

# A Spiritual Awakening in a University

Contributed by John R. Mott

What do we mean by a

“spiritual awakening” in a university?

It means seeing a work of the Spirit, which not only promotes a more abundant spiritual life among Christian students, but also results in leading other students to accept and confess Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. A state of spiritual life which manifests itself in a constant spiritual awakening should be the normal condition of the Christian student life in any university. This was true of the early Christians in those days when there were added to their number daily such as were being saved.

So we do not mean any new or strange or unscriptural experience, but simply that which has characterized the best Christian communities in all ages and in all lands since the resurrection of Christ.

We shall try to emphasize only those principles and methods which have a Scriptural warrant, and which therefore are equally applicable to universities of all countries and races. At the outset, let us state that we do not sympathize with those awakenings which are characterized by excitement due to peculiar methods and human energy, and followed by a dangerous reaction. It is not this kind of awakening that we shall consider today. We shall dwell upon the real spiritual awakening, which has its justification in the practice and teachings of the early Church.

Is there not an urgent need for a spiritual awakening in the universities of every land represented in this Conference?...Let us remember how many Christian students there are who, by inconsistent and sinful lives and practices, are dragging the banner of Christ in the dust. Let us reflect on the intense spirit of the world which in so many places is invading the Church...Let us not forget the terrible consequences which will follow if these students are not reached for Christ—the consequences not only to themselves, but also to the cause of Christ, and even to ourselves if we do not seek to win them. As we ponder all these facts deeply and prayerfully, are we not impressed with the great need of a spiritual awakening? “It is time, O Lord, for you to work.”...

It may be seriously questioned if we will ever have an opportunity to influence our generation that will compare with the one we now have to work among our fellow students. Moreover, students are more open to the claims of Christ than any other class of young men. While we do not forget that the natural man is always at enmity with God, it is also true that the very nature, purpose, and spirit of a university education predisposes a man to consider honestly the truth, no matter from what quarter it comes.

A man does not go to the university to shut his eyes to the light, to learn to look at things incorrectly, to avoid the truth, and to ignore or trifle with facts and evidence. Rather, he goes there to learn how to seek truth, to sift and to weigh evidence, to account honestly for all the facts, and to welcome and to obey the truth when he finds it, cost what it may.

Statistics collected in Japan and India,

as well as in the West, clearly prove that this is true, and that a much larger proportion of students are Christians than of any other class of young men. This should be a distinct encouragement to us to pray and work for them.

We should also keep before us the solemn fact that, if our fellow students are not won for Christ before they leave the university, the probabilities are very great that they will not accept Him later. We have found evidence of this in all parts of the world&hellip;

Here are some points to be emphasized to help encourage a spiritual awakening on your campus:

### Awakening & Admitting Your Need

Let a few earnest Christian students come together to face the plain facts about the spiritual need of their own university. In order to have real prayer and action to change things, we must have conviction as to the need of prayer and action. In order to have conviction as to the need of prayer and action, we must have knowledge. Christ was moved to compassion, prayer, and effort by first beholding the multitudes. So, you need to have a meeting in some quiet place and at a time when you will not feel hurried. Take time to consider and realize the need; it will take time&hellip;Pray much that God may show you the need as He views it&mdash;that is, from the standpoint of eternity. Try to realize what Christ would do if He were in your place. Try to catch the vision of the university made new when Christ is enthroned there in all lives and relationships. Then, solemnized by the knowledge of the deep need and inspired by the vision of all things made new by the mighty Christ, resolve to give yourselves to encouraging a spiritual awakening.

### Awakening Starts with You!

With whom does a spiritual awakening begin? It&rsquo;s not caused by earnest Christians trying to merely awaken the apathetic Christians on campus. As a rule, it begins with the most spiritual students themselves. The two most active and godly men of one university were led at a student conference to see this secret. When they went back to their university, they spent many days in humiliation, special prayer and Bible study. After they were themselves thoroughly on fire, they invited another Christian to their daily meeting. When he was awakened they invited a fourth. So the fire spread, until the unconverted students began to come under its influence. Before three months had passed, over thirty students had accepted Christ as their Savior. In this manner, beginning with a thorough work in our own hearts, the members of our association will be revived. To this end we should promote heart searching and self-examination. Questionable or sinful habits and indulgences should be given up at all cost. Sin should be confessed to God and put away. And let&rsquo;s not forget the sins of omission: lack of prayer, lack of Bible study, lack of personal work. A necessary pre-cursor of any great spiritual awakening is a spirit of deep humiliation growing out of a consciousness of sin, and fresh revelation of the holiness and power and glory of God. We have discovered no exception to this rule from Old Testament times to the present.

