

Chapter 2. Review of Literature

Much has been written on the subject of revival through the history of the church. Some criteria for selection are required to reduce the scope of this chapter to a manageable task. First, this study will emphasize the writings of leaders who were themselves involved in revival movements. Second, it will focus on those select revival movements that both made impact on church history and that would have parallels to today's church. The three revival movements that will be the focus of this study are the Great Awakening in America¹, the Methodist Revival in England², and the Second Awakening in America³. Even more specifically, the writings of Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and Charles Finney will be emphasized. Although other scholars are cited, these church leaders' teachings are key to understanding modern revival movements.

Jonathan Edwards & the Great Awakening

The Great Awakening in America had some early rumblings in the 1720's as

¹The Great Awakening is a series of religious revivals that swept over the American colonies beginning in the 1720s in New Jersey and in 1734 in New England under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards. It was spread by a tour of George Whitefield in 1739-41 and reached the South in 1748-59 with the preaching of Samuel Davies.

² The Methodist Revival began in England in the 1730s through the methodical spiritual disciplines and personal renewal experiences of George Whitefield, John Wesley, and his brother Charles Wesley. Their renewed faith and extraordinarily popular preaching resulted in a renewal movement that lasted for more than fifty years.

³The Second Great Awakening is a period of religious revival generally agreed to have started with the Cane Ridge revival of 1801 in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, and at Yale University that same year through the preaching and efforts of Timothy Dwight. The Awakening extended through the revivals of Charles Finney in upstate New York in the 1830s.

Theodorus Frelinghuysen and Gilbert Tennent experienced local stirrings in their work in New Jersey. However, it is most directly traced back to the fall of 1734 in Northampton, Massachusetts, a small town about one hundred miles west of Boston. The pastor of the Congregational church in the town was Rev. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Fearing a growing tendency toward Arminianism⁴, Edwards preached a series of sermons entitled “Justification by Faith Alone” and “God’s Absolute Sovereignty in the Salvation of Sinners.” An unusual increase in the people’s interest in Christianity resulted in a large number of conversions and impacted the entire community.

Over the next year, this revival of religion spread to more than thirty nearby towns along the Connecticut River Valley. Although Edwards did not have an itinerant ministry in these towns, as people visited Northampton, they were affected by what they experienced and returned home with a yearning for revival. This “Valley Revival” reached its peak in the spring of 1735, and lost any force in June following the suicide of Edwards’ uncle Joseph Hawley, a leading merchant in Northampton.⁵

This might have been merely an obscure revival in a remote part of New England had Jonathan Edwards not recorded and analyzed the events thoroughly in his writings. He wrote letters to friends describing the events. He wrote extended historical narratives.

⁴ Arminianism is a theology named after Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius rejected his Calvinistic background and “sought to modify Calvinism so that ‘God might not be considered the author of sin, nor man an automation in the hands of God.’” The Church of England held many of the Arminian beliefs even prior to Arminius’ birth. John Wesley later advocated a slightly modified Arminian theology.

⁵ Edwards describes this and other events that led to the cooling period in “A Faithful Narrative” in The Great Awakening ed. C.C. Goen, 208-209.

He published the sermons that had been instrumental in waking up the congregation. These writings were published and read widely in America, England, and continental Europe and led many people to an increased desire to see a great revival.

In 1740, Edwards began to see the awaited reemergence of revival. This broke through as George Whitefield (1714-1771) came to Northampton to preach. Whitefield is often described as the greatest preacher of that era, and at the time was as famous as any man in the English-speaking world.⁶ Whitefield had played an integral role in the Methodist Revival in England in the preceding years. Unprecedented crowds attended his preaching tour of the American colonies. After preaching in Boston, he made his way west to Northampton, where he preached from Edwards' pulpit. Both Edwards and his congregation were moved to tears, and the embers that had grown cold were rekindled. Whitefield played the role of a catalyst that joined the works of Edwards, Tennent and others and ignited all of America in a blaze of revival.

The Writings of Jonathan Edwards

Though George Whitefield may have been the spokesperson for the awakening, Jonathan Edwards was the source of its fervent passion and intellectual support. His writings thus prove to be invaluable to the current study of revival. Edwards possessed an astonishing intellect. He was interested in theology and philosophy, as well as science. He was educated at Yale University and ordained in 1727 as assistant pastor to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. Two years later, Stoddard died and Jonathan

⁶ Arnold A. Dallimore, George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 5.

Edwards became the sole pastor. There he remained until 1750, when he was voted out over a controversy that arose in his church.

In November 1736, Edwards wrote an historical narrative of the early revival of 1734-35 in response to a request from a fellow pastor, Dr Benjamin Colman of Boston. Fully entitled, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England*. This was Edwards' first-hand account of these extraordinary occurrences. Whereas there was opposition to Edwards, the narrative was also in part a defense against those who either criticized the revival movement as improper or supposed it to be overstated.

