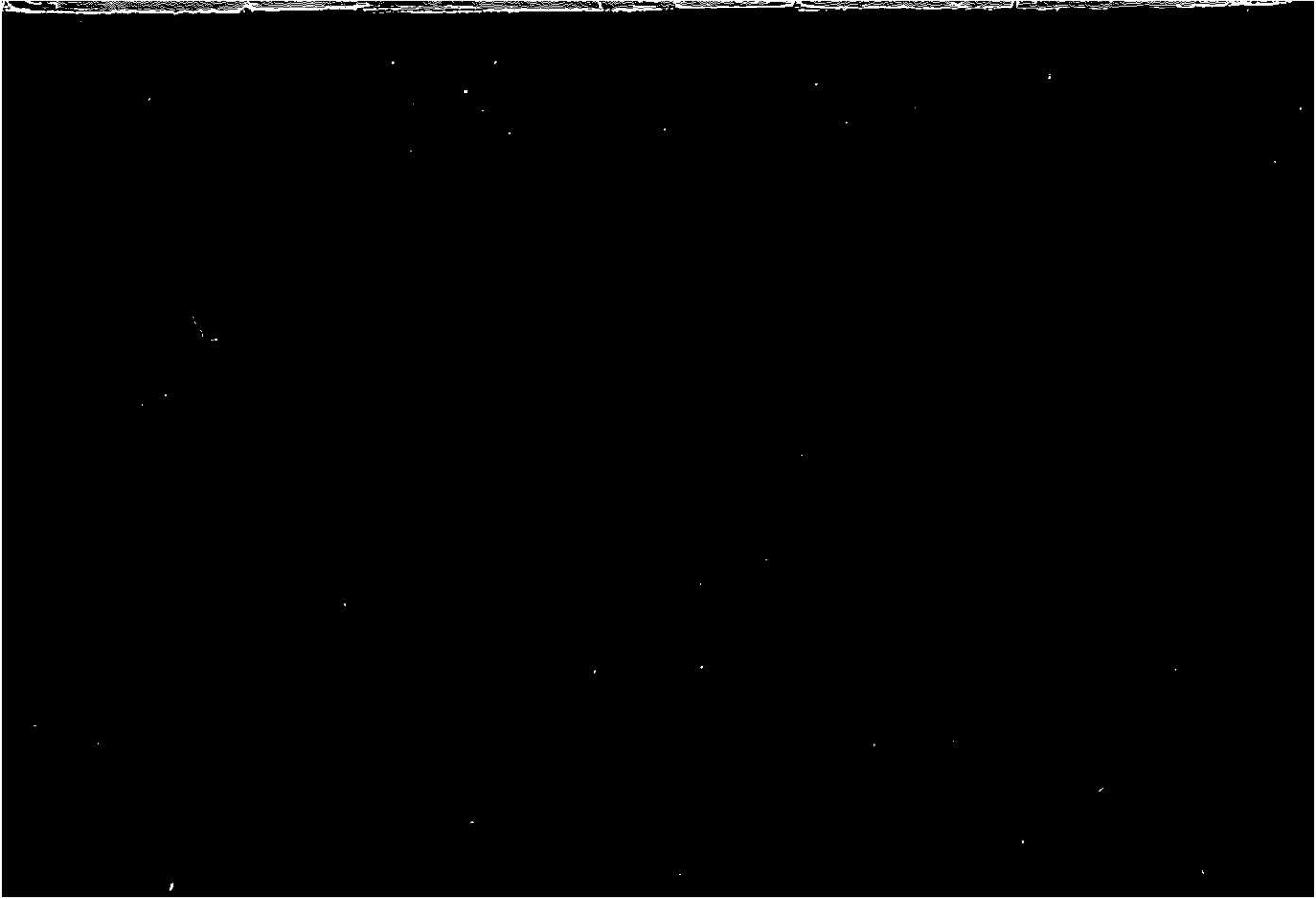

REVIVAL

By ARTHUR LONGLEY

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Revival

SINCERITY

THOSE Christians who want a revival can have one. But not at any price. It cannot be bought cheaply at a religious bargain counter with pious wishes, sentiments or sighs. It will cost much of the hard cash of practical Christianity. The price has been the same in all ages. It begins by a wholesale smashing of spectacles: the rose-tinted, the dark, and the sectarian. For it does not come by optimism, pessimism, or religious conservatism, but only by realism. It is Christian realism diffused. It means being affronted by truth, being compelled to something more than mere respect or admiration for its aloof and abstract beauty.

