

CHAPTER 1

Revival Myths

In keeping with its popularity, there has probably been no spiritual awakening on earth that has proved more contentious and created more confusion than the Lewis revival of 1949–52. Deeply conflicting accounts have appeared in various publications, and particularly on a plethora of websites – making it well-nigh impossible to glean fact from fantasy. Much of the difficulty relates to the many exaggerations that have arisen in connection with the movement.

Few people deny that exaggerations and falsehoods have surfaced in the retelling of this popular revival. It has been claimed that many of the myriad of revival myths that have sprung up originate with an individual at the very centre of the movement; we will consider this claim shortly. First, we note a number of inadequately researched narratives that have cropped up through the decades.

Location Location

Consider a portrayal of the movement which alleges that the New Hebrides islands was the location of the awakening, where, near ‘Barvis,’ close to the ‘town of Lewis,’ two women were ‘the human instruments responsible for revival,’ which came after Campbell, a grandfather, suddenly left the Keswick Bible Conference to come and minister.¹ There are a number of inaccuracies here, while others also crop up further on in this brief account.

1. Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present*, Ann Arbor, 2000, pp. 144–6.

The Lewis revival did not occur on the New Hebrides islands, which was the former name for a group of around eighty islands now formally known as Vanuatu, located in the South Pacific Ocean, some 10,000 miles distant from the Scottish Hebrides. Similarly, Lewis is not a town but an island, Duncan Campbell at this stage was not a grandfather, and it wasn't the Keswick Bible Conference that he left to come to the island; rather, his evangelistic work on the Isle of Skye.

Fixing the location of the revival as the New Hebrides islands is a mistake that many have made. A writer of whom Billy Graham claimed, 'no one is better qualified ... to write on revival,' also speaks of 'the great New Hebrides Islands revival of 1949.' He goes on to state that 'within a few weeks the revival had moved across the island sweeping thousands of people into the kingdom.'² Here is another commonly-reported myth – that the revival led to many thousands of conversions in a short period of time. In fact, neither Duncan Campbell nor anyone else in Lewis made any claim to so large a number being saved during the entire course of the revival, let alone within a few weeks.

Tales From Across the Pond

Other reports are equally riddled with historical mis-statements. An 800-word summary of the Lewis revival on the website of a famous American Christian TV network includes well over twenty factual errors. Among these are that invitations to hear Campbell preach in Lewis were 'put in all the roads' and that on his arrival on Lewis he was explicitly requested to 'talk about God.'³ In reality, the Lewis revival was never advertised in the

2. Robert E. Coleman, *The Coming World Revival*, Wheaton, 1995, pp. 43–4. Coleman states as his reference source 'Arthur Wallis.' Wallis, however, makes none of the errors found in Coleman's one-page account. Another writer speaks of the Hebrides revival occurring outwith Europe (Peter H. Lawrence, *The Spirit Who Heals*, Eastbourne, 2006, p. 330).

3. Ross Scott and Elmer Towns, *Flames of Revival: New Hebrides Awakening*, Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), www.cbn.com/biblestudy/flames-

way specified, or in any way. The advice to speak about God would have been considered quite unnecessary; no Highland evangelist of his day ever preached on anything other than God and His gospel.

In a study of Nehemiah, in the context of spiritual renewal, an internationally popular author speaks of *Donald Campbell* and the Lewis revival. ‘Whole shifts of below-the-ground miners would be too distressed to continue their work until they had resolved their relationship with God.’⁴ The author is apparently confusing events of the Welsh revival of 1904 with those of the Lewis awakening; the former affected many hundreds of coal-miners, the latter affected none, for there were no underground pits in Lewis in the mid-1900s.

Another US author, in her very brief account of the Lewis revival, states, with no supporting evidence, ‘More than 500 prayer groups, almost exclusively women, had been crying to God for an awakening.’⁵ This statistic seems to have been pulled from thin air; it in no way corresponds to reality.

The blurb advertising one account of the Lewis revival refers to ‘a powerful move of awakening to God that began with five men praying in a barn and expanded to over 20,000 conversions in three months ... you will be able to duplicate this great outpouring in your own home, city or region, for truly God is no respecter of persons.’⁶ Apart from the mythical conversion statistic quoted, how can any individual or group of people possibly ‘duplicate’ an outpouring of God’s Spirit?

of-revival:-new-hebrides-awakening.

4. John While, *Excellence in Leadership: The Pattern of Nehemiah*, Leicester, 1986 p. 101, quoted in John Macleod, *Banner in the West*, Edinburgh, 2008, p. 262.