He describes the circumstances in the town that led up to this extraordinary work and then gives an overview of the effects of the revival. He goes into detail regarding the theological and spiritual issues that impacted his understanding of the revival. Finally, he gives anecdotal illustrations of what he has previously described in general. He tells of a young woman who, when converted, displayed an extreme affection for God and a love for everyone, even up to her death. Edwards also gives a detailed account of a child who was amazingly converted at four years of age. So as to dispel anyone who would scoff at such a suggestion, he goes into detail of her struggle in prayer to receive the peace of salvation and then the clear evidences of a changed life that she displayed.

In 1740, Edwards wrote *Personal Narrative*, an account of his personal spiritual journey. Edwards describes an early religious experience during an awakening period:

The first time was when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation. I

was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion, and my soul's salvation; and was abundant in duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys; and used to meet with them to pray together. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much self-righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties.⁷

Edwards affirms, however, that this was not his salvation experience. “I am ready to think, many are deceived with such affections, and such a kind of delight, as I then had in religion, and mistake it for grace.”⁸ His religious practices and affections waned and he returned to his life of sin. It was not until he submitted to the understanding of God’s complete sovereignty that he experienced an intimate relationship with God. This occurred during his last year of graduate school at Yale and he reported that the experience grew steadily until the time of his writing the narrative, encompassing his ministry in New York and Northampton. This gives insight into the spiritual heart that lay behind Edwards’ powerful sermons and writings. He walked on a higher plane of spiritual experience. Through his ministry, he sought ways to describe this understanding to those who were spiritually blind.

The delights, which I now felt in things of religion, were of an exceeding different

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, Personal Narrative (c.1740) [on-line]; available from the Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/major-works/personal-narrative/>; Internet: accessed 08 September 2005.

⁸ Edwards, Personal Narrative, 1.

kind, from those forementioned, that I had when I was a boy. They were totally of another kind; and what I then had no more notion or idea of, than one born blind has of pleasant and beautiful colors. They were of a more inward, pure, soul-animating and refreshing nature. Those former delights, never reached the heart; and did not arise from any sight of the divine excellency of the things of God; or any taste of the soul-satisfying, and life-giving good, there is in them.⁹

Edwards wrote often of the Sovereignty of God as the key doctrine to understanding revival. In his sermon entitled, “God’s Sovereignty,” Edwards defines sovereignty as God’s absolute independent right of disposing of all creatures according to his own pleasure. For God to practice this sovereignty in relationship to men’s salvation is in no way contradictory to any of God’s other attributes, namely his mercy or his justice.

His message to those who are not yet converted is to not be discouraged, but to seek God’s salvation. It is God’s promise that if you will hear God’s voice and heed his voice, he shall save you. In 1738, Edwards published the sermon, “Justification by Faith Alone”, to combat the Anglican-Arminian theology, which Edwards thought was encroaching upon New England. His criticism with Arminianism was that it led people to falsely believe that their own works save them. This flows from the understanding that receiving a salvation that is offered to us by God is a work, rather than faith. He taught that, in our sinful nature, we could only have faith as God enables us to believe, and further that God does not give this faith to everyone.

⁹ Edwards, Personal Narrative, 5-6.

As the Great Awakening ignited and spread in amazing ways, Edwards found himself attacked from two extremes. On one side, the revival was criticized from the established church, which combined a mixture of envy and philosophical/theological objections to some of its practices. On the other side were the enthusiasts, who reveled in the bizarre outpourings that accompanied the revival. Edwards wrote several works defending the revival from both sides. *The Distinguishing Marks of the Spirit of God Applied to That Uncommon Operation That Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of the People of the Land* was first delivered on September 10, 1741 as a commencement address at Yale. He based the address on 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” From this passage, he articulated a thoroughly biblical view of how to determine if major Christian movements are from God. His first nine points refuted what many thought to be evidence that a movement is not from God, based primarily on tradition or intuition. He then lists five evidences that a movement is from God, including the fact that it raises people’s esteem of Jesus, it operates against Satan’s kingdom, and that it causes men to have a higher view of scripture. Edwards’ balance is evident here as he neither promoted nor criticized some of the extremes that arose. They were neither evidences that this was from God, nor a blemish on what he considered God’s true work.

In 1742, Edwards published a lengthy defense entitled, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England, And the Way in Which it Ought to Be Acknowledged and Promoted*. In this work, Edwards defended why he thought this revival was not only a work of God, but was the culmination of God’s work in history.

He asserted that the conservative opponents of revival preached great doctrinal sermons, but their faith was cold as any emotion or passion was forbidden. He went as far as to state that not actively promoting the current work of revival is the same as working against God's latter-day glory.

