among the Presbyterians, the Methodists and the Independents. The Episcopalians remained about the same, as did the Baptists, but the group labelled "Other persuasions" in the census showed a dramatic rise in membership from 8,414 to 19,035, "substantiating the contention that sects sprang into existence as a result of the Revival."²⁵ This group included especially the dispensational, ultra-Arminian, anti-ecclesiastical Plymouth Brethren who still remain a large and influential group in Ulster and whose opposition to the instituted church, an ordained ministry and creeds continues to have a negative effect on ecclesiastical life in Ulster.

Not only did the revival not contribute to the numerical growth of the churches, but it had a deleterious effect in many other respects. One area in which changes were brought about in the churches as a result of the revival was in the worship of the church. Before the revival the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was committed to exclusive psalmody, to congregational singing, and to unaccompanied praise. After the revival these all changed, so that Scott can say,

A century later, we see the contribution of the Revival in the enriching of the service of God by the use of hymns as well as psalms, and the aid of the organ to assist well-trained choirs leading the congregational singing.²⁶

Indeed, four new hymnbooks were published at the time of the revival.

But even M'Meekin, a friend of the movement, admits that,

²⁴Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 3.

²⁵Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 188.

²⁶Quoted in Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 196.

the strenuous efforts put forth to express the varied experiences of the converts by hymn singing imported frequently an unscriptural element into the movement that it would have been without ... Many doctrinal errors of '59 and of more recent days, are traceable to the teaching embodied in unscriptural hymns.²⁷

The revival was also an ecumenical movement and promoted ecumenism. Strangely, this is viewed as a positive thing even by those who today are dead set against ecumenism. Ian Paisley, an outspoken enemy of ecumenism, views it as one of the “permanent advantages” of the revival and quotes with approval the following words:

All the Protestant churches of the province were greatly stimulated by it, and the immediate result was a spirit of unity and co-operation which unfortunately under the stress of later controversies did not fulfil its earlier promise.²⁸

Hamilton reminds us, however, that true unity can never come at the expense of the truth:

Look for a moment at this unity: the minister who subscribes the statement, that the number of the predestinated unto everlasting life is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished [cf. *Westminster Confession* 3:4], and the one who teaches that all men are in a savable condition, and their own free will decides for eternity, and that Calvinism leads souls to hell ... Such is their unity. It carries with it the elements of its own destruction.²⁹

He summed up the revival's effect on the churches thus, and has proved prophetic in doing so:

The collective congregated fullness of the fruit is—

1st. To depreciate the ministry. The Word goes with the ministry, and the work of the Spirit ceases. Hence when the true ministry is put in the background, error and evil will increase rapidly.

²⁷D. M'Meeke, *Memories of the '59 Revival*, p. 56.

²⁸The Rt. Hon. Thomas Sinclair, quoted in Paisley, *The “Fifty-Nine” Revival*, p. 187.

²⁹Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 278.

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2nd. A false, delusive, ignorant fanaticism is put in the place of true holiness,—and outward profession instead of unfeigned faith and true obedience,—multiplying of man’s devices and increasing intolerance.

3rd. The Scriptural ministry has, through this Revival, greatly departed from the Scriptural means, while unscriptural teachers are multiplied, and unscriptural teaching encouraged and strengthened.

4th. By means of this Revival, the Laodicean condition of the Church has been placed greatly in the ascendant—outward, boastful prosperity, with real spiritual barrenness. The continuance and increase of this issues in the awful sentence, “I will spue thee out of my mouth ...”³⁰

Other Criticisms of the Revival

The 1859 revival was closely associated with the temperance movement, so closely that the two cannot be understood apart from each other. There was a notable decline in drunkenness and even in the amount of spirits sold in Ulster during the revival and in the years after, a drop of almost two million gallons. This result also was not lasting, for, as Scott says, “after this date [i.e., 1863] the amount rose slowly again.”³¹

Apart from the drop in drunkenness, which certainly was a good thing, though not lasting, it must be understood that the temperance movement itself is not biblical and that its successes during the revival are no proof that the revival was the work of the Spirit of God. That would be the subject of another article, but the Word of God does not teach total abstinence and all attempts to make the Word of God say so involve Scripture twisting.

