

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE FUTURE REVIVAL.

BY THE REV. HAROLD SMITH, D.D., St. John's Hall,
Highbury.

MANY are now looking for a new revival of religion in this country. The main grounds for this expectation are three: (1) Such a revival seems absolutely necessary if Christian religion—at least except in the form of vague Christian sentiment on the one side or of Romanism on the other—is to be preserved in this country. (2) Such a revival is almost due; it is now nearly a century since the beginning of the Oxford Movement, which is usually dated as in 1833; and nearly two centuries since that of the Evangelical Revival. (3) In the luxuriant growth in recent years of various new religions and religious philosophies there seems clear recognition of the need of some religion, combined with great dissatisfaction with the existing religion of the Churches. Some think that this points to the end of institutional religion; but I doubt the permanent survival of any other: history is against it.

It thus seems worth while to examine (1) the antecedents of these two previous revivals, and (2) the present-day features which will probably determine the character of any future one.

There is, however, a very marked divergence in the antecedents of the two above. We can see two or three elements which largely prepared for the Oxford Movement or determined its character; all these were in rapid progress when it started. On the other hand, the Evangelical Revival, while of course adding new factors, was largely based on an element of English Christianity which seemed dead or dying, but which proved a permanent element, well alive beneath the surface. The difference here forbids us to attach too much importance to present-day developments; these may possibly not determine the future, but prove merely a backwater.

The Oxford Movement had several antecedent influences: (1) The previous High Church movement has been so overshadowed by it as to be commonly ignored. We constantly find all nineteenth-century development of Church life credited to the Oxford Movement, whereas examination of dates shows many to have started much earlier. The movement did not get much beyond Oxford till the "forties"; new developments or revivals before that date are not due to it, though it may have contributed to some of the later ones. The work of Bishop Wilberforce has overshadowed the earlier work of Bishop Blomfield. There was nothing sensational or enthusiastic about the earlier movement, but much solid work was done, e.g., the foundation of Colonial and Indian bishoprics, apart from two earlier Canadian ones, starts in 1815. The office of Rural Dean was revived by Bishop Marsh both at Llandaff and at Peterborough. The two old Church Societies, S.P.C.K. and S.P.G., took a new start; new ones, as the National Society and the Church

Building Society, were founded. The first systematic steps to divide ancient parishes and to build new churches belong to this period. The "Waterloo churches" were indeed built by a parliamentary grant, but the impetus came from leading Churchmen. The support of Evangelicals must not be ignored, but the leadership necessarily came from the High Churchmen. In particular Evangelicals did much towards the founding of the Indian bishoprics; they are responsible for various parochial developments, including the introduction of evening as distinct from afternoon services. A good account of the period preceding the Oxford Movement is given in Overton's *Church in the Nineteenth Century*.

(2) The Romantic Movement with its new interest in everything mediæval and its revolt from modern (eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century) conditions. The tendency, still present, to idealize the Middle Ages had its beginning then. Scott's poems and novels did much in this direction; see Overton, pp. 205-7.

This influence was largely independent of the former. The "orthodox" looked back to the Fathers and the Caroline divines, but had not much interest in the Middle Ages. (They of course totally rejected all modern Roman developments.)

(3) The Oxford Movement was immediately called forth by alarm at the growth of Liberalism, both political and religious. There had been strong criticism of the Church by some of the promoters of the Reform Bill; the bishops had been told to set their house in order. It was this more than anything else that called forth the assertion of Church principles just then. This dread of Liberalism, however, has not proved a permanent element; it ceased as regards political Liberalism when Mr. Gladstone became a power, and the opposition to religious Liberalism, while still existing, is very different from what it was in the days of Pusey and Liddon. The new Prayer Book shows that Anglo-Catholicism can accept a much larger amount of Liberalism.

Very different is the case of the Evangelical Revival. This may be dated from the appearance of the group of Oxford "Methodists"; but as a permanent force on distinctive lines it is best dated from 1738, when Wesley and Whitefield started preaching. The remarkable thing here is that man after man about the same time, but mostly quite independently, took up the new ideas and outlook. Henry Venn, of the C.M.S., in his life of his grandfather, the elder Henry Venn, points out how much was independent of Wesley's direct influence, which does not account for the work of (e.g.) Romaine, Grimshaw, Berridge, or Walker of Truro. When once the movement was well under way, it is easy to understand how clergy impressed with the need and seriousness of true religion gravitated to those of like mind, "the serious clergy," but it is remarkable that so many should have appeared as upholders of the same ideas almost if not quite independently.

When we look at the theology of the movement one thing stands out clearly—it was essentially the old Puritan theology,

which we should never forget was also essentially that of the Reformers and the Elizabethans—of Whitgift no less than Cartwright. Fuller greatly dislikes the way in which the Laudians gave the name of "Puritan" to all who simply held to the old theology, not distinctive of Puritans proper. Of course Evangelicalism or Methodism was more than a mere reproduction of Puritanism; Overton (*Church in Eighteenth Century*, II, 60) points out a number of differences. But some of these did not hold good of all, and others (especially political ones) sprang from the altered circumstances of the times. In theology they were essentially one. But there is one important difference of balance. The Puritans were almost exclusively Calvinists, associating Arminianism with Popery. The great majority of the earlier Evangelicals were also Calvinists, some of them very strongly so—Whitefield, Berridge, Romaine, Toplady. Among the Puritans there was only one definite Arminian—John Goodwin; but among the Methodists these views were held by the Wesleys, and hence stamped on the society founded by them. Hence arose an unedifying controversy. Wilberforce also was no Calvinist. But this difference is one of balance or of proportion, and does not definitely separate Evangelicals from Puritans. Arminianism had a place, even though only a small one, among the Puritans; Calvinism had a very large place among the Evangelicals.