As persons will greatly expose themselves to the curse of God, by opposing, or standing at a distance, and keeping silence at such a time as this; so for persons to arise, and readily to acknowledge God, and honour him in such a work, and cheerfully and vigorously to exert themselves to promote it, will be to put themselves much in the way of the divine blessing.¹⁰

There were also shorter descriptions of the Awakening, which were offered to more friendly audiences, such as *Letter to the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston* (1743). Here Edwards describes the effects of the Awakening on his congregation and includes the Northampton Covenant, an agreement which the congregation had adopted as their standard for relating to each other in Christian love.¹¹

In addition to correct doctrine, Edwards emphasized the role of prayer in promoting revival. In his sermon, "The Duty of Prayer," Edwards demonstrates that a "Christian" who does not have a fervent desire to spend time in prayer is nothing but a hypocrite. He admonishes his listeners to have a change of principle--to change that which they have put their hope upon, because the hope of anyone who is prayerless will certainly lead only to damnation. In 1748, Edwards corresponded with a group of revivalist ministers

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in Goen, 368-369.

¹¹Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston," in Goen, 550-554.

in Scotland. They had proposed a plan that would have Christians in various towns gather for extraordinary prayer for revival on a weekly and quarterly basis, and asked for Edwards' advice. His response, *A Humble Attempt To Promote Explicit Agreement And Visible Union Of God's People In Extraordinary Prayer*, gives a biblical basis for such prayer and wholeheartedly joins the call for all Christians to join in such prayer.

Edwards understood the prophets to speak of "an extraordinary spirit of prayer, as preceding and introducing that glorious day of revival of religion."¹² Often in his writings, Edwards expressed his belief and hope that this current awakening was the beginning of a new age of the church in which God would usher in his glory to the ends of the earth.

John Wesley & The Methodist Revival

For more than half of the eighteenth century, England experienced an extended revival of Christianity that transformed the very character of the nation. Though this Methodist Revival was primarily intended to renew the spiritual life of England from within the Church of England, it resulted in an organized movement that became the Methodist Church. Its origin can be traced back to 1729, when a small group of students at Oxford University began meeting together in what came to be known as "the Holy Club." The purpose of the group was to challenge each other to a more disciplined practice of reading, a more sacrificial practice of charity, and most importantly, a more

¹² Jonathan Edwards, *A Humble Attempt* (1748), [essay on-line]; available from the Jonathan Edwards Center, <http://edwards.yale.edu/major-works/humble-attempt>, 4; Internet: accessed 08 September 2005.

diligent observation of their religious duties. The three central figures of the Methodist Revival all arose out of this small society: John Wesley (1703-1791), his brother Charles Wesley (1707-1788) and George Whitefield (1714-1770).

Though each had a devout commitment to the religion of Christianity, they were each just beginning individual pursuits that led them down separate but similar paths to a deeper and more personal understanding of faith. Accompanying their spiritual breakthroughs came a powerful anointing that transformed the effectiveness of their ministries. God used their fervent preaching and skillful organizational efforts to bring thousands to new heights of spiritual intimacy. Though most scholars agree that George Whitefield was the best preacher of the era, John Wesley came to be known as the father of the Methodist movement. The story of their lives, often recorded in their journals, letters and sermons, contains much of what we know of the Methodist Revival.

John Wesley's Writings

The primary source of John Wesley's writings comes from his journals, which he transferred from his diaries¹³. The original journals are still preserved in twenty-six bound volumes and several editions have been published. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock¹⁴ is thorough (eight volumes) and contains ample supplemental information taken from Wesley's unpublished diaries and

¹³ October 14, 1735 until October 24, 1790.

¹⁴ The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: The Epworth Press, 1909, reprinted in 1960).

correspondence to expound on what is written in each day's journal entry.¹⁵ The other primary source of information for John Wesley's ministry is his sermons. In 1771, he published some of his most significant sermons as *Sermons on Several Occasions*¹⁶.

*The Rise and Design of Oxford Methodism*¹⁷ is the published letter from Wesley to Mr. Richard Morgan, whose son, William, one of the four original members of the Holy Club, had recently died. Apparently, some had claimed that the Wesleys' strict practice of fasting was responsible for William Morgan's death. Wesley wrote the letter to defend him and their society (including the fact that William had stopped fasting a year and a half prior to his death). In the process, we have the most complete account of the beginning of the Wesleys' society at Oxford. In November 1729, four Oxford students "agreed to spend three or four evenings a week together. Our design was to read over the classics, ...on common nights, and on Sunday some book in divinity."¹⁸ The group later began ministering to prisoners who were condemned to death and visiting and aiding impoverished families in London.

Strangely, they were ridiculed for being so methodical in their faith. As Wesley consulted his father for direction, however, he was consistently encouraged to do that

¹⁵ A more abridged edition of The Journal of John Wesley, ed. Percy Livingstone Parker is available online through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.toc.html (as of July, 2005).

¹⁶ Available today within The Works of John Wesley, Volumes 1-4, ed. Albert C. Outler, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1984). They are also available online at www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.toc.html (as of July, 2005).

¹⁷ John Wesley, The Rise and Design of Oxford Methodism, in Curnock, Volume 1, 87-102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

which was consistent with scripture, regardless of public opinion. They continued and gradually added to their number as they added new members, including Whitefield. They were also scorned for their weekly observance of the sacrament of communion and for their participation in the fasts of the church. They continued to meet at Oxford until John and Charles left for Georgia in 1735.