The Word of God teaches moderation, but not total abstinence. The “wine” that made Noah drunk is the same “wine” that is recommended in moderation in other Old Testament passages (Deut. 14:26; Ps. 104:15; Isa. 55:1), and the “wine” that Paul warns against in Ephesians 5:18 is the same as the “wine” that Jesus made at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-10).

³⁰Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 293.

³¹Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 194.

Even worse is the association that the revival and all temperance movements make between total abstinence and conversion. A person is not truly converted until he takes the “pledge,” though no such thing is required by the Word of God. Thus the drunkard is viewed as converted solely because he puts away his drink, though his life may remain otherwise unreformed. Thus, an unbiblical demand is made a substitute for the true holiness which is essential to conversion.

Nor is this a minor matter, but rather, it is symptomatic of what is wrong with all revivalism. Revivalism and the unceasing desire for revival in the church all come from the desire for a “quick fix” for the church’s problems and weaknesses. Rather than insisting on the necessity of true holiness, of living faith in Jesus Christ, and of sincere repentance for sin, the desire is for some excitement which will give the appearance of bringing the church back to her spiritual moorings, however temporary such excitement may be. Rather than the hard work of preaching the gospel and of calling for these things in the church, the easy way is sought.

Conclusions

All these problems with the 1859 revival and others are recognised but dismissed by most authors as temporary and unimportant aberrations. One meets with comments such as these:

As a result of my observation and investigation, I may say that, while there is not a little that is doubtful, a good deal that is objectionable, and much that is perplexing, there is very much that seemed to me a glorious and triumphant work of grace.³²

All revivals have produced problems—life always does so—and the danger is to dismiss the entire phenomenon because of certain excesses that often accompany it.³³

Those who are so sure that the revival was God’s work seem to forget everything that Scripture says about God’s work of grace. Hamilton complained about this already at the time of the revival:

³²Scott, *The Ulster Revival of 1859*, p. 155.

³³Lloyd-Jones, “Forward,” in Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904*, p. 6.

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There has been considerable controversy concerning the “Revival,” but no one, so far as I know, has brought it to the test of Scripture ... True religion is obedience to the Divine will, revealed in Scripture—nothing more, nothing less.³⁴

He speaks, too, of the difficulty involved in doing this:

The Revival is all around; the people are greatly excited—many of them very earnest for the Revival; already we have been urged to bring the “converts;” already have even ministers—some of them bosom friends—united with the people in finding fault for not bringing them. We look up to the blessed God, and say, Most merciful One, what is to be done? The answer is plain. You have the Word a light unto your feet, a lamp unto your path; examine, ascertain. Know the truth, and keep by its guidance. Such, however, is the popularity of the movement, and such the feeling in its favour with many esteemed wise and good, that the very mention of inquiry, as though it were of doubtful character, is likely to create a prejudice.³⁵

We are sure that those who tout the revival as a work of God will continue to dismiss our criticisms as nit-picking and will say that we have unfairly singled out every item of negative criticism from the accounts of the revival. The fact is that at all important points the revival was contrary to the Word of God and the only conclusion, therefore, is that the revival was not a work of God or of His Spirit. Its theology was not the theology of Scripture. Its “manifestations” were not the work of the Spirit of God. The majority of its conversions were not lasting. Its effect on the churches was devastating. Its methods were not the means the Spirit uses.

We cannot help thinking how closely they follow the example of Balak and Balaam, going from place to place, building altars and offering sacrifices, all to issue in greater sin and deeper misery.³⁶

“Pray for revival” is the cry and it is shouted so loudly that no other voice is heard and every protest drowned out. Nevertheless, we say, “God save us

³⁴Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, pp. 3-4.

³⁵Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, pp. 11-12.

³⁶Cf. Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 164.

from such,” and echo Hamilton’s closing words, little heeded then and little heeded now:

And finally, let every individual, and all our families and congregations, and the entire Church, but especially let all our ministers, turn at once and for ever from all devices of man’s wisdom, and cleave in sincerity and in truth to the good ways in which our fathers walked, to the standards of our Church, which embody the truths essential unto salvation and the divine glory; but above all to the Word of the blessed God, which alone is complete, perfect, suitable, and all sufficient. So shall mercy and blessing be our portion, and so shall his name be glorified from whom all blessing comes, and to whom all glory is to be ascribed.³⁷

³⁷Hamilton, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859*, p. 296.