

REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM: A HISTORICAL AND DOCTRINAL EVALUATION

by
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Iain Murray, in his recent critique of revivalism,¹ laments what he considers a new view of revival that came into vogue during the latter half of the nineteenth century—a view which displaced the old with a distinctly different understanding of the subject. A shift in vocabulary marked the change. He writes,

Seasons of revival became “revival meetings.” Instead of being “surprising” they might now be even announced in advance, and whereas no one in the previous [eighteenth] century had known of ways to secure a revival, a system was now popularized by “revivalists” which came near to guaranteeing results.²

Murray relates that critics of revival as well as supporters of it have failed to draw a distinction between professional revivalism and genuine heaven-sent revival. “The two things are treated essentially the same...[they use] the terms interchangeably.”³ For the critics, all revivals can be explained in human terms; for the supporters, revivalism constitutes no real departure from the revivals in America’s early history. This has led to a great deal of misunderstanding as to the genuineness of revival and its effects.⁴

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¹*Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), p. xix.

²*Ibid.*, p. xviii.

³*Ibid.*, p. xix.

⁴Examples of the misunderstanding of revival’s true nature abound. Two recent works which make little difference between the great awakenings of the past and twentieth century pseudo-revivalism of Pentecostal “latter rain” and new wave or third wave charismatic varieties are: Winkie Pratney, *Revival: Its Principles and Personalities* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers, 1994), especially pp. 222–24; and Richard M. Riss, *A Survey of Twentieth Century Revival Movements* (2nd printing of 1988 ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), especially pp. 7–16. Another somewhat

Most revisionist historians have failed to see any divine initiative or supernatural activity in the moral transformation of individuals and communities. Instead, they have caricatured revival by focusing on the idiosyncratic and aberrational behavior of the credulous in response to dynamic pulpiteers relying on their incredible powers of suggestion.⁵ Without admitting the divine origin of genuine revival, historian William McLoughlin criticizes those historians who have treated the subject of revival unfairly.

Chroniclers, intent upon the colorful or the bizarre, have created a false stereotype. Their real meaning and drama have been lost in exaggerations of their eccentricities. It is a mistake to think that all revivals are orgies of mass hysteria and all revivalists are grim or theatrical prophets.... If that is all there were to revivals, they might well be dismissed as quaint or picturesque sidelights of American life. But they have been far more than that.⁶

Moreover, fundamentalists have not always been discerning about the differences between revival and revivalism. They have often equated emotional exuberance and numbers of decisions with the work of the Holy Spirit. Their advertisement of and preparation for a revival meeting presumes that revival *will* take place. The approach is: "Since we have promoted it and prayed for it, we *will* have revival." The point of

more conservative approach nevertheless fails to discern doctrinal unsoundness in so-called revival movements: Wesley Duewel, *Revival Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

⁵For instance, Harry S. Stout portrays George Whitefield as a sensational dramatist who, in marketeering the gospel, became a religious celebrity. To Stout, Whitefield was an actor performing the role of a revivalist on the center stage of colonial American history. Stout virtually rules out the supernatural as an explanation for the evangelistic success of Whitefield and the wonderful awakening which resulted from his preaching (cf. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], passim; note especially pp. xiii–xxiv). One of the first cultural historians to apply the evolutionary hypothesis to revival was Frederick Morgan Davenport. He advocated that revival was a psychological reversion to primitive animism. See his *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals: A Study in Mental and Social Evolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 217, 220, 223–24, 238–39, 297. For a discussion of those suggesting that the use of communications media have "artificially awakened" people, see Leonard I. Sweet, ed., *Communications and Change in American Religious History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); see especially pp. 11–12, 128–30. These are examples of various attempts to circumvent the divine element in revival.