All the weaknesses and failings of the Church must be faced before they can be remedied. But the first stage in the cure is personal. Divine truth must be personified to be potent. It must have personality. It must become flesh and blood. It is only a reality when it is alive in Christians. And the intention to pursue the purpose of God must come before the knowledge of that purpose. A decision to follow truth to the end, bitter or sweet, is absolutely essential before taking the first step. Revival is the march of a vast army along that road. It is Truth militant, the rhythmic pounding of a myriad feet on the flint highway of God's will.

We must allow ourselves to be confronted with the facts, because those who want to be blind cannot be made to see, even by God. Each one of us must be suspicious of himself, must question his motives and condition of heart.

To be credulous is to ignore the injunction "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." But we need not spend much time asking ourselves if we are to blame for the Church's failures. We are. That will become plain immediately we read any of the ethical exhortations and spiritual idealism of the New Testament. Our self-examination must be to determine what are the weights to be laid aside in the race. But without moral courage to admit the worst, much that is hid will not be revealed before

the judgment day. And then it is too late to run a race, or have a revival.

Salt that has lost its savour, even though it has retained its appearance, "is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."* Without potency it is refuse. When Christianity ceases to be active, generative, intrinsic, it needs another name. When it becomes inert, impotent, unproductive, it is ready for the rubbish dump. This Sermon on the Mount is an example of Christ's realism. It depicts an irrefutable quality of Christianity—salty salt, righteousness unsoured but uncompromising, sympathetic but inflexible. Not that dull religious respectability which demands the suppression of every natural instinct. Not that self-righteous boredom of negation left over from Victorian Sunday afternoons, nor that sugar-cane religion which is sweet at all costs. For the world is not interested one bit in an eternal life that is syrupy, stuffy or sour.

The Sermon on the Mount can solve most of our problems. Only the realism depicted there can compete with the popular unholy excitement of going to the devil. For realism is concerned with the substance as opposed to the shadow. It is the true as distinct from the false, the genuine in contrast with the spurious and artificial, the concrete, not the abstract or speculative. It deals with experiences and facts, with the actual and the authentic. It is sure and dogmatic. It is reality. This is the only kind of Christianity which can bring a revival. It was the only kind preached by Christ, and we cannot afford to be diverted from evangelism because this genuine article is too costly for many.

The Church of Christ must make its own way through the world. It must do more than stand on its own feet. It must lift others, constantly, from every lower level. It must remake lives, or become a museum. This task demands fresh, ceaseless spiritual power, up-to-date experience. A saint is not a work of art in stained glass, without warmth even when the sun blazes through its thin anatomy. Saints are

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* Matthew v. 13.

Christian realists. Jesus spoke of them enduring insults, injuries and buffetings that would make most ordinary people morbid. They have cravings for the godly life, hunger and thirst after righteousness. It was such righteous ambition that made the reformers and revivalists of all ages daring and intense. Without this spiritual ambition Christianity becomes insipid like flat wine. This hunger is the goad of God. Without it there is no spiritual greatness. Christianity is unimpressive to-day because it lacks spiritual violence and passion. It may have the heart of the Lion of Judah—but it is certainly wagging a lamb's tail.

We cannot have the ease of resignation and the energies of revival at the same time. To settle down is the way of all flesh, but not the way of Christian realism. Christianity is not convenient. It is neither comfortable nor dull. It offers adventure and demands daring. The Church is in desperate need of more saints with imagination that can soar into the blazing sun, and stretch powerful wings over the unexplored vastness of the Divine promises. Revival can only come through those who refuse to be buried alive under the junk of formalism, through those whose spiritual passion fires them with the expectations of the impossible, whose molten energies spill from every restricting convention, and burn every pretty religious affectation in which nice but misguided Christians try to wrap them. For realism is something that fits no human frame. It can be controlled only by God, through truth.

