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PRAYING FOR THE NEXT GREAT AWAKENING

RICHARD LOVELACE

What God began building in past awakenings is a good sign of what He intends to complete today. Wholly new features may emerge if He grants us a worldwide spiritual awakening. But since the elements of renewal described in the previous chapter are central to the gospel and anchored in the life and mission of the early church, we can pray for their occurrence today with the assurance that they are critically important for revival and for mission.

HEARTS THAT ARE OPEN TO GOD

Before anything else can happen within the church, God must get our undivided attention. We need to sense our need for God. Can we pray with the hope that today's believers will be awakened from their sleepwalking, disengaged from the rat race for success and survival that the world has built, and turned humbly toward God? Yes, for this is the goal of biblical religion! Under the Old Covenant, the Scriptures were carried about in a box, the Ark of the Covenant, as the talisman that would bring Israel victory in battle because God's presence traveled with it. But God's real home is the human heart that is sensitive to His voice. "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the home that you will build for me? . . . But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:1,2,). God has promised to write His Word "with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3, RSV). For the heart of the New Covenant is this: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). God has promised to turn the Body of Christ into a construction team which will build His temple of living stones. We should pray that all professing Christians will turn

their hearts toward the Lord with a hunger to seek His will.

A NEW AWARENESS OF GOD'S HOLINESS

Turning our hearts toward God will result in an outpouring of the Spirit, illuminating our hearts and bringing deep conviction of the holiness of God and the depth of individual and corporate sin. We should pray that whole churches will suddenly become conscious of the sins they are tolerating, which are not just conscious acts of disobedience, but longstanding conditions of spiritual pride, jealousy, envy, hatred, resentment, and strife, as well as doctrinal false teaching. We should pray that Christians will realize their sin is no rare and outrageous occurrence in their lives; for the "works of the flesh" are constantly among us, tolerated and virtually invisible. We should pray that religious flesh and spiritual self-centeredness will be revealed by the spotlight of God's truth. In America Christians are constantly preoccupied with their individual spiritual growth or even their health and wealth, and care nothing for the lost and hungry multitudes of the earth. As John of the Cross points out, every deadly sin has a spiritual form also: spiritual pride, spiritual gluttony, spiritual envy, and so forth. We must overcome this hidden gravitation toward self which afflicts even our spiritual lives, or we will never see an awakened church reach the world for Christ.

As church members and outsiders are brought under deep conviction of sin by the Spirit, they will be eager to hear the good news of Christ's saving work. We need to be sure that our proclamation of the gospel is clear and complete, including justification, sanctification, the Holy Spirit's indwelling, and spiritual authority.



How many of our people really understand that they are justified (accepted as righteous) not because of their experience, not because they were born again, but only because of the wholly alien righteousness of Jesus Christ laid to their account? How many of them know that they are involved in a lifelong process of sanctification in which God shows them areas of bondage to sin and helps them overcome these by Christ's power? How many of them know the Holy Spirit as a real power? How many can detect the characteristic strategies of Satan in tempting them, accusing them to drive them into discouragement and promoting lies and slander to divide the church? How many pastors are preaching a shallow version of the gospel which does not proclaim the full victory we have in Christ?

PRACTICAL TRANSFORMATION IN OUR LIVES

Not many of our people are even awake enough to have the center of their lives illuminated by the core of the gospel. But how many have gone beyond to reach for the corporate dimensions of life in the Spirit? How many are praying regularly for the kingdom to come among their families, their friends, their bosses, and their subordinates? How many are praying that their place of business will be honest and uncorrupted, and that its whole operation will be a blessing for workers, managers, consumers, the environment, and the whole human community? How many are praying, and also contributing, so that the gospel will reach all people groups, and all the earth be full of the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea?

INTEGRITY WITHIN THE BODY

We can pray that Martin Bucer's agenda of global inreach and outreach will be achieved in the church. Bucer you will remember, attempted to encourage the Puritan and the Pietist to pay attention to more than individual piety but also to mission. These goals are mutually dependent. We cannot achieve world evangelization without an awakened church, because the church (not just its message, or individual Christians) is "Exhibit A" for the truth of the gospel. Unfortunately, at the moment, it is the biggest piece of evidence on earth that Jesus is not Lord. We should especially pray for troubled spots like Northern Ireland and South Africa, where strong commitment to the Bible is combined with unconscious disobedience to its commands.