⁶William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), p. v. McLoughlin is a cultural (certainly not a theological) historian who considers periods of revival a necessary therapeutic for the revitalization of society. See his *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 2, 8, 10. Cf. Keith J. Hardman, *The Spiritual Awakeners: American Revivalists from Solomon Stoddard to D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 19–20.

this article is that there is a difference between revival and revivalism, which virtually constitutes a difference of what is genuine from what is false. Many sincere Christians down through the years have longed for heaven-sent revival and seen it happen, but often man's work of revivalism has been mistaken for revival or has marred the real thing. The results have been superficial at best. At worst, the cause of Christ and His doctrine have been distorted. It is imperative that we know the difference between revival and revivalism if we are to be scripturally obedient, able to discern what is heaven-sent, and hopeful of God's blessing on our churches.

Three presuppositions underlie this study. First and foremost, only God can produce a revival; it is a divinely sovereign work originating in the good pleasure of the Spirit of God in accordance with the Word of God. Second, revival is simply the intensification of what is normal to biblical Christianity. It can only be extraordinary in degree and extent, not in nature, of what is authentically Christian. As one early commentator on revival explained it, the Holy Spirit produces converts "in more copious measure and in greater power at some times than at others."⁷ Third, revival will conform to Christian doctrine as found in the Bible. Revival will therefore be manifested in salvation and sanctification. The test of genuine revival as a work of God will be whether those doctrines, as revealed in Scripture, are clearly evidenced.

If we accept the propositions that true revival is a work originating solely with God, that revival is the activity of God in saving souls and sanctifying Christians, and that the faithful proclamation of God's Word only will produce spiritual fruit, then we must conclude from both scriptural truth and history that there is a great difference between revival and revivalism, as I hope to prove. We will pursue this topic by first of all defining *revival* linguistically and scripturally in order to furnish a theoretical basis of evaluation. Next, we will briefly note practical and theological dissimilarities between revival and revivalism. We will then concentrate on historical and doctrinal differences, using the paradigms of Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening, and of Charles G. Finney and new measures revivalism respectively.

DEFINITIONS OF REVIVAL

The Meaning of Revival

Revival is the noun form of the verb "revive," a derivation of the Latin *revivere*, meaning "to live again" or "to return or to restore to consciousness or life."⁸ Revival can also be "the restoration of something to

⁷Joel Hawes in Edward A. Lawrence, *The Life of Joel Hawes* (Hartford, CT: 1871), p. 113, quoted in Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, p. xiv.

⁸*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "revival," p. 1010.

its true nature and purpose.”⁹ Additionally, the term may mean “reform,” as in the profound change of social morals or doctrine. It is in this sense we may understand the Protestant Reformation, for example. As we will see, the implication of the term scripturally and historically is that, while revival will result in moral reform, it is essentially a powerful work of the Holy Spirit in saving the lost and sanctifying the saved.¹⁰

Commenting on the so-called five “harvests” his Northampton (MA) Congregationalist church experienced, Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) defined revival as “some special seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable manner revive religion among his people.”¹¹ Stoddard’s use of the word “revive” would appear to relate revival only to those who have life, i.e., believers, who are in need of reconsecration of life and service to God. Thus revival could be defined as *the awakening of the believer to scriptural obedience*. However, Stoddard’s grandson, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), considered these harvests as “the conversion of many souls.”¹² Revival is therefore more than the rededication of believers; it is also the awakening, or quickening, or impartation of spiritual life to the unregenerate.¹³ Thus we may also identify *revival as the con-*

⁹Walter C. Kaiser, *Quest for Renewal* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), pp. 14–15.

¹⁰Murray recognizes that in genuine revival there is “an observable raising of the whole moral tone” of the affected community. In historic revivals, such as the Great Awakening of 1734–41 or the Prayer Meeting Revival of 1857–58, the benefits of God’s powerful working are remarkable, e.g., “hunger for the Word of God and Christian literature, importunate prayer, a sense of wonder and profound seriousness” about the things of God; joyful praise; a renewed energy in Christian witness; and the recovery of genuine worship in church and home (*Revival and Revivalism*, p. 348).