Wesley's *Journal* begins as he embarked for Georgia with the entry for October 14, 1735. Wesley, along with his brother Charles, went as a missionary to America with a desire to preach to the Native Americans. On the journey to America, they were introduced to and impressed by the faith of a group of Moravians from Germany. There had been a horrendous storm that had frightened Wesley and most of those on the ship. Despite the ordeal, the Moravian Christians peacefully sang hymns. John "asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.'"¹⁹ This began a dialogue that opened Wesley's eyes to the possibility of such a deep assurance of salvation that one is delivered from a spirit of fear. It also began a period of profound personal searching for such a peace. This personal journey defined the message and theology of Wesley's revival ministry that spanned the next fifty years of his life.

Wesley's missionary efforts and ministry to the English in Savannah were frustrating and only mildly effective. Wesley returned to London in February 1738, at which time he became acquainted with Peter Böhler, another Moravian who had just

¹⁹ Ibid., 142-143.

arrived from Germany. Böhler had been a part of the Herrnhut revival with Count Zinzendorf and was on his way to the American colonies as a missionary. While in London, Böhler focused much of his attention on the Wesleys, discussing theology and the reality of a personal faith. In his journal, John Wesley wrote, “All this time I conversed much with Peter Böhler, but I understood him not; and least of all when he said, ... “My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away.”²⁰

A few weeks later, Wesley wrote, “I met Peter Böhler again, who now amazed me more and more by the accounts he gave of the fruits of living faith, --the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it. The next morning I began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by ‘the law and the testimony’; and being confident that God would hereby show me whether this doctrine was of God.”²¹

Wesley gradually became more convinced that Böhler’s teachings on faith were Biblically sound, that instantaneous conversions were commonly spoken of in the book of Acts, and that there were now many who testified that God was doing this in his day. On April 22, he wrote in his journal, “I could now only cry out, ‘Lord, help Thou my unbelief!’”²² On May 1, a new society began with John & Charles Wesley, Peter Böhler and a few others. It originally met at James Hutton’s home, where the Wesleys were also

²⁰ Ibid., 440 (Saturday, February 18, 1738).

²¹ Ibid., 447 (Thursday, March 23, 1738).

²² Ibid., 455 (Saturday, April 22, 1738).

living, but later that year moved and became known as the Fetter's Lane Society.²³ Later that week, Böhler left for America, but a few days later wrote a letter to John Wesley which contained this exhortation, "Beware of the sin of unbelief; and if you have not conquered it yet, see that you conquer it this very day, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Delay not, I beseech you, to believe in your Jesus Christ;"²⁴ After much "continual sorrow and heaviness,"²⁵ Wesley attended a society in Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans was being read. Wesley writes of the turning point in his life:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.²⁶

In the summer of 1738, Wesley traveled to visit the Moravians and Count Zinzendorf in Germany. The Moravians had experienced a dramatic community revival at their village of Herrnhut in 1727 under the leadership of Nicholas Ludwig von

²³ Ibid., 458. In his footnote, Curnock proposes that this was not a Moravian society as is often supposed, but rather a Church of England society. Later, two men were removed who disassociated themselves from the Church of England. Böhler was an original member, though just a few days after it was started, he left for America.

²⁴ Ibid., 461 (Wednesday, May 10, 1738).

²⁵ Ibid., 464.

²⁶ Ibid., 475-476 (Wednesday, May 24, 1738).

Zinzendorf. A. J. Lewis, in his book, *Zinzendorf: the Ecumenical Pioneer*,²⁷ documented the circumstances in Herrnhut leading up to the revival. Zinzendorf had provided a haven for members of the *Unitas Fratrum* (United Brethren) who were escaping persecution from the Catholics in Moravia. He brought together Lutherans, German Pietists, and Brethren into a new community, which was knitted into a unified Christian family that was intent on changing the world. The missionaries that Wesley had encountered on the way to Georgia and in London were the result of this dynamic movement.

Wesley had personally experienced this intimate, experiential faith. The visit to Herrnhut convinced him that this was not an isolated experience. In fact the community could promote this among all its members. “And here I continually met with what I sought for, viz. Living proofs of the power of faith: persons saved from inward as well as outward sin by ‘the love of God shed abroad in their hearts,’ and from all doubt and fear by the abiding witness of ‘the Holy Ghost given unto them.’”²⁸

It is clear that this visit shaped Wesley’s vision for revival. As he left, he wrote, “I would gladly have spent my life here; but my master calling me to labour in another part of His vineyard, on Monday the 14th I was constrained to take my leave of this happy place; ...Oh when shall THIS Christianity cover the earth, as the ‘waters cover the sea’?”²⁹

²⁷ A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf: The Ecumenical Pioneer* (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: Moravian Church in America, 1962).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, p. 13 (Thursday, July 6, 1738).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume 2, p. 28 (Monday, August 14, 1738).