The salvation of souls is a serious affair. It is a matter of life and death; a greater life and a worse death than the natural. No other justification for plain speaking should be needed. All Church members who, by the means unfortunately at their disposal, endeavour to influence a minister to avoid facts because they are ugly, disconcerting or offensive, are playing at being Christians. Those who want nothing but comfortable words and pious platitudes, instead of revolutionary truths, have no conception of the desperate fight for people's lives, souls, and eternal destinies, in which Christianity is engaged. Our joy is declared to be in the struggle, and, like that of the angels, over a sinner that

repenteth. We have no right to any pleasures which supersede this.

If the truth of God is to work miracles on sinners it will also have to work them on saints. We must be hurt if they are to be healed. Revival depends upon our wilingness to endure the painful truth, to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. It is this choice between a form of godliness and its power which determines whether we will offer the leper a cure or a cosmetic. For if the Word of Life is not generative in us we cannot tell sinners of its creative power. To be a Christian is to be born again of incorruptible seed "by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." And this living Word can only be preached by those in whom it really lives. Revival is the diffusion of such spiritual reality.

It demands co-ordinated effort. Though the Church has many members it is one Body. Its organic harmony is vital. Its denominations should be an admirable method of distributing its burden of responsibility. Instead, so often, they interfere with its evangelical effort and unity. Let us retain our labels, remain within our different organisations, and continue to emphasise this or that particular doctrine, so long as these things do not prevent co-operation in the task of winning people for Christ. Whatever hinders this is intolerable to a Christian realist. Churches, after all, are companies of believers. It would be very strange if they were not chiefly concerned with making converts to Christianity. And denominationalism is no substitute for evangelism.

DOGMATISM

The Church functions by the demonstrations of its doctrines. It confirms God's Word by His works. Its experiences of Christ's presence prove the truths of its Revelation. It is the Body of Christ: the Word made flesh.

Christian doctrines cannot become dogmas by intellectual criticism. No amount of rationalisation can change them one way or another. They can only be proved by the scientific method of experiment. "Now if any man have

not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." Dogmatism is doctrine demonstrated as fact in human lives. It is the unquestionable authority of faith and works. It is experience in harmony with the revelation. It is doctrinal realism. The Church's evangelical influence depends upon its faithfulness to the truths entrusted to it, upon the constant ability to change its doctrines into experience. Without such dogmatism there can be no revival.

But the Church allowed modern criticism to dissipate the substance of its Revelation. It compromised with an age to which agnosticism was as indispensable as aspirin, an age which could not contemplate the idea of religious certainty without the risk of a headache. It paid deference to temporary philosophical speculations and scientific theories. It tolerated denials of the Deity of Christ, merely on the basis of intellectual presuppositions about the miraculous. It has been unbalanced by what Bishop Henson describes as critical innovators, and has learned that the "record of New Testament criticism is filled with obituaries of brilliant and widely-accepted critical theories" which one day hold the field in an unchallenged security, and the next are "challenged, reversed and abandoned."* Yet, mainly on the unfounded assumption that miracles do not happen, the Modernists were anxious to re-write the Gospels and to give Christianity a Humanist shape emptied of the supernatural; which really means a shape without the recognisable presence of God.

In fact that was exactly what they achieved by discarding Christian dogmas. The Church lost the authority of the Divine Presence, its evangelical influence, and its prestige. Preachers avoided references to repentance, sin, and judgment. These subjects seemed clumsy and crude against the polished hypotheses which clothed the fallacy of human progress. Every challenging doctrine was modified to suit the egotistical period. In attempting to moderate theology that was an offence to modern culture and ideas of progress, it left itself at the mercy of the critics it had endeavoured to please. Like the proverbial ostrich, in

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* "Christian Morality."

trying to achieve peace of mind it exposed its flanks. The restoration of its evangelical influence depends upon a return to dogmatism, upon a return of confidence in those original doctrines by which it became a Church and prevailed through the ages.