A RENEWED MISSIONARY SPIRIT

Ralph Winter's work has made American Christians aware that they enjoy a disproportionate share of everything--not only of the world's energy usage and gross national product, but of exposure to the gospel. As we might expect, the huge majority of committed and nominal Christians are in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world colonized by Europe. These areas also have some "unreached peoples" who are culturally distant from the Christians surrounding them. But the majority of unreached people are in the Muslim world or in areas dominated by older living religions in the Asian heartland or in the Middle East. That is to say, most Christians are saturated by the gospel while many non-Christians have never heard the good news.

The aim of Protestant world mission during the last three centuries was the expansion of Christian witness until all the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Messiah, "as the waters cover the sea." But if Dr. Winter's research were graphically portrayed as this world viewed from space, it wouldn't show a little gospel everywhere. Rather, the predominating ocean areas would represent deep ignorance, not knowledge. Three centuries of expanding missions, and the earth is still a sea of ignorance!

We should pray that many young Christians will give several years abroad as tentmaking missionaries and that older Christians will take early retirement to go to Third World countries which need their skills and would be glad to receive the gospel also when they realize that it is Christ who has sent them to meet their practical needs.

THE ANOINTING OF THE LAITY

We should pray that the laity, the sleeping giant of the church's power, will experience the release and enabling of its leadership gifts. Richard Hutcheson has said that in every great spiritual awakening, the clergy retire to the coach's box, and the lay people get out onto the field and play the game. This was especially true in the Second Evangelical Awakening, where lay people like William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton changed the whole shape of English life. In the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Suenens moved that the church be defined primarily as the people of God and only secondarily as the hierarchy.



Now Pope John Paul II states that social change can best be promoted, not by an activist clergy, but by an awakened laity.

THE SOCIAL DEMONSTRATION OF THE GOSPEL

We should pray for the social demonstration of the gospel, especially in countries where there are large numbers of Christians. J. Christy Wilson has said that the Arab world is unlikely to receive the gospel from Americans when all they know of us is our drunken businessmen and our X-rated films. We must launch crusades to roll back the tides of pornography, abortion, and other socially destructive forces in ways which will not sacrifice freedom of expression.

We must also pray that hunger and other forms of social injustice--the disease centers which communism can infect--will be healed. It is my conviction that multi-national corporations, transformed by Christian workers and managers who will put their jobs on the line to witness for Christian principles, may be able to do far more than governments to end social injustice. Businesses often manage to accomplish what they attempt; governments, for some reason, seldom do.

The model of Campus Crusade's Christian embassy in Washington is instructive. Those leaders discovered that they could not do evangelism credibly with Third World diplomats unless they responded to their concerns for hunger and development in their home countries. The Crusade leaders introduced them to businessmen in this country who could help meet their needs, and then they found the diplomats open to listen to the reasons behind their help and their Christian hope.

A BURDEN FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER

This may sound circular: pray that more will pray. But don't dismiss this point too quickly. Prayer as a serious task is important. In the last century, throughout the eras of spiritual awakenings, prayer escalated--from quarterly concerts to weekly meetings to the daily noontime prayer among laity. But in this century among Western churches, prayer has been drastically weakened while we work at projects for the Lord.

Intercessory prayer has become vestigial in the churches--a ritual which baptizes meetings as they begin and buries them when they end--because it

is focused not upon the whole panorama of God's work in the world, but on stifling particularities. How many pastoral prayers have you heard which really embraced the scope of God's work throughout the planet, probed the concerns of His kingdom in the whole nation, and adequately dealt with local concerns beyond the needs of your own congregation? Our worship services are now monuments to our spiritual self-centeredness as a result of the impatience many people have felt when their pastors have tried to "pray around the world." It is a wonder that any pastoral prayers ever rise higher than the ceiling, when they so rarely embrace anything beyond the walls.