When John Wesley returned to England, he was still working to reconcile his theology of faith with his personal experience. Still, he continued to preach his new understanding of assurance. In particular, his sermon, *Salvation by Faith*³⁰ was controversial; so much that, in several places he preached it, he was asked not to return. At the same time Whitefield had returned from Georgia and was preaching in Bristol with amazing success. The crowd had been too large to be contained in the church, so he had moved to larger halls, open courtyards, and even in the fields. It was not unusual for several thousand to come hear Whitefield's preaching. On one occasion, it was calculated that twenty thousand people covered three acres to hear him. Whitefield felt he needed to continue on to South Wales, however. He was initially raising money for his Orphan House in Georgia. So he persuaded a reluctant Wesley to take his place in Bristol.

When Wesley arrived, he was taken back by the method of "field preaching." Wesley noted in his *Journal* that nearly all his life he had been "so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls a sin if it had not been done in a church."³¹ Nevertheless, as he studied scripture, he found no restriction and even found Biblical precedent where Jesus preached outdoors. Shortly after, Wesley preached "in the highways" to about three thousand people and experienced encouraging results.

This began a new phase of Wesley's life as an itinerant preacher, traveling

³⁰ John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abington Press, 1991), 40-47.

³¹ Curnock, Journal, Volume 2, 167 (Saturday, March 31, 1738).

throughout the British Isles leading people to a new experience of faith. This upset some of the local ministers who felt threatened by Wesley and Whitefield's encroachment into their parish. In response to a letter of criticism, Wesley wrote, "Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to. And sure I am that his blessing attends it."³²

Over the next fifty years, it is estimated that he traveled 225,000 miles and preached 40,000 times.³³ In his *Journal*, he indicated the texts for his sermons and perhaps the main theme. He would share the reception he received in a town, particularly the first time he preached there. While these entries are not organized treatises, as one would find with Jonathan Edwards, or even with some of Wesley's letters and sermons, they do portray a genuine picture of the life of this man with his doubts and struggles.

Almost immediately, Wesley began to group his hearers into societies to continue their pursuit of faith. Many of Wesley's conversions were in these society meetings, rather than in the large preaching venues. This became the key to the lasting effect of the revival. As the societies grew, they built chapels in which to meet and divided into class-meetings. These classes were originally up to twelve members and were used to collect offerings to pay the debt from the chapels. Later, even smaller bands were created as a

³² John Wesley, "Letter to the Revd. John Clayton" in The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 25, ed. Frank Baker, 616.

³³ Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 3.

source of spiritual accountability among the committed believers. Howard Snyder has written about the effect of this system of classes and societies on the longevity of the movement in *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal*.³⁴ Snyder writes that the movement was in fact a whole series of sporadic and often geographically localized revivals, which were interconnected and spread by the society and class network, rather than one continuous wave of revival which swept the country. Without the class meeting, the scattered fires of renewal would have burned out long before the movement was able to make a deep impact on the nation.”³⁵ The movement continued to experience revival for more than fifty years.

“Wesley’s gift for organization was bent toward the one objective of forming a genuine people of God within the institutional church. He concentrated not on the efforts *leading up to* decision but on the time *after* decision.”³⁶ Whitefield recognized Wesley’s gift for nurturing the new converts and the impact this had on the movement. He is quoted as saying, “My brother Wesley acted wisely: the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruit of his labour. This I neglected, and my people are as a rope of sand.”³⁷

From his early days at Oxford, Wesley had a compassionate heart for the poor and those in prison. He also encouraged his followers to show the same love toward those in

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 57.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁷ George Whitefield apparently said this in a conversation with John Pool and Pool related this to Adam Clarke as quoted in The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke, ed. J. W. Etheridge (London: John Mason, 1858), 166.

need. This can be best seen in the life of William Wilberforce (1759-1833), a Methodist who became a member of parliament. In 1789, Wilberforce made his first speech against the slave trade and became one of the leaders of the anti-slave trade movement. His first bill to restrict the slave trade was defeated 163 to 88. A year later, John Wesley wrote to encourage Wilberforce. It proved to be the last letter written before Wesley's death. Wesley wrote, "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."³⁸ The accounts of Wilberforce and other influential men, who formed a group of Christian social reformers known as the Clapham Sect, can be found in the book, *Saints in Politics* by E. M. Howse.³⁹

Charles Finney

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) was a prolific leader of revivals in nineteenth century America. Shortly after he was converted in New York State, he left his law practice to begin preaching a bold gospel message. His ministry was extraordinarily effective as he came to serve as a catalyst for revival in dozens of towns and cities throughout the United States and Great Britain. He spent more than fifty years as an

³⁸ John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. John Telford (London, The Epworth Press, 1960), 265.

³⁹ Ernest Marshall Howse, Saints In Politics; The 'Clapham Sect' And The Growth Of Freedom (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952).

itinerant evangelist, pastor, and president of Oberlin College, and experienced God's work of revival in most of the places he ministered.

