

Children Of The Revolution (August 2017)

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By Rev Paul Graham

Recently, I was having a conversation with someone about the word “revolution”. Usually, we see the word in the context of historical upheaval – the Industrial Revolution, the French and Russian Revolutions, the Cultural Revolution in France, and so on. Revolutions are usually characterised by those in favour of the change that such an endeavour will bring about and those who oppose such a thing.

There are also, usually, a number of those who frankly couldn't care less, but history tends not to be interested in the “whatever” brigade. The others, those fervent masses, whichever side of the revolution they sit, will defend their corner with vigour and, not uncommonly, a call to arms.

Bloodshed and battles usually epitomise revolutions; the French and Russian ones being most commonly associated with rampant massacres as the situation ebbed and flowed, with the guillotine and firing squad the reward for the vanquished. Even the so-called “Glorious Revolution” of the 18th Century had its bloodier moments, as last month's Battle of the Boyne anniversary note in my diary reminds us (though I hadn't realised the significance of this until watching Lucy Worsley's BBC documentary on the subject recently). The Industrial Revolution had its troubles as those who saw the new technological advances as threats to their way of life and livelihood saw no other recourse but to violent protest.

Revolution seeks to bring about change: cultural change, society change, economic change and so on. These are not low-level things, as even those who shrugged their shoulders, unwilling or too disinterested to commit, are caught up in the after-shocks once the dust settles and the blood starts to dry. Shifts in ideology, technology and other ologies can send shockwaves across the whole globe, with the future path of humanity taking a left or right turn as a consequence. The ripples continue to spread and the world is shaped by these events.

What would the world look like if any of the afore-mentioned revolutions hadn't reached their historical conclusion? What would the world look like if France and Russia had retained their royal families, or if Stevenson et al hadn't brought their machinery to the heart of industry? We cannot speculate in any way accurately due to the range, breadth and depth of the ramifications of such a possibility, so we're safer to look forwards, rather than backwards.

More recently, we have faced the revolution of media and news, with the advent of rolling 24-hour news and social media creating a revolutionary shift across the globe. We are facing a change in the way we regard truth, the way we process information and our ability to communicate it, spread it, Tweet it to a never-sleeping global audience. Whether that audience wants to be bombarded by these opinions with the veneer of “news” is hardly germane to the situation; this is the world we now live in and we have to respond accordingly. Fake news, no news, real news, are all ingredients in the melting pot of global communication that never seems to be any less than at boiling point.

This modern revolution hasn't arrived with bloodied hands, though lives have been lost as a consequence. The knock-on effect of this latest cultural shift will only be fully measurable when the next shift comes along, but we can spot the effects it has had on us. We know more, but at the same time feel less informed; we are more global, but at the same time feel more isolated; we hear more voices, but at the same time hear fewer opinions.

As this is a church magazine, there has to be a “where is God in this?” element as well. And this is the whole point; the whole article is based on a godly premise. It wasn't humanity that invented the

revolution; not the English, nor the French and certainly not the Americans. God did it first.

God has been bringing about revolutionary shifts since creation. God-ordained revolution reverberates throughout the Old Testament and then, when people were just starting to think that God was nicely parochial with a focus on a small corner of the Middle East, Jesus sparked a global revolution that we're still coming to terms with two thousand years (and many other revolutions) later.

Jesus' revolution, which in order to start it he was required to shed quite a lot of his own blood, has, in its time, caused an awful lot of strife, conflict and pain and been falsely blamed for much more. With the benefit of hindsight we now apologise for the misguided efforts of our ancestors, hoping that we don't repeat their mistakes with the best of intentions. And mistakes they are, as generations have twisted the words of Jesus, the revolutionary truth of the good News into something very different and at times, very nasty.

Jesus' revolution is still unfinished and that's largely because we're still coming to terms with the enormity of the task that he left us in the simplest terms, an explosive two-fold instruction that though we might like to think we are achieving, we will never fully succeed in until we realise that we can't do it without the help of the one who gave it. It's a revolution that increases our horizons, looking further outwards than we might want to acknowledge and further upwards than we might want to commit. It's certainly a revolution that, though it starts with "I", quickly moves to focus fully on "us".

The revolution of Jesus is one that we're all invited to join in if we dare. It's not dependent on our strength, our stamina or our mighty armies, ready to charge into battle at the word of command. Neither is it based on our weakness, our tiredness or our down-trodden survivors, grimly holding on for dear life. But rather on surrendering to the commitment required in two simple, world-changing commands:

"Love God with all you are. Love your neighbour with all you can."

Up the revolution!