¹¹From his chapter “The Benefit of the Gospel” in *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell, to Restrain Men from Sin* (Boston, 1713), quoted by Murray in *Revival and Revivalism*, p. xvii.

¹²Jonathan Edwards, “Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire, in New England; in a Letter to the Rev. Dr. Colman, of Boston” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:347 [hereafter cited as *Works*].

¹³Interestingly, in his definition of revival, Russell E. Richey draws a historical difference between a revival and an awakening that I have not sought in this article because of its purely psychological/social (rather than theological) tenor. He states that “when revival in one place helps trigger revival elsewhere, when revival becomes contagious and is communicated to the general society, when revival sustains itself over a prolonged period of time, revival becomes Awakening.” To him a “great” awakening depends primarily on a popular communication network to sustain it; both an awakening and a revival are strictly “a social construction” (“Revivalism: In Search of a Definition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 [Spring–Fall 1993]: 172). Richey’s temporal and spatial contrasts do have merit, but his model is a prime example of the failure to make a theological distinction between revival and revivalism.

version of sinners to salvation in Christ. Quite significantly, these two meanings (rededication and regeneration) appear in the scriptural concept of revival.

Descriptions of Scriptural Revival

In the Old Testament, “revival” is a form of covenant rededication, and necessarily includes restoration to divine favor. Israel’s spiritual recovery is the focus in Psalm 85, especially verses 4 and 6: “Restore us, O God of our salvation, And cause Thine indignation toward us to cease.... Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, That Thy people may rejoice in Thee?”¹⁴ This is a plea frequently repeated by both individuals (cf. Psalms 51) and the nation (Psalm 80:3). Renewal comes through reform, that is, a return to covenant obedience of Yahweh. One may recognize this with the revivals under (1) Asa of Judah in 2 Chronicles 15 (note, especially v. 12: “And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul”); (2) Jehoash in 2 Kings 11–12 and the destruction of the house of Baal, and repair of God’s house; (3) Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18 (particularly vv. 4–6: “He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah.... He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel.... For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments”); and under (4) Josiah in 2 Kings 22–23 (especially 23:3: “And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant”). All of these passages reflect a common theme—repentance: a turning from idolatry and restoration of obedience to Mosaic law and sincere worship of Yahweh as conditions for a return or revival of God’s favor. No doubt during these times of renewal many Israelites individually repented and were truly saved.

The Old Testament also speaks of revival as rededication during special events, such as entry into the Promised Land under Joshua (Josh 5); the defeat of the Philistines under Samuel (1 Sam 7); and the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel, culminating in celebration and worship (Ezra 5–6). A prophetic entreaty for revival can be found in Solomon’s prayer at the consecration of the Temple (1 Kings 8, especially vv. 30–40), and in Daniel’s prayer of confession in chapter 9 (cf. vv. 16–19). Finally, the prophets interject the hope of a millennial renewal of God’s wonderful works of judgment and blessing (Hab 3:2)

¹⁴All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

and restoration of His people (Isa 62–66; Zech 2:10).¹⁵ Broadly speaking, all these instances of covenant renewal are revival.

In the New Testament revival is the “awakening” of the church with the conversion of thousands at Pentecost and the inauguration of the church as recorded in Acts 2. One may note several principles of revival from this passage.

(1) The Pentecost revival is a model only for emulation of some, not reduplication of all, of its features. Nowhere in the epistles are Christians commanded to replicate the “signs and wonders” of Pentecost in order to enjoy God’s salvific blessings.¹⁶ Nor in the early post-canonical period of church history are believers expected to seek the gift of tongues as part of their spiritual experience.¹⁷

(2) The Pentecost revival was not in the speaking of tongues, nor the miraculous signs (cf. vv. 2–3), but in the mass conversion of 3,000 people when they accepted Peter’s gospel (cf. v. 41) and subsequent devotion to the things of God, namely, doctrine, ordinances, and fellowship (v. 42 ff.).¹⁸