The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney

Finney reluctantly published *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, in 1876 after several of his close friends convinced him to respond to his critics. As Finney's ministry began to experience phenomenal success, he began to attract more notable opponents. His most consistent denouncers were two well-respected ministers: Asahel Nettleton, a New England evangelist, and Lyman Beecher, an evangelical pastor in Boston. "Finney's policy had been to ignore opposition and keep about his revival work."⁴⁰ However these consistent criticisms continued past both of these men's deaths and appeared in their biographies. Finney was finally convinced, not to defend himself, but to set the record straight regarding his doctrines and the methods used in these early revivals, and their lasting positive results.

The memoirs are a chronological narrative of his conversion and the various revivals he was a part of. He does not openly criticize his opponents, but makes very clear that they were wrong. He often gives Beecher and Nettleton every benefit of doubt by attributing their opposition to inaccurate information that was given to them. Finney was by then in his late seventies and more than forty years had passed since some of his early revivals. There were some inaccuracies in his memoirs, many of which have been corrected in the editing process, but there is a vivid sense of detail, partly attributed to the

⁴⁰ Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A.G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), xx.

fact that Finney often recited many of these stories in his sermons through the years.

Finney's memoirs record his conversion on October 10, 1821, while he was praying alone in the woods of western New York. Several years earlier, Finney had moved to the small town of Adams, New York to study law. He was admitted to the bar in 1818, after which he joined a law firm in town. Though he had "no definite knowledge of religious truth whatever,"⁴¹ he was interested in Christianity. He bought a Bible and began conversing with the Presbyterian pastor in town. He even attended a small prayer meeting that met near his law office. He approached the church initially as a curious skeptic. Finney later reflected back on an early prayer meeting:

On one occasion, when I was in one of the prayer meetings, I was asked if I did not desire that they should pray for me! I told them, no; because I did not see that God answered their prayers. I said, "I suppose I need to be prayed for, for I am conscious that I am a sinner; but I do not see that it will do any good for you to pray for me; for you are continually asking, but you do not receive. You have been praying for a revival of religion ever since I have been in Adams, and yet you have it not. You have been praying for the Holy Spirit to descend upon yourselves, and yet complaining of your leanness."⁴²

Finney continued to struggle with the problem of unanswered prayer and later wrote, "I do not think I ever could have been converted if I had not discovered the

⁴¹ Finney, Memoirs, 9.

⁴² Finney, Memoirs, 13.

solution of the question, ‘Why is it that so much that is called prayer is not answered?’”⁴³ His answer came after continuing to study the Bible. He wrote, “it struck me that the reason why their prayers were not answered, was because they did not comply with the revealed conditions upon which God had promised to answer prayer; that they did not pray in faith, in the sense of expecting God to give them the things that they asked for.”⁴⁴

Finney’s curiosity developed into an obsession until one day he went into the woods and determined that he would not come out until he felt he had been saved. Through an extended spiritual catharsis, he experienced God’s forgiveness and shortly after had an experience that he described as “a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁵

Finney felt God’s call to preach immediately and soon left the law office and began sharing at the prayer meetings. His testimony had a tremendous impact on the town and he drew a crowd to the church to hear him. Finney was a controversial figure from the beginning of his ministry. In the spring of 1822, he put himself under the care of the Presbyterian Church as a candidate for the ministry. He came into conflict with their Confessions of Faith, particularly its teaching on total depravity and the limited atonement. The Presbytery attempted to convince him to study at Princeton, but Finney refused.

He writes in his memoirs, “When urged to give them my reasons, I plainly told them that I would not put myself under such an influence as they had been under. That I

⁴³ Finney, Memoirs, 14.

⁴⁴ Finney, Memoirs, 13.

⁴⁵ Finney, Memoirs, 23.

was confident they had been wrongly educated; and they were not ministers that met my ideal at all of what a minister of Christ should be.”⁴⁶ In light of this, they appointed his pastor, George W. Gale, to oversee his studies. Finney primarily relied on the Bible for his studies, although Gale’s library was available to him. Rather than Gale convincing Finney to agree with the Confessions, Finney, with his superior intellect and debating skills had more success in persuading Gale.

From 1824 to 1833, Finney traveled to different towns, primarily in the state of New York. Almost always, when he preached, an unusual revival would come upon that town. He was often criticized for his confrontational approach, but it was undeniably effective. He placed a high priority and an immense amount of time in prayer.

I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; sometimes, I thought, literally praying without ceasing. I also found it very profitable, and felt very much inclined to hold frequent days of private fasting. On those days I would seek to be entirely alone with God, and would generally wander off into the woods, or get into the meeting house, or somewhere away entirely by myself.⁴⁷

This seemed to give him both power in his preaching and discernment as to how far he could proceed in his individual conversations. Defending his methods used in these revivals, he wrote, “The means used were simply preaching, prayer and conference meetings, much private prayer, much personal conversation, and meetings for the instruction of earnest inquirers.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Finney, Memoirs, 47.

