

Restoration

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Join the Revolution!

Balanced men don't change history

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Living in Cornwall for many years enabled me to meet some amazingly colourful characters. One in particular stands out, though he is memorable more for his lack of colour than for an extravagance of it. I will call him Harry, and his wife Annie.

Doom and gloom

Harry was an evangelical Christian, grudgingly charismatic, who could put more people to sleep in his half-hour prayers than anyone I have encountered before or since.

He actually *enjoyed* poor health - Annie was always telling us she was prepared for him to go any moment. He held to a theology of absolute defeatism, and gained a kind of perverse pleasure when world events seemed to give credibility to his doctrines.

According to him, the world would get worse and the church smaller. In fact, deception and depletion was the church's inevitable destiny. And always lurking in the wings was the shadowy figure of the antichrist, awaiting his moment of worldwide takeover. Harry had uncovered at least three potential candidates for the antichrist during the time I knew him.

Harry's worldview could be summed up in two words: 'helpless' and 'hopeless'. There was nothing to be done - the world's clock was running down, fatalistic gloom was his only expectation - no light for the world, no life in the church and no hope for Harry this side of the grave. For him, every silver lining had a cloud, and it always rained - except when it poured.

Pessimism

We once sat down together to listen to a tape by American evangelist T.L. Osborn. The evangelist was dramatising the story of the paralysed man let down through the roof to the feet of Jesus. 'Imagine', said T.L., 'how the folk in the house must have looked up in surprise as plaster and dirt from the roof began to fall on them!

'There!' exclaimed Marty. 'That's certainly not of God. The Lord would never allow dirt to fall on his congregation!

Totally lost on him was the word of faith that expounded the wonderful love of the Lord to forgive and heal. From then on, T.L. Osborn was the preacher who believed Jesus was happy for people to get dirty.

Well, at least Harry was consistent in his pessimism. Except, that is, in one particular area, where he seemed to contradict his own natural inclinations. His garden was like Eden restored.

Garden guerrilla

Even the tool shed was a wonder to behold. In fact, it was more like an armoury than an implement store. Half the stuff in there needed to be licensed by the police - I swear he had a hoe you could shave with.

The truth is, Harry was at war.

Oh, he knew all about the curse. He was aware that thorns and thistles were destined to spring up from the ground - but not in his half-acre! This was Harry's kingdom, and it was a very brave weed that dared to intrude into his domain. He was a cabbage-patch Rambo, a garden guerrilla who ruthlessly pursued the invader, plant or pest, and dispatched it with breathtaking efficiency.

In that one area, where he really came alive, Harry was an avowed radical and a committed revolutionary. One cannot help but wonder what might have happened in his church and in his town if such dedication to changing the environment had motivated him on the other side of his garden fence.

Transformers

George Bernard Shaw once observed, 'The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable one persists in adapting the world to himself. Therefore, *all progress depends on the unreasonable man.*'

Just as Harry persisted in adapting his garden to himself, imposing his will and rule upon it. Christians are called to adapt the world to the kingdom of God.

In the opening verses of Romans 12, the apostle Paul presents us with two types of Christians: the *conformer* and the *transformer*. J.B. Phillips paraphrases his words like this: 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable to him and perfect!

So then, the difference between being world-shaped, and a world-shaper through the practical outworking of God's will, lies in the way we think. Revolution in our minds will lead to radical action in our lives. Power for great change can be brought to birth in a dream of better things.

World-changers

Abraham embarked on an epic and historic pilgrimage because he had seen the day of Christ and sought the city of God. Paul travelled the Roman Empire and played a key role in turning the world upside down in obedience to a heavenly vision.

Modern world-changers, too, have thrown caution to the wind of God's Spirit, for they know that cautious men don't shape history. Paul Yonggi Cho pictured in his heart the steps of progress from an obscure work to the present-day phenomenon of a church larger than some cities - and still growing. Civil rights champion Martin Luther King declared, 'I have a dream' - and was prepared to die for it.

Of course, dreaming alone will not change anything. The world is full of those who think they are dreamers but are only asleep.

Visionaries indulge in impractical theories, but people of vision work to achieve what they have seen. For them the ultimate is more real than the immediate, and they lay hold of what now is in order to shape it into what it shall be. We must believe that our dream is achievable if it is to affect the way we live.

Join the revolution

Spiritually speaking, poor old Harry was as blind as a bat – but he grew the best beans in the neighbourhood. By contrast, many of us are full of vision but have nowhere to work it out. We need to rethink why we are here, and what we are doing.

Harry's garden was his passion. He was an expert. Ask yourself what areas of life stir you and in what sphere you could excel. Broaden your mind beyond the religious fence of your present activity. God's purpose is bigger than your garden, bigger than your church.

If we are to change society we must be involved in it. World revolution is our commission, a revolution in which we seek no glory but God's, no power but his kingdom, and in which we determine to shed no blood but our own.

Because they can do nothing dramatic, many opt to do nothing at all. The truth is, revolution can only succeed when supported by the ordinary people just being themselves and doing what they can. The dictionary defines 'revolution' as 'the overthrow of a regime or political system by the governed'.

There can be no doubt that it is to this we are called when we read Paul's words to the Corinthians: ['God] has chosen things low and contemptible, mere nothings, *to overthrow the existing order.*' (1 Corinthians 1: 28, NEB).

Join the society, club, governing board, advisory committee or other secular group. And there, in the real world, by your integrity, reliability, dedication, enthusiasm - but most of all because Christ is in you - impact it with the revolutionary kingdom of God.

Be a revolutionary for God today!