(3) Since the Pentecost revival was quite obviously a remarkable outpouring of God’s blessing in the conversion of so many persons, we may consider certain instances of divine activity as guidelines by which other revivals may be tested as to their scriptural authenticity. To be a genuine work of God, a revival must include a doctrinal preaching of the Word of God that is truthful (vv. 14–36). Second, revival must be an activity of the Spirit of God (v. 33). Third, genuine revival will produce a people of God (vv. 37–47), who will be convicted and who will repent of sin (vv. 37–40); who will be converted (v. 41); who will continue in the faith (vv. 42–46); and who will properly worship God in fellowship one with another (vv. 46–47). We may confidently assert that these are indications of genuine revival, not only because they are true of Pentecost, but because they are evidences of New Testament Christianity. This supports my contention that revival is essentially

¹⁵For a brief but incisive treatment of revival as covenant renewal in the Old Testament, see Roy B. Zuck, ed., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), pp. 62, 74, 85, 200, 324, 333–35.

¹⁶Even in the famous *χαρίσματα* passage of 1 Corinthians 12–14, the gift of tongues is not for everyone (cf. 12:11, 29–30), and therefore cannot be a condition for nor a required evidence of salvation.

¹⁷The only possible exception to this would be the probability of tongues-speaking among the second century Montanists, but, of course, they were a heretical sect.

¹⁸It is noteworthy that the tongues-speaking was incidental to the conversion of the lost, and in fact was merely a means to that end in that the mixed multitude could hear the apostles speak “the mighty deeds of God” in their own language (cf. Acts 2:6–11).

nothing more than what is the normal pattern for biblical faith. This in no way minimizes the miraculous element in revival, for salvation is definitely a miracle (cf. Mark 10:26–27). Indeed, true revival emphasizes the supernatural activity of God. Man can no more produce a revival than he can convert a soul; once again, only God can do this.

It is also significant that, according to Acts 4:23–35, revival appears to be the bestowment of power by the Holy Spirit who enables His people to serve Him and persevere in the midst of trials. The Acts 4 revival (a continuation no doubt of the powerful work begun in chapter 2) was accompanied by submission and prayer to a sovereign God (vv. 24–30), wise and bold use of the Word of God (vv. 25–26, 31), and unity and love of the people of God (vv. 32–35). We may use these marks of the first revival in church history as criteria to help us discern what is a truly divine work in subsequent periods.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM

Practical and Theological Differences

It is unfortunate that well-meaning Christians often confuse evangelism and revival. They tend to equate the two, calling an evangelistic meeting or campaign a revival.¹⁹ But they are two different things. Evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel, which is every Christian's responsibility. Revival is uniquely a work of God that may or may not take place in an evangelistic meeting.²⁰ Yet, when revival has occurred in history, it is most often in an evangelistic context.²¹ This is under-

¹⁹An acknowledged authority on revival, Keith J. Hardman, contributes to the problem by viewing as revival mass responses to emotionally-charged messages by ecumenical evangelists and charismatics. Hardman seems enthralled with vast numbers of crusade decisions and pollster results as evidence of evangelical Christian resurgence in the modern world (cf. *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], especially pp. 17, 24–30).

²⁰This is difficult for many Christians to accept, but technically speaking, an evangelistic meeting may take place without a single convert. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that missionaries William Carey and Adoniram Judson were not evangelizing for the first six years of their ministries in India and Burma, since they had seen no conversions during that time (cf. Isa 6:8–10). The fact is, they were faithfully giving the gospel, but *God* had not yet given the increase. Neither Carey, Judson, nor any other preacher should be blamed for lack of professions if they are obediently declaring and living according to the gospel of Christ. This reality makes it all the more imperative for us to rely upon the grace of God for the salvation of the lost and revival!