⁴⁷ Finney, Memoirs, 39.

⁴⁸ Finney, Memoirs, 78.

Another key to these revivals was the commitment of numerous men and women who had what Finney called a “spirit of prayer.” These devoted prayer partners would often travel to the town where Finney was preaching and pray for the people of that town. Most notable among this group was Abel Clary. Clary was licensed to preach, but was so often “burdened with the souls of men”⁴⁹ that he could seldom preach. Instead he devoted his life to prayer. During Finney’s revival in Rochester in 1830, Clary went to Rochester near the time Finney went there and secured a room to live in without Finney’s knowledge of his presence. He never attended any of the meetings, but prayed night and day.

That Rochester revival turned out to be one of the highlights of Finney’s revival experiences. Finney recollected, “The greatness of the work at Rochester at that time attracted so much attention of ministers and Christians throughout the state of New York, throughout New England, and in many parts of the United States, that the very *fame* of it was an efficient instrument in the hands of the Spirit of God in promoting the greatest revival of religion throughout the land that this country had then ever witnessed.”⁵⁰

His *Memoirs* continue to recount Finney’s tenure as pastor in New York City, His travels to Great Britain. In 1834 he left the Presbyterian Church and became a Congregationalist. The next year he became the Professor of Theology at Oberlin College. For several years, he combined this post with his church in New York. From 1838 on, he focused the majority of his time on Oberlin, where, it is said, he trained some

⁴⁹ Finney, Memoirs, 316.

⁵⁰ Finney, Memoirs, 325.

20,000 students in the course of his life.

Lectures on Revivals of Religion

At age 42, Finney's health prevented him from traveling as much and he accepted the pastorate of the Chatham Chapel in New York. A newspaper, the New York Evangelist, asked him to write a series on revival for their paper. He agreed to give a series of lectures at the church where he was the pastor and allowed the paper to send a reporter to cover the lectures and print his notes. This series of twenty-two lectures was published by the paper and later in book form as *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. These teachings on revival have been credited with igniting several other revivals as the readers put Finney's teaching into practice.

His lectures were not intended to be speculative theory, but rather practical guidance that one could immediately put into practice before the next lecture. At the end of the first lecture, he wrote,

It is not my design to preach so as to have you able to say at the close: "We understand all about revivals now," while you do nothing. Will you follow the instructions I shall give you from the Word of God, and then put them in practice in your own lives? ... I want you as fast as you learn anything on the subject of revivals, to put it in practice, and go to work and see if you cannot promote a revival among sinners here.⁵¹

Finney ridiculed the view that revivals were miraculous occurrences, which the

⁵¹ Charles G. Finney, Lecture I, "What a Revival of Religion Is," Lectures on Revivals of Religion, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 22.

church “had no more agency in producing than they had in producing thunder, or a storm of hail, or an earthquake.”⁵² He advocated that revivals were to be promoted with whatever means were effective and appropriate. If this seems to take God’s influence out of the process, we need to realize that the primary means that was advocated was prayer. He teaches,

There are two kinds of means requisite to promote a revival: the one to influence man, the other to influence God. The truth is employed to influence men, and prayer to move God. When I speak of moving God, I do not mean that God's mind is changed by prayer, or that His disposition or character is changed. But prayer produces such a change in us as renders it consistent for God to do as it would not be consistent for Him to do otherwise.⁵³

As to these two means of prayer and truth, by which he means preaching or witnessing the truth of the Gospel, Finney argues that either one without the other is fruitless. On the one hand “truth, by itself, will never produce the effect, without the Spirit of God, and that the Spirit is given in answer to prayer.”⁵⁴ But also, “prayer might be offered for ever, by itself, and nothing would be done. Because sinners are not converted by direct contact of the Holy Ghost, but by the truth, employed as a means.”⁵⁵

Several of Finney’s lectures were devoted to prayer, both individual and collective. He challenged his readers to adopt a deeper, genuine prayer relationship with God and to

⁵² Ibid., 20.

⁵³ Ibid., Lecture IV, “Prevailing Prayer,” 52.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

petition God for the salvation of those who were not Christians. Finney conveys a youthful arrogance in his teachings, as one who has fully understood God and his ways. For example he writes, “You see why you have not a revival. It is only because you do not want one. Because you are neither praying for it, nor feeling anxious for it, nor putting forth efforts for it.”⁵⁶ Yet these lectures are far from declaring self-sufficiency. Finney had learned the power of prayer and attributed the success he had experienced in his revivals to the working of the Spirit of God in response to the prayers of many devout Christians.