## Awakening & Personal Bible Study

Promote personal, devotional Bible study.

Before emphasizing any methods of work, we need to lay special emphasis on this. We must first BE before we can DO. Bible study is absolutely essential in order to live a life which is pleasing to God.

It is necessary to feed the prayer life and make it strong. And when we think of work, it is good to remind ourselves that bible study furnishes the best possible equipment for Christian service. It shows us the work which

Christ wants done and how to do it. It insures fruitfulness in our work. It

means power in our work, for Bible study is the channel through which God communicates the power of His spirit to men.

Bible study is necessary in order to preserve the results of the awakening—to make it safe and sound and real, and also to encourage the awakening to continue.

## Awakening & United Prayer

Prayer is an indispensable

condition of a spiritual awakening among students or among any other class of people; We fail to prevail with unconverted men because of our more fundamental failure to

prevail with God in prayer; The greatest revival in the history of Yale University was due to the prayers of a band of students who were so earnest in their desire that for weeks in the cold winter season, they arose before daylight each morning and spent an hour in fervent prayer;

Our praying should also be

united. In one university, Christians

had been praying a long time for an outpouring of the Spirit. Their prayers were powerless. Why, because the leading workers were jealous

of one another and criticized one another behind their backs. At last the Holy Spirit convicted them of this sin. They came together, put aside their differences, and had real union in prayer.

Then a far-reaching work of God began which spread all through the university, resulting in many unbelievers becoming Christians. From the day of Pentecost until the present time, it has been necessary to be of one accord in prayer before the Spirit of God will work with mighty converting power.

We should also be persevering in prayer.

Persevering prayer had a large place at Edinburgh University

in making possible that wonderful year of grace. I can think also of another university in which the students met daily for prayer for five months. Many of them became discouraged and gave up, but God honored the persistence of the few who held on. After five months had passed, students began to forsake their sins and accept Christ.

We might greatly multiply

these examples showing the irresistible power of definite, fervent, united and persevering prayer. If we would have an awakening in our university today, it will be no exception in this respect to awakenings of the

past. We are prone to magnify human agencies and human personality. Prayer affirms that the awakening is God's work, which comes from above. Our prayers reveal that we have more faith in God, than we have in man's works and efforts. Let us change our methods and in the future give ourselves to prayer—to more prayer, to continued prayer.

### Awakening is a Work of the Spirit

We must depend upon the Holy Spirit if we would have a genuine spiritual awakening. It's God who must convict our fellow students of sin. It's God who must reveal to them Jesus Christ as Lord and energize their wills to accept Christ. It's God who must guide and embolden and empower us in our personal work. To do the work of God, we must have the power of God. To present a supernatural Gospel, we must have a supernatural power. In a word, we must be filled to overflowing with the Spirit; then rivers of living water will flow from us... Why should we be satisfied with working alone as men when we may have the mighty power of God manifested in and through us?

Every person who is in touch with the living Christ is under obligation to promote a spiritual awakening. How much greater is the responsibility which rests upon all of us who occupy positions of leadership in the work among students. If the Christian Associations and movements which we represent are to be spiritually awakened, we, the leaders, must be deeply spiritual. The stream will not and cannot rise above the fountain.

If we fail to do our duty, I tremble to think of the consequences... As we think again of the great need of a spiritual awakening among the students of the lands we represent; as we feel the forces moving us to desire such an awakening; as we recall the mighty means which God has so greatly used in promoting awakenings and which He has placed at our disposal, let each of us ask himself and honestly answer these three questions: "Is it the will for God that there be a deeper and more widespread spiritual work among the students I represent? If so, where shall it begin? And when?"

### Reference:

Addresses & Papers of John R. Mott, Address delivered at The Federation Conference Eisenach, Germany, 1898. Edited & Abridged by David Smithers