

Fire on the Earth

by Virginia

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Fire on the Earth, originally published electronically as articles – but now edited and updated – represents David Orton's writing between 2002 and 2013. This was in addition to his previous book, *Snakes in the Temple*, and therefore both complements and completes that work.

What is Fire on the Earth about?

From the Introduction:

Like *Snakes in the Temple*, *Fire on the Earth* penetrates the causes of the Western church's contemporary malaise, but also provides a kaleidoscope of prophetic perspectives on a kingdom-shaped *ecclesia*; designed and destined by God to transform entire cultures and disciple nations. From the personal lessons of learning the ways of God to the re-shaping of the church apostolically, as one citywide *ecclesia*, it radically re-castes the Christian vision for the 21st century. Until God's people repent of the scandal of their sectarian divisions – albeit in the name of orthodoxy or success – the world will not listen. Only when we stand functionally as one body, in one Spirit and one faith, will the imprimatur of heaven entrust to us the spiritual authority and power necessary for the final harvest of the nations.

The two appendices, *Apostolic Architecture* and *A Statement Concerning the City-Church*, are essential to this. They were worked out on the ground, the former in an experimental citywide context and the latter in a national context, reflecting a more concrete attempt to map the way forward for Christ's *ecclesia* into the 21st century and beyond; nevertheless, very much building on the spirit and values of *Snakes in the Temple* and the preceding thirty-five chapters of this current compilation. Accordingly, the appendices provide a strategic blueprint for a *new wineskin* — a post-denominational and organic *ecclesia*, pointing the way to a more complete restoration of the apostolic ideal found in Christ and his 1st century apostles.

For this to occur much will need to change — in fact, it cries out that “*fire fall on the earth!*” (Lk 12:49). These words of Jesus describe his mission. As one sent to the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Mtt 15:24), they allude not only to his role as Messiah, but also as *the* Prophet, climaxing the long succession of prophets sent to Israel, calling them back to covenant fidelity — to purity of heart before the Lord, and thus, to her calling as a missionary nation to the whole earth:

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Exodus 19:5–6 ESV

Jesus ministry, as the final prophet to Israel, was to presage the judgement (restorative discipline) that was about to befall her. This was culminating the long history of biblical prophets who consistently called God's people back to the *stipulations* of the covenant — that is, to “... *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*” (Mtt 22:37 ESV, cited by Jesus from Deut 6:5).

However, a covenant not only has stipulations, but also *sanctions*. It was of these that all the prophets warned. And so, Jesus follows the declaration of his mission to “*cast fire on the earth*” with the challenge that they do not “... *know how to interpret the present time [kairos]*” (Lk 12:56 ESV, author's emphasis). This begs the question as to what they should have been observing so as to understand their “time” (*kairos*) — very simply, the *sanctions* of the covenant; that is, the covenant consequences of their disobedience. Israel was wilfully blind to the fact that Roman occupation was exactly that! In line with the touchstone of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 – that *disobedience* produces *dispossession* – the prophetic interpretation

of Israel's predicament was that they were under a judgement of God, albeit designed for their ultimate restoration (see Rom 11). The fire that was about to fall on the "earth" (literally *land*, alluding to Israel as the Promised *Land*) was the fall of Jerusalem, the predicted destruction of the temple, and their expulsion from the 'land' in 70 AD — a mere 40 years on; significantly a biblical generation, in fulfilment of Jesus' Olivet discourse and prophecy (see Mtt 24).

My conviction is this — we, in the 21st century West, are in the exact predicament of the Israel of the 1st century. Despite the positive fruits of the faith, the West's church and culture, generally, could now be described as apostate and neo-pagan respectively. Like Israel of the first century despite its long history of divine visitation and privilege, we too — because of our disobedience — are rapidly approaching the culmination of a long line of incremental judgements. This last century, in spite of significant spiritual outpourings (Pentecostal Revival early century and Charismatic Renewal mid-century), saw two catastrophic world wars and a major depression without a demonstrable recognition — from either the church or wider culture — of "the present time (*kiaros*)" — that is, that we are living in the consequences of violating the covenant that God has made with humankind; first in the garden, then through Israel, and finally in Christ and to the nations that receive him (historically the West); both wars and economic problems are included among these consequences — or *curses* (see Deut 28 and Lev 26).

Too whom much is given, much is required (Lk 12:48). Also like Israel, the 'previously Christian' West — in fact, the product of the gospel and its cultural impact — privileged with the revelation of God and the covenant blessings (including prosperity and freedom) has "... *forsaken ... the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water*" (Jer 2:13 ESV); and thus, is now weighed in the balance and found wanting. Turning to the false gods of humanism and statism — exposed in the 20th century as "broken cisterns" — the West has come under a divine discipline. Interpreting Israel's present predicament as covenant consequences (see Rom 9-11), it is time to heed Paul's application warning the Gentile church:

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen [Israel], but God's kindness to you [Gentiles], **provided you continue** in his kindness. **Otherwise you too will be cut off.**

Rom 11:22 ESV, (author's emphasis)

What has happened to Israel — her *temporary* dispossession — can also happen to us!

The Western church's fall — dramatically displayed in its existential and humanist theologies on one hand, and its market driven agendas on the other — has invited covenantal consequences, and like Israel, unless she turns, is about to be "cut off" — that is, *dispossessed*.

As Jesus warned:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

Matt 5:13 NASB

Our espousal of false gods and value systems has invited the ire of God. As a church and culture we are in the process of being expelled — under the discipline of God — from the 'land' of kingdom authority and power. And this will escalate — through a neo-pagan post-Christian culture, war, economic recession, and intimidation of radical Islam — until we break and fall on our faces. No amount of triumphalist 'dominion' posturing will override the dealings of God. Not until we own our corporate sin will we see the spiritual breakthrough and kingdom advance for which we labour and pray.

The call of this book, therefore, is for radical repentance *and* reformation — a rending of our hearts *and* a mending of our ways, the dismantling of false value systems and idolatrous power structures. This then demands real changes as to *why* and

how we do 'church'.

These writings are dedicated to this end, trusting that they might find some measure of favour both with God and with men.

David P. B. Orton, Cape Schanck, Victoria, September 2013

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