The unity of the Christian Revelation must be emphasised if we are to inspire faith in its doctrines. Dogmas are indispensable to evangelism. But differing schools of interpretation confuse the public mind. By cherishing our private views we are raising a barrier against revival, and dimming the light by which men find their way to God. The Apostle Paul is nowhere more solemn and more sad than when he contemplates doctrinal divisions in his address to the Elders of the Ephesian church: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"*

Harmony of interpretation can be achieved by sincerely following the Scriptural method of exegesis. All the various values of the Revelation are literary and plain within the Bible itself. Historical narratives, incidents, and everything of biographical nature can be distinguished easily from the straightforward commands and exhortations of God. The differences are not between that which is infallible and that which is ambiguous, but between direct doctrinal communications and the rest. They can be recognised by the same literary and grammatical principles by which millions of people understand the books they read. Nor should metaphorical language present any serious difficulty, because

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* Acts xx. 26-31.

it has been used by the world's greatest literary geniuses to communicate their thoughts to the public. In any case, doctrine in the Scriptures is never dependent upon the interpretation of symbols. Instead the symbols are interpreted by the plainly-stated doctrine. We must accept the Scriptures as they are, and treat them in that same straightforward grammatical manner which we adopt to ascertain a writer's meaning when we read a newspaper, book, or a letter. Ambiguity is related to agnosticism, and opposed to that dogmatism which is indispensable to evangelical preaching.

God's revelation of Himself is understood and appropriated by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual,"* which means, as Liddell's Concordance puts it, to " separate from other matter, and compound anew." In this way we bring together all the scriptures which have a common truth, and the sum of the facts stated is the doctrine. This is a scientifiic method. Unfortunately, however, it is very often ignored by both the critics and advocates of Bible doctrines. According to Young's Concordance this comparing process is to " judge or sift together." This is " rightly dividing the word of truth."† But unless the truth which is common to all the scriptures to be brought together is obvious, that is, plainly asserted or unambiguous, the grouping will become arbitrary. There will be room for different personal view-points and external intellectual standards. Either these scriptures fall naturally and easily into their doctrinal groups, or the grouping depends on personal choice, and the " dividing " is arbitrary.

Therefore in the Scriptural Method of Exegesis, the outstanding qualification of all doctrine is that it is obvious, or plainly asserted. Bible doctrines are thus self-contained or self-sufficient. Though it may be necessary to follow their implications into history or science, this can only be done by their meaning first being made plain and fixed within the Scriptures themselves. Though external evidence can be

* I. Corinthians ii. 12, 13.
† II. Timothy ii. 15.

allowed to elaborate such fixed meanings, it cannot be allowed to alter or contradict them. This position of Scripture is set once for all by the very nature of Revelation. Because, "the world by wisdom knew not God,"* the Revelation of Himself had to be entirely self-sufficient and independent of the wisdom of man which had such limitations.

If doctrines are formulated by the Scriptures being " divided " and " compared " on the basis of unambiguous statements, then, in exegesis, such literal statements or plain assertions take precedence over every other literary form. Though literal statements are not the only means of conveying truth they are universally the best and least liable to ambiguity. Webster's New International Dictionary defines a literal statement as one which professes to be a statement of fact, happened or to happen, a plain statement of truth, intended to be accepted " according to the 'letter,' or the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of the words." A literal statement then, is one in which the meaning is most obvious. Scripture doctrines, therefore, are plain to all who desire to understand them.

This method of exegesis is realistic and sincere. Whatever violates it is artificial, unscriptural, and unscientific. By it all can speak the same things, and thus help to restore to the Church that doctrinal harmony essential to revival. To cherish view-points that have not been tested by this method is not only disingenuous, but also a form of egotism which makes truth the special merchandise of select companies, when really it is God's gift to all. Christian doctrines are the means of man's salvation. It is a serious thing to use them instead for intellectual juggling, or to be resigned to debatable interpretations. Because of these things the Church spreads confusion where it should evoke conviction. For more than half a century it has given undue prominence to unsound assumptions and to speculations. This exaltation of critical enquiry to a position of authority has helped to shatter the public's confidence in its message. Obviously, the only way it can restore its power is by re-

* I. Corinthians i. 21.

versing its policy. It has sown criticism and reaped mass indifference. Let it now sow dogmatism and it will reap faith.