5. Mary Stewart Relfe, *Cure Of All Ills*, Montgomery, 1988, p. 151.

6. Rev. Owen Murphy, *When God Stepped Down from Heaven: Revival in the Hebrides*, self-published, 2017.

Home-spun Anecdotes

Lest anyone think I am deliberately picking on North American authors, I include some European examples. An English evangelist records that the Hebrides revival of 1950–1 was the third of only four ‘historic genuine revivals’ to have occurred in the British Isles in the twentieth century.⁷ This ‘heaven-sent Divine visitation’ had as its theme, ‘Your honour is at stake,’ lasted ten months, and ‘produced approximately 4,000 converts.’⁸

In a live discussion on a Christian TV channel, the leader of a national prayer movement re-iterated the universally held belief that the Lewis revival was initiated by the prayers of the two elderly Smith sisters, who, she said, were so desperate for God to move upon their island that they drew a circle around them and vowed that they would not move out of it, nor would they sleep or eat one bite, until God sent revival in answer to their persistent intercession. The immediate cause of the revival, continued the correspondent, was the power of God coming down upon a young girl standing on a chair!⁹

Two young revival researchers noted, ‘The first event which clearly showed that Mr Campbell was going to be powerfully used and anointed was when, prior to his arrival, a local man, who was either a dentist or a doctor, began to stir the people up against Campbell, in an attempt to hinder his influence. On doing so, the man instantly dropped dead.’¹⁰ There is no truth in this.

7. The first two, the author informs us, were the Welsh revival of 1904 and the Lowestoft revival of 1923. The most recent authentic revival in Britain, he records, was one which he personally co-led, occurring in Wigan, Lancashire in 1970. Apparently lasting six weeks and seeing 2,200 conversions, this movement remains unknown to most UK believers, and no revival historian I know has documented it.

8. Melvin Banks, *Nothing Is Impossible*, Chippenham, 2008, preface.

9. ‘Pastor Kate’ in discussion with Jonathan Oloyede on *Live @ Nine*, 07.12.2010.

10. Article on revival, The Australian Christian Assemblies International website, January 1991.

An Anglican minister wrote that the revival caused ‘hundreds of very secular people to cry aloud for mercy ... It was entirely God’s work.’ As a result of it, ‘the ferries were discontinued on the Sabbath.’¹¹ The truth is that even prior to the revival, the people of Lewis could not be considered ‘very secular’ – the island being steeped in Christian teaching. Nor did the revival alter the running of ferries – these didn’t operate on Sundays anyway.

One popular writer confuses George Macleod, ecumenical founder of the Iona Community, with Duncan Campbell as being the prominent evangelist in the awakening. He is also under the impression that Campbell was a contemporary of John Govan, founder of the Faith Mission. In fact, John Govan founded the Mission well before Campbell was born. He died in 1927, two full decades before Campbell set foot on Lewis.

A German researcher had it that the two Barvas spinsters ‘had been praying to God for thirty years for a revival. First only young men were affected. They arduously prayed for their pastor until he confessed himself a sinner and devoted his life to Jesus. The spirit of repentance then came upon the elderly men and afterwards on the women and girlsThe Hebrides experienced two waves of revival; the first in 1949 and the second in 1953.’¹² None of these claims has any basis in fact.

Checking the Facts

The above statements are among the more outlandish misreporting of the Lewis revival. Sadly, the uninitiated reader is likely to take them as true. Many other accounts of this spiritual movement intermingle fact with error, thus creating overall distorted reports. That’s not to suggest such narratives don’t contain much in the way of valuable information. Most of

11. Michael Green, *When God Breaks In*, London, 2014, pp. 210–3.

12. Kurt Koch, *Die Erweckung auf den Hebriden*, on www.schriftenmission.de (accessed 12.10.2016).

them do. Nor is it to suggest that a reporter should never record anything unless he is 100 per cent certain of its veracity.

The author of this study, for example, can in no way guarantee that all the information he presents is error-free; I will have made numerous mistakes, albeit inadvertently. But the above accounts do highlight the need for historians to do their best to ensure accuracy by checking their facts where at all possible. Otherwise, the misinformation documented is likely to get further distorted by others over time, potentially leading to greatly aberrant revival accounts.

We close this section with a more relevant quote on the Lewis revival. In his classic book, *Why Revival Tarries* – one of the most pertinent studies ever written on the theme of revival – Leonard Ravenhill quotes a pastor who exclaimed:

“We wish revival would come to us as it came to the Hebrides.” But fellow servant, revival did not come to the Hebrides by wishing! The heavens were opened and the mighty power of the Lord shook those islands because “frail children of dust ... sanctified a fast and called a solemn assembly,” and waited tear-stained, tired, and travailing before the throne of the living God. That visitation came because He who sought for a virgin in which to conceive His beloved Son found a people of virgin purity in those souls of burning motive in their praying. No petitions were coloured with desire to serve the face of a failing denomination. Their eye was single to God’s glory. They were not jealous of another group who was outgrowing them, but jealous for the Lord of Hosts, whose glory was in the dust, the “wall of whose house was broken down, and whose gates were burned with fire.”¹³