In the late twentieth century, the Pentecostals have become a "third force" in world Christianity, not because their doctrine is perfect, but because they have given themselves to the praise of God and to intercessory prayer. If we are to be delivered from attempting only what is predictably achievable, while others "expect great things of God and attempt great things for God"--to quote the great missionary leader William Carey--we must return to a proper regard for prayer.

An increase in the volume of prayer may not be as important as refinement in the agenda for intercession. God, as Jesus tells us, is not impressed by the multitude of our words (Matt. 6:7,8). He does respond, however, when we ask those things which are closely related to the interests of the kingdom of His Son. He is not looking for perfect Christians, but for those who are deeply attentive to His holy purposes. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

Some years ago my wife and I began to pray together with a deliberate aim to develop intercession that was kingdom-centered rather than self-centered. One useful exercise was to pray according to the daily news. Often in prayer groups it helps to perform this simple exercise. "Take the main section of the daily paper and tear it into single pages. Give each person a page, and ask him or her to read it, looking to the Holy Spirit to light up prayer concerns in the news of the world. Then hold these before the Lord in prayer. A little experience with this technique will show you how often we ignore God's power to change world events and meet deep human needs, both spiritual and social.



If we are to “expect great things and attempt great things” in this global way we must surely enlarge the place of praise and worship in our prayer. Only a faith grounded in a deep awareness of God’s glory, power, and grace will give us courage for the tasks the coming Great Awakening may involve.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

We must pray for the development of congregations which are full of cellular groups for prayer, sharing, support, and pastoral help. This means recapturing the experience of true Christian community. In the Herrnhut model, community was strongly concerned with encouraging unity among Christians at levels beyond the local congregation. We must pray for what I call regional ecumenical renewal, in which all the churches in a given area begin to plan and cooperate and share their gifts across denominational lines.

Paul regarded all the congregations in an area as the church in that region, and I am convinced that God still looks at things this way. How can we read I Corinthians 1:3 without realizing that Paul would be appalled at our dividing up into teams named after favorite theologians, forms of polity, or doctrinal convictions? What gifts for the whole body are locked up when we isolate all the Pentecostals in one church, and all the Calvinists in another? Often the churches which have most to offer in sharing sound doctrine avoid contact with weaker churches in their area. But Paul teaches that the cure for our being “blown here and there by every wind of teaching” lies not in separation from those less pure but in the drawing together of believers and the “speaking of the truth in love” (Eph. 4:14-16).

We must also encourage prayer for the renewal movements of inreach which God has now given us in every mainline denomination including Rome. Why should nominal Christians be ruled out of the great missionary movement of our time? How can the descendants of past awakening movements, whose forefathers were in covenant with God, hear the awakening message of the gospel unless it comes to them in culturally familiar clothing? Christ told us to forgive and to love our enemies and to pray for their recovery from sin and falsehood. Should we not pray for fellow sinners among the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic Church, and even the World Council of Churches?

A STRONGER CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Finally, we should pray for the strengthening of Christian education and theological integration among evangelical churches and we must be willing to pay for this as well as pray for it.

When Communists intend to subvert a nation, they first infiltrate its schools. Do they know something we don’t know?

A Christian periodical recently urged us to “pray for another Abraham Kuyper.” We should pray for one hundred Kuypers, and one hundred Edwardses—for great theological minds which are filled with the Spirit, in touch with our cultures but not duped by them, and able to meet the issues of our time with biblical answers. We need minds which can design theological containers big enough to unite all Christians without quenching any gifts or insisting that all manifest the same gifts. We need systems which will harness together those burdened for evangelism and those burdened for social action without restricting either concern. We need theological activists who will evangelize the historic churches for orthodoxy, and experts at apologetics who will not just defeat their opponents with arguments but convert them with kindness and love.

In short, in order to have global spiritual awakening, we must have a massive infusion of the mind of Christ, delivering us from conformity to the world and transforming us by the renewing of our minds. May God give us grace, understanding, and persistence to pray for this and every other scriptural dimension of global spiritual awakening, in order that the world may be reached with the gospel!

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