Mere acquiescence in the ideal of doctrinal harmony will not overcome modern agnosticism. In days when the "common salvation" was being held in contempt, Jude urged the believers to "earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints." Aggressive and concerted action is needed to re-establish the divine authority of Christian truth. The prevailing spiritual apathy is not being disturbed by any sectarian emphasis; but it can be by a strong unbroken doctrinal front. The situation demands unity of doctrine, not the union of denominations. The latter contains a colossal amount of organisation, and bristles with enough difficulties to make it almost impossible. Nor would it solve the main problems. But an evangelical dogmatism could be created by an interdenominational fellowship of those who believe in the inspired harmony of the Christian Revelation.

PROPAGANDA

MILLIONS of pounds are spent yearly on trash simply because it is well advertised, or marketed by plausible salesmen. An ordinary commodity of no greater value than any other of its kind is made to appear superlative merely by the way it is described or offered. "American advertising specialists are alleged to hold that only cost limits the delivery of public opinion in any direction on any topic," says Professor E. H. Carr, member of the Foreign Office and diplomatic services for twenty years. And, though he considers this a pardonable exaggeration of expert practitioners, he informs us that "Publicity and propaganda have become both so dangerous and so valuable as instruments of foreign policy, that no government can any longer afford, even in time of peace, to leave them in the unguided hands of private interests."* Yet, while successful commercial advertising can overcome public indifference, and political propaganda

* "Propaganda in International Politics," Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs (1939). Clarendon Press.

can mould the thought of nations, the Church is unable to make its supreme spiritual realities impressive. In other words it has no propaganda. What little advertising it does attempt is, for the most part, obsolete in its appeal. Its preaching is not insistent. It does not speak in that passionate dogmatic language which is compatible with its real and almost sensational experiences of God. The apostles preached with authority, because they were quite clear, intensely so, regarding the things they believed. They declared the truths of God in plain, forthright terms. Their doctrine was so much of a unity that it was called the " Apostles' doctrine." There was no room for doubt, for confusing issues in their preaching.

A great actor of a past generation was asked how he could make fiction so real to his audiences, when preachers failed to impress their congregations with the truth. He replied: " It must be because I present fiction as thought it were fact, while they present fact as though it were fiction." The Church's approach to the public lacks that authority which is indispensable to propaganda. The early evangelists astonished and impressed people by the bold manner in which they preached in the Name of God. Being convinced of the truth, they spoke it as if it could not possibly be anything else.

They " multiplied " and spread their message. The charge of the high priest was " behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Propaganda in evangelism is illustrated in the sixth and nineteenth chapters of the Acts. " And the word of God increased: and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly," and "so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." Converts increased inasmuch as towns, villages, and localities were filled with the Word of God. The trouble which dispersed the Jerusalem Church promoted this method of evangelism. For " they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand

of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."* In the parable of the sower it will be seen that much of the seed of the word was scattered to waste. That is inevitable in propaganda. But, to evangelicals it is an incentive to sow liberally.

Christian doctrine must come out of sectarian holes and corners. It must forsake those tortuous labyrinths occupied by rival Fundamentalist schools. It must be used in the open against all modern challenging thought. Stephen's opponents "were not able to resist the wisdom and spirit" † by which he contended for the truths of God. Apollos "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." ‡ Paul "went into the Synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened and believed not, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." § The Christian Revelation must stand on its own feet, against all its opponents. It must be allowed to fight for its own life, instead of being preserved by intolerance, or bigoted resentment of culture and education. But it is grossly unjust to muffle it first in those philosophical pre-suppositions, fanciful individual interpretations, and distortions of its text, which are the product of "schools," sects, parties, and "isms." Eliminate these, then God's Word will become "quick and powerful," divinely alive and energetic.

