

ADVENTIST REVIEW

nad**Ministerial**

JUST FOR PASTORS



REVIVAL:

What It Is (And Isn't)

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BY MORRIS L. VENDEN

One of the major figures of late twentieth-century Adventism, Morris Venden (1932-2013) brought a new understanding of righteousness by faith to hundreds of thousands of believers through revival meetings, preaching, and writing. His campus revival series in the early 1970s was credited with launching a transformation of many North American Adventist colleges, and resulted in hundreds of baptisms and unnumbered thousands of recommitments. During his career, Venden served large congregations at La Sierra University, Pacific Union College, Union College, and Azure Hills Church near Loma Linda, California.

This short article, not well-known among his nearly 30 books and thousands of pages of published material, appeared only in the special 150th anniversary edition of the Adventist Review in July 1999. His words are entirely relevant today for the church he loved and served.—Editors

In 1887, Seventh-day Adventists were told that a revival of true godliness among us was the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. For a people who had been preaching the law until we were “as dry as the hills of Gilboa” (Ellen White’s phrase!), revival was to be a top priority.

Well, with that kind of track record, it was easy to misunderstand what revival was all about. We had become behavior centered: some found it difficult to think in any other terms. One of the earliest misunderstandings, therefore, was to think of revival as reformation.

Those of us who span the century (like my preacher father and I) can recount all the “buzz” words: *health reform, education reform, dress reform, diet reform, temperance reform, hospital reform*, ad infinitum. Many Adventists apparently thought that reform was revival or that it would lead to revival.

I can remember serious Adventists urging that if everyone took off their buttons, pins, and jewel lookalikes, we would bring on the great revival. I can remember someone in the Northwest trying to bring on the revival by getting everyone to become vegetarians. This went on until someone found a salmon in the deep freeze of the local elder.

When I was beginning in the ministry, a godly preacher tried to get all of us to take off our tie clasps and watchbands. Being serious about my work, I went along with it, until I got tired of my tie bobbing in the soup. So I started wearing bobby pins for tie clasps. When people noticed my bobby pins, I could then witness about bringing on the great revival. Then I became proud of my bobby pins and my great humility for wearing them. And the last state of that man was worse than the first.

The prophetic voice who told us of our greatest need also told us what revival is and what it isn't. You can read about it in the now well-known article originally printed in the *Review* in 1887 and later reprinted in *Selected Messages*, volume 1, pages 121-128. This article was used heavily by A. G. Daniels in his book *Christ Our Righteousness* and included in the appendix of the earliest editions. Later, it was left out of the appendix "for mechanical reasons."

Herein lies a deep mystery. What were these mechanical reasons that caused it to be left out? Did the electricity go off? Did the presses break down?

Read the article for yourself. You will discover some of these mechanical reasons within the context. Here's an example: *"We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world."*

Here's another mechanical reason to leave it out: *"We have not the first reason for self-congratulation and self-exaltation. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. He will appear to comfort and bless the true seekers."*

For a church that wants to think that all is well in Zion, these kinds of warnings make it easy to leave them out!

Ellen White clearly reminded us that reformation without revival will lead to dead works because it deals only with behavior and externals while the real problem—the inward spiritual life—remains unchanged. Revival has to do with the heart, the thinking, the springs of action and not merely with the outward behavior. It happens in the closet, not simply in a resolution proposed at a General Conference Session. It happens through knowing Jesus, not simply knowing the rules and regulations.

In the decades since then we have certainly struggled with other substitutes for revival.

Celebration worship isn't revival and hasn't brought it, even though it can look like a big blowtorch for a while. If we don't have quality time alone with God during the week, why would He be impressed with us politicians kissing babies on Sabbath? (Genuine revival, however, is cause for celebration!)

Church growth isn't revival and hasn't brought it either. Genuine church growth is growth in the members, not simply the membership. If our purpose for church growth is to grow membership, we won't truly grow. We'll only get fat and sluggish.

Would you like to know where real revival comes from?

There have been revivals without great preachers. There have been revivals without great organization. But there has never been a revival without prayer. In the history of the Christian church, prayer was the central element of the great revivals. And they didn't begin with a mass prayer meeting either. They began with one person somewhere who felt a burden. Another one joined in and then a small group. And they began to pray for revival. Revival comes only in answer to prayer.

What kind of prayer? Here's an example from Psalm 85:6: *"Will You not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in You?"*

Look toward heaven, friend, if you are feeling colder than you used to. Look toward heaven if you know of a backslider or a hesitator or a procrastinator. Look toward heaven with this prayer for yourself and for others.

There has never been a revival without prayer.