A Shocking Interruption

What may well come as a surprise to many is the charge that the greatest source of exaggerated information came from the

13. Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, Tonbridge, 1959, pp. 131–2.

very evangelist at the centre of the movement – especially in addresses given in the latter years of his life. The charge must be taken seriously, for this characteristic of Duncan Campbell has been belatedly accepted, not only by his opponents, but also by his closest friends. One revival convert stated, ‘I was horrified at the exaggeration of details of this revival. Campbell often spoke about the revival and was accused of exaggerating. That accusation was justified.’¹⁴

Although he had his detractors, everyone I have spoken to who knew Duncan Campbell personally, or those I’ve read about who knew him, have spoken of him in the highest terms. He was universally regarded by all friends and colleagues as a warm-hearted, unassuming man of genuine godliness, who held a burning passion toward his Lord and Saviour. Testimonies abound as to his humility and life of holiness.

Reflecting on times spent with Campbell, writer Wesley Duewel noted, ‘What a humble but fearless and anointed man of God he was.’¹⁵ A student influenced by the evangelist said, ‘If you didn’t believe in God you could no longer be an atheist after meeting the man. You could see Jesus in his life and touch Jesus in his ministry.’¹⁶ Close friend and Faith Mission colleague Andrew Woolsey said ‘it was a rare privilege to know him. People meeting him were introduced to new spiritual dimensions, and could never be the same again.’¹⁷

All of these testimonies to the distinction of Campbell’s character make his tendency to exaggerate or distort all the more baffling and disconcerting. Many who knew the man have been at a complete loss to account for it. It cannot have been

14. Mary Peckham, ‘*Revival Conference*,’ Evangelical and Theological College of Wales, 2002, audio tape.

15. Wesley Duewel, *Heroes of The Holy Life*, Grand Rapids, 2002, p. 36.

16. Quoted in Andrew A. Woolsey, *Channel of Revival: A Biography of Duncan Campbell*, Edinburgh, 1974, p.163.

17. *ibid.* p. 10.

for the purpose of personal aggrandisement (which, in any case, was contrary to his above-noted character). For, although his embellishments serve to aggrandise the Lewis revival's impact, in general they do not have the effect of making the evangelist look greater. On the contrary, Campbell often downplayed his own role in the movement.

I should state at this point my enormous personal respect for Duncan Campbell. Ever since I first heard of him over four decades ago, I have held him in great esteem. This is still the case, and I have not the slightest desire to cast aspersions on his character. I remember being shocked and confused on first discovering that he had misreported several stories of the Lewis revival. Given that Campbell was much more prone to making distorted statements about the revival in his later years – especially the late 1960s, I initially put it down to failing memory. I discuss the matter more fully in a later section of this book (see Chap 21).

In the pages that follow, I tread a narrow and often precarious path, ever seeking to be genuinely respectful of the sincerity and authenticity of Campbell's spiritual life and ministry, while at the same time acknowledging his tendency to inflate details of the revival for which he is so well known worldwide, which tendency has been overlooked for far too long. However sensitive and arduous the task may be, it is time to correct that massive oversight, for it has led to a very distorted picture of that revival being reported through a multitude of media.

As we have seen, Campbell has by no means been the only source of faulty information on the Lewis revival. Colin and Mary Peckham had long been aware that a lot of material available on the revival was either wrong, exaggerated or could not be verified. They decided to present a much more accurate representation of events, and in this they succeeded magnificently; *Sounds from Heaven* constitutes the most accurate and comprehensive record of the Lewis revival in print.

Intriguingly, and somewhat disconcertingly, the Peckhams' book has not succeeded in dispelling most of the myths of the revival. The resulting confusion has led to a great many diverging accounts – leaving big questions regarding even the most basic facts of the movement. In particular, existing sources significantly diverge in regard to answering the following questions:

1. What were the spiritual conditions on Lewis prior to revival breaking out?
2. Was the revival initiated by the prayers of two spinster siblings?
3. Was revival ongoing in Lewis prior to Campbell's arrival?
4. How and when did the movement begin?
5. What is the truth behind some of the revival's most popular stories?
6. Why did opposition arise against Campbell?
7. Did Campbell preach the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
8. Was revival universal throughout Lewis and Harris and across the Hebrides?
9. Was this the last revival to occur in the British Isles?

Among other things, this book seeks to provide as clear an answer as possible to each of these questions.

In the process we will have to deconstruct a number of popular stories of the Lewis revival, stories that turn out to be mythical, either in part or in whole. It's only in stripping back the *untruths* that the glorious *truths* of this famed movement become prominent – truths that are every bit as inspiring and faith-building as the myths they replace. For while such stories have endeared and inspired countless thousands of believers across the globe for the past seven decades, they form part of the Lewis revival that never was.