POWER

ONLY the realism of primitive Christianity can disturb modern religious apathy. The present-day indifference should drive us to despair, or to the Acts of the Apostles. This is the most dynamic book of the New Testament. The spiritual power and passion, the action and events, which it records, are the dramatic and evangelical sequel to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

* Acts xi. 19-21. † Acts vi. 10. ‡ Acts xviii. 28. § Acts xix. 8-10.

Revivals cannot be promoted by ingenious schemes or novel methods, though some organisation is necessary when they occur because multitudes must co-operate in such works of God. But they cannot be engineered. They are Pentecostal. That is they are the result of expanding spiritual forces, of many Christians having more divine life than they need for themselves. They are a mass return to that intense reality of righteous life, that clear, pure doctrine, and that zealous Gospel propaganda which characterised the early Church.

Originally, Christianity was contagious and vigorous. To-day it is conservative and languid. The difference is mostly a question of spiritual energy. The one was active. The other is passive. The one was rampant. The other is reserved. The one was concerned with propaganda. The other is over anxious about propriety. The one was forceful. The other is feeble. In the first place the Gospel had to be resisted to be rejected. It was fierce and avid, like a flame. Men either smothered it or were engulfed. Very few could play with this fire without being scorched. It was either intolerable or indispensable. It was momentous, intimate, incisive, challenging, because it was the power of God.

This Christian realism was created in ordinary people by the Holy Spirit. The confusion and vacillations of the disciples before the Day of Pentecost are well known. But the phenomenal change in them afterwards is, perhaps, even better known. It was so marked and immediate that Peter made this transforming power of the Spirit a subject of the gospel sermon which he preached on that day. Salvation is the gift of spiritual vitality. It is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."* It is "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus " which makes man " free from the law of sin and death."† The gift of the Spirit is for all who believe, said Peter. It is indispensable to the new life. It is the dynamic of godliness, its compelling force, its virility, its substance. So Paul prays that God may grant the Ephesian saints " to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man," that they may enjoy to the full their relationship with Christ.

* Rom. xiv. 17. † Rom. viii. 2

The "kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."* Its doctrines are more than systematic theology. They are spiritual forces. They are the manifestations of the Divine personality, the Spirit of Truth. When He is come, said Jesus, He " will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."† The Word of God is only effective in those who experience also the power of God. The natural man receiveth not the things that be of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned. Truth converts only because the Spirit of Truth creates the faculty of spiritual perception, even if only temporary, in those who by nature are blind to the things of God. In this way it becomes the power of God even in those who resist and reject it. That profound sincerity without which no one can believe and understand the Gospel is no human trait. It is the work of the Spirit, achieved, at first, against the human will. This is the meaning of our Lord's words: " No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me, draw him." The Spirit of Truth always provides the first divine pull toward Christ. There is no other way to morally adjust the ingenious mind and deceitful heart of man. There are many methods of propagating Christian doctrines and ideas, but if they are not channels of the Spirit's power, they are all futile.

Before the Day of Pentecost the disciples were timid in the face of the opposition which culminated in the Cross. They entered the upper room in Jerusalem almost surreptitiously. But they burst from it sensationally, preaching the Word of God boldly, emphatically and passionately. Truth had become a living and spontaneous force which they could not contain. " We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," said Peter and John when they were forbidden by the priests to teach in the name of Jesus. But they had seen and heard things just as wonderful months before without such inspiration and courage as a result. The disciples had even performed miracles in the Master's name. Yet nothing, not even the proof of His resurrection, had produced anything like the evangelical

* I Cor. iv. 20. † John xvi. 8

fervency which they showed after they were endued with "power from on high."

Their fierce propaganda was the inevitable outcome of their doctrinal assurance. They entered the upper room with confused beliefs. But they emerged with a convincing Gospel. They had added nothing to their doctrine. The truths they held were simply fused into a message by an intense spiritual force. They received no new revelation. But they received power which changed ambiguity into dogmatism. It was the Spirit of Truth who descended upon them. This fact is greater than any other associated with the Day of Pentecost. But too often this is overlooked. Because revival depends upon reality of Christian life, dogmatism, and zealous propaganda, it depends upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Any organisation which ignores this will be no more than a monument to formalism.

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