Now at the time when the movement began, one would have thought Puritanism to be dead, or at least dying rapidly. The *spiritual* descendants of the Puritans are the Evangelicals; but their *historical* descendants were the Latitudinarians or Low Churchmen. It is usual to trace these back to Hales and Chillingworth; this may be their remotest source, but it is not the main one, which is among the Cambridge Platonists and others who like them had been trained under Puritan influences, but rejected Puritan narrowness and dogmatism. These conformed at the Restoration without to any great extent sharing High Church views; there was nothing false to their principles here. It is a bad mistake to run these men down indiscriminately; there were many devoted men among them, such as Tillotson and Patrick. Burnet's *Pastoral Care* leaves a high impression of its writer. But in the Georgian period things went rapidly worse; there is a very long drop from Burnet to Hoadly, both Low Church and Whig bishops. Nor were the Non-conformists markedly better; Arianism and Socinianism were gaining ground among them even more than in the Church. So no one could have expected a revival of Puritan theology. The event shows that such ideas were still strong beneath the surface; they now welled up almost simultaneously in very different parts. But there was nothing obvious, nothing in the general set of thought, to lead men to anticipate this.

So while in the one case antecedents and growing influences can easily be noticed, these are practically imperceptible in the other case. This great difference makes it impossible to be confident that any examination of the influences and characteristics of the present

day will give sure guidance as to the line a future Revival is likely to take. Yet it seems worth while to consider such possible clues.

It would seem that we shall find a better clue in the new religious and quasi-religious movements of the present day than elsewhere. If we look at present-day ideas and tendencies apart from these, our conclusions will be very different ; but these surely give us a better clue to a future *religious* movement. There are many of these of one kind or another. Some are merely additions to or excrescences on orthodox Christianity, such as Spiritual Healing or British-Israelism. Others are unorthodox forms of Christianity, such as Christadelphianism, Russellism, Seventh-Day Adventism. Others are new cults, more or less philosophical, with a varying Christian flavouring, strong in some representatives, weaker in others, e.g., Christian Science, Theosophy, Spiritualism. They differ greatly not only in their views and character, but also in the type of mind to which they appeal. Some find their adherents mainly among the uneducated or half-educated ; others also among the highly educated. But they unite in expressing dissatisfaction with the regular religious ideas and practices, "the religion of the churches." Can we trace any common factor which may be expected to recur in any future Revival of religion ?

In my opinion two such factors can be traced : (1) The spirit of revolt from the commonplace, traditional, current and orthodox. This spirit is always influential in any new movement. There is in it not merely dissatisfaction with the old and craving for novelty, but also a sense of adventure, with a feeling of intellectual or moral superiority. This is at least as strong now as ever, and it will certainly be great in any new revival ; its adherents will feel that the spiritual world belongs to them, that they alone have laid hold of new truth.

(2) But a second factor seems also discoverable. There is in at least the bulk of these no great amount of criticism, at least not of self-criticism. There may be criticism enough of the traditional and orthodox, but it stops there. The new ideas are commonly accepted largely on authority—it may be of the founder or of some exponent or expert. Evidence in their favour is seldom critically sifted, but usually accepted at once at its face value. They may criticize traditional interpretations of Scripture, but their own are usually regarded as self-evident.

There is therefore some probability that the new revival will share these two characteristics. The former is indeed common to all new Movements ; the latter, though probably the reverse of what we should expect if we looked at the present state of things generally, yet seems a common characteristic of recent religious and quasi-religious movements.

From these results two further considerations suggest themselves.

(1) The future Revival will probably not be brought about by deliberate actions of the Churches nor with official patronage ; nor will it probably come on the old regular lines. It is acknowledged that Missions no longer have the effect they once had. Then they

appealed largely by their novelty and so to speak irregularity; there was an element of curiosity or of adventure in attending, sometimes with the feeling of superiority to old-fashioned prejudices. Now they are quite regular and well organized, and people largely attend because it is expected of them, or to oblige. This accounts for the comparative failure of the National Mission some years ago; it was far too official, pressed by the authorities, talked of in churches for months beforehand; nothing spontaneous about it. Further, it ran straight upon a rock marked in all good recent charts—the paucity of really capable missionaries. The official mind expected that nearly every clergyman would be so qualified after some instruction from, e.g., an “Archbishop’s Messenger”; this was never likely and did not prove correct.

But there is consolation here for some of us. If we older and cautious men set ourselves against the Movement when it comes, not recognizing its value because alive to its extravagances or one-sidedness, no harm will really have been done—possibly more good than if we were suspected of promoting or patronizing it.

(2) Criticism is rampant just now, especially in the sphere of religion. There is no finality in Bible criticism, nor in Christian doctrine. Whatever position we may think to hold fast, we find others abandoning it as untenable. This might lead us to expect everything to go in a few years. But the study of these new religious systems shows that criticism does not go for much with the supporters of any of them. Nor will it probably stand in the way of a Revival, or have much place there.

The Church Assembly has issued a volume, *The Protection of our English Churches* (2s. 6d.), being the Third Report of the Central Council for the Care of Churches, with a brief foreword in the form of a Letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury. For the most part all who love our churches will agree with the advice given, and will realize what has to be done to enable us to preserve for posterity the treasures we possess. The Chancel ideals of the Committee are not ours, and the illustrations supposed to command our approval do not always do so, but they can be forgotten by those who wish to see churches made meet for the worship of God and the strange fittings and decorations that are popular in some quarters reduced to a minimum. No clergyman who is intent on improvements should leave unread this volume, and every incumbent pressed to give permission for memorials should make a point of studying what is said on this subject. The “Don’ts” of the Archdeacon of St. Albans ought to be framed in every vestry as the commandments of churchwardens!
