



REBUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS

Tim J. R. Trumper

... if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Psalm 11:3 (ESV)

When New York's Twin Towers cascaded in September 2001 who could have seen beyond the chaos, grime, and trauma to a cleared site, a fresh foundation, and a new One World Trade Center? Likewise, today, who peers over the ruins of the once towering edifice of the West to envision its spiritual renewal?

Christianised by theism, revelation, law, and Christ's gospel, and adorned by Protestant reformers, biblical preaching, spiritual revivals, personal godliness, international mission and social action, the West has now toppled under the accumulated assaults of rationalism, romanticism (emotionalism), materialism, hedonism, and postmodernism. The church, called to be "a pillar and buttress of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) and previously the backbone of the West, has crumpled, increasingly rejecting the authority of God's Word for the irrational fads of our day. She now reflects the West's ideological, spiritual, and moral chaos.

God, though, always retains a witness to himself. "The righteous" are not sinless, but, sheltering under the blood of the covenant, are divinely declared righteous in the Messiah, and now promote God's righteousness. Yet, there are epochs of history such as ours, when, so dire is the context, that we ponder, as did David, how to advocate righteousness when its foundations are destroyed.

We look up! A call to prayer.

Straightaway, David declares: "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven". Although highly exalted, the LORD sees all. Being righteous and loving righteous deeds, he tests the righteous and judges the wicked (11:4-7). We may deduce, then, that God will, in his

timing, defend his honour, preserve his people, and complete his saving purposes on earth.

Somewhere, somehow we gave up on God's intervention. Many prayer gatherings have vanished, are pathetically attended, or are limited to personal needs. Yet, our Lord's template for prayer prioritizes not our need for daily bread but the coming of the kingdom (Matt. 6:10, 11). He reminds us that while our maintenance matters to God, primarily we are to implore him to glorify himself by purifying his church, converting souls, and revolutionizing communities.

Where this burden exists, it suffuses both private and public prayer. The 3,000 converted on the Day of Pentecost committed not just to pray but, literally, to "the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Luke refers explicitly to set times of prayer, recording the apostles' return to the temple at "the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1). The synagogues, too, were "a place of prayer". There, significantly, Lydia, the first-recorded Christian in Europe, was converted (Acts 16:11-15). It is, then, in earnest, united, God-glorifying prayer that the spiritual rebuilding of society begins.

We look back! A call to penitence.

It is when conscious of God's greatness and glory that we weigh best the needs of Wales. Our cultural *hiraeth* is endearing, yet a forlorn longing for the past does nothing in itself to clear today's rubble. With *hiraeth* we rehearse our history, but only in repenting for its squandered blessings may we hope for days of reviving.

So profound is repentance that it entails at least three elements. First, there is the emotional element (*metamelomai* [e.g., Matt. 21:29]): regret over, in this case, the deplorable state of the church and society. By contrast, *hiraeth*, at its best, comes closest to the penitent's emotion, but, amounting to sentiment, falls far short of true repentance.

Hiraeth knows nothing of the penitent's change of mind (*metanoëō* [e.g., Matt. 3:2]). For that, we must open ourselves up to why things are as they are in Wales. Why, for instance, did we jettison the biblical orthodoxy of the historic confessions of the church (notably the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Confession, 1823), favouring the heterodoxy of rationalism and romanticism? Why, for all the mercy in the 1904-05 Revival, is the landscape of Wales so peppered today with demolished, dilapidated, or converted chapels? And why have we accepted a

secularized Wales instead of humbly acknowledging that the Lord has withdrawn his favour?

Moreover, *hiraeth* knows nothing of retracing our steps (*epistrephō* [e.g., Lk. 22:32]). Not only is down the way up, but back is the way forward. Repentance, unlike *hiraeth*, means excising and barring afresh the world's "isms" from the church, standing foursquare on God's revealed counsel (Acts 20:27), and preaching his gospel with renewed zeal and authority. Only then may we hope for the world to say of us, as was said of the Thessalonians, that we have "turn[ed] the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Anyone in Wales can exhibit *hiraeth*, but John C. Miller reminds us (*Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*) that church leaders are to be to the as chief repenters, showing us the way to return to God and to his Word.

We look out: A call to preach.

The reformation of the church in Wales implies our need for God's reviving power. Yet, when God filled his servants afresh with his Spirit amid the post-crucifixion animosities in Jerusalem, the prayers he answered focused not on revival *per se* but on the need for boldness in proclaiming Jesus as Messiah (Acts 4:23-31). Thus, revival, we learn, was occasioned not by a longing for a prior golden age (the best years of David and Solomon), but by faithfulness to God's work in the present.

While, then, we wait on God to revive his church and to rebuild the West, we utilize the Word and the Spirit already given us to live and to preach boldly in our communities. Let us break forth from behind our closed doors, confident in the divinely revealed gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting God to grant us, amid our witnessing, "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:20).

Much more could be said, but less we cannot say.

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