These two works by Finney have had a greater impact on our current concept of revival than any other. They were not as well reasoned as Edwards’ works, but they appealed to the laity like none other. Finney wrote as one who had authority on the subject of revival. He had led more revivals than anyone in memory and wrote decisively on how others could do the same. Billy Graham reinforces the perception of authority that Finney had on the subject, “Through his Spirit-filled ministry, uncounted thousands came to know Christ in the nineteenth century, resulting in one of the greatest periods of revival in the history of America.”⁵⁷

A student of revival needs to be cautious in conceding Finney’s authority simply because he participated in numerous popular revivals. Finney does offer an alternate theology of revival, however, which, while contrary to many former theological

⁵⁶ Ibid., Lecture II, “When a Revival Is To Be Expected,” 36.

⁵⁷ Billy Graham, in Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858, Iain H. Murray (Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 298.

standards, was based on an honest and passionate attempt to apply scripture to the needs of the people Finney encountered every day of his life.

Modern Writings on Revival

Though Edwards, Wesley, and Finney give us excellent primary resources to experience revivals from the pen of those who were on the front lines, there have also been several contemporary scholars who have written excellent chronicles and analyses of revivals. There are a few notable authors who help us understand the nature and genesis of revivals.

One of the most prolific writers on revivals in the past generation is James Edwin Orr (1912-1987). Orr has written thorough accounts of revivals and evangelistic awakenings throughout history and in every region of the world. His accounts are detailed narratives, based on research from those who participated in the revivals as well as newspaper accounts of the revivals when they were available. Several books cover the history of a region such as *Evangelical Awakenings in Latin America*⁵⁸, *Evangelical Awakenings in the South Seas*⁵⁹, and others. Some of his books deal with one movement in greater detail: *Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening*⁶⁰, while others look at a sub-category of revivals, such as revivals that occurred college campuses, *Campus*

⁵⁸ J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in Latin America* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship Incorporated, 1978).

⁵⁹ J. Edwin Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in the South Seas* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship Incorporated, 1976).

⁶⁰ J. Edwin Orr, *Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening* (Wheaton, Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1989).

*Aflame*⁶¹. Orr seeks to be objective and avoid some of the exaggeration that often occurs in accounts of revival. Often the large quantity of details replaces an in-depth analysis of the movement, however. One of Orr's most notable sayings is actually a quote from Dr. A. T. Pierson, which he uses in several of his books; "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer."⁶²

Another key work on revival is Richard Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*.⁶³ Lovelace approaches revival from a theological as well as historical perspective. He promotes the goal of a continuous state of renewal, as opposed to a cyclical model of renewal and decline. To understand this, he outlines primary and secondary elements of renewal. The primary elements, justification, sanctification, the indwelling spirit, and authority in spiritual conflict, are all to be experienced in a vital relationship with Christ. The secondary elements, mission, prayer, community, disenculturation, and theological integration, are necessary for the continuation of a healthy Christian life.⁶⁴ As a congregation understands and practices each of these elements, they will prevent the decline of spiritual vitality. The key question for this thesis is how to achieve this level of congregational grace. In analyzing cyclical revivals, Lovelace acknowledges the

⁶¹ J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame* (Wheaton, Illinois: International Awakening Press, 1994).

⁶² J. Edwin Orr, in *Prayer and Revival* [on-line article] available from <http://articles.christiansunite.com/article8330.shtml>; Internet: accessed August 2005

⁶³ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979).

⁶⁴ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 75.

relationship between the prayers of Christians and the onset of renewal. He is, however, hesitant to attribute this as the originating cause of the revival.

This is not to say, however, that the ultimate causative factor in the cycles of revival is spontaneous human initiative. Left to itself, sinful human nature would run downward forever, even among the elect of God, because of the disease of indwelling sin. As Paul intimates in Romans 8:26-27, even prayer itself, the pivotal admission of dependence through which decline begins to turn toward renewal, results from the hidden inspiration of the Spirit.⁶⁵

While prayer is essential, God is believed to have initiated our desire to pray, and, as we progress in prayer, even directs how we pray.

Lovelace also suggests the need for structural renewal within the church. These are changes which need to be made in order for the “congregation’s full potential for renewal” to be released. “It is not enough to renew individual hearts for churches to be renewed, although it is probably true that structural renewal cannot progress very far unless it is preceded by a great deal of individual awakening.”⁶⁶ He advocates two primary changes. First, the role of the laity needs to be elevated within the church. Opposing pastoral elitism, Lovelace applies the principle of the priesthood of believers to the daily work of the church. He is not advocating that there not be a role for clergy within the church, but that the power be decentralized and that the people of God would each use their gifts to build up the church.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 224.

The second proposed reform is “the formation and strengthening of nuclear subcommunities within the larger church community.”⁶⁷ It is easier for the church to function as it was intended, within intimate small groups that pray together and support each other. There must also be good communication to the larger church body and even beyond the local church to the community and the denominational structure.

Many more authors could easily be cited. There is a vast amount of writing that has been done on this subject over the centuries. In the next chapter, a key work, which was not cited, will be studied. Each of these authors considered the Bible as authoritative on the subject of revival. What does it teach us about revival and what theological issues need to be considered in more depth?

⁶⁷ Ibid., 225-226.