²¹An example of revival occurring in a setting not given to evangelistic preaching per se is the *annus mirabilis* (year of miracles) Prayer Meeting Revival of 1857–58. However, there is evidence to indicate that the gospel was given in sufficient measure to produce large numbers of converts even in that context. Cf. William C. Conant, *Narrative of Remarkable Conversions and Revival Incidents: Including a Review of Revivals*

standable since evangelism is the divinely-appointed means of salvation and hence of revival. As the gospel is preached, and several people are truly awakened or converted in a concentrated period and place, one may say that historic revival has taken place. Methodist historian Melvin E. Dieter points out that “the evangelical’s acceptance of Christ’s final commission to his disciples as a mandate for personal witness and world mission reinforces the urgency that characterizes revival movements.”²² However, should we not question whether it is somewhat presumptuous to advertise an evangelistic meeting as a “revival” when such has not yet occurred?

Since the days of Charles Finney and so-called “new measures” attempts to produce revival, critics have tended to define revival by evangelistic methodology and technique and labeled it revivalism. However, there are serious differences between revival and revivalism. (1) Revival may be considered theocentric; revivalism, anthropocentric. One may note this in the shift of revival emphasis after the Great Awakening from submission to God to pragmatic results, i.e., numbers of decisions. This was due to a move in theology away from the doctrinal content of faith to the subjective experience. This change paved the way for existentialism and rationalism.²³ Michael Horton informs us that the Enlightenment on the one hand and Arminianism on the other combined to upgrade man from a totally depraved sinner to a free moral agent. “In the former, people were taught to trust in their reason, and in the latter, their emotions, but in both the individual was enshrined.”²⁴

(New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858), pp. 426–35; Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing*, p. 181; Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976), pp. 65–66, 69, 77; Frank Grenville Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals*, 2nd ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), pp. 225, 232.

²²“Revivalism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker), p. 951.

²³If one has difficulty seeing how rationalism and pietistic experientialism can accommodate each other, he need look only at the father of modern theology, Friederich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), the product of Moravian pietism and Kantian idealism. In the early American context, one may trace the intrusion of liberal theology, at least in part, to the mixing of Old Calvinism with Enlightenment Rationalism by theological successors to Edwards: Timothy Dwight, Nathaniel Taylor, and Jonathan Edwards the Younger, among others. For a superbly well-written treatment of the liberalization of New England theology, see John D. Hannah, “The Doctrine of Original Sin in Postrevolutionary America,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (July–September 1977): 238–56. To corroborate his findings, Hannah cites several original and secondary sources including two outstanding classical works: Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), and George Nye Boardman, *A History of New England Theology* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph, 1899).

²⁴*Made In America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), p. 30. See also, William R. Sutton’s interpretation of New Haven

Bernard A. Weisberger identified the symptomatic cause of the problem as a diluting of orthodox theology: “As theology grew simpler, technique became predominant.”²⁵

Another difference is that (2) revival comes from God, as a sovereign, undeserved gracious bestowal of renewal; revivalism is the work of man, with emphasis on human ability and agency. Popular nineteenth century preachers as diverse in style as Peter Cartwright (1785–1872) and Lyman Beecher (1775–1863)²⁶ downplayed this distinction by accentuating man’s free will in salvation. Writing of Beecher, Weisberger noted that

if a literal belief in “inability” meant that the sinner could not really pray properly until he knew he was converted, then a literal belief in “inability” had to give way. Man’s utter dependence on God to make him fit for holiness would have to be soft-pedaled, and reliance on study, prayer and penitence would have to be stressed.²⁷

Such preachers failed to fully appreciate that revival is a work impossible to initiate by any other means than divine; it comes down from above, often unexpectedly and spontaneously, always sovereignly. Revivalism is a methodology of cause and effect; it is “worked up” and virtually produced by human instrumentality. Man is sovereign in revivalism and the Holy Spirit becomes an agent at man’s disposal. A contemporary of Beecher and ardent proponent of genuine revival, Presbyterian minister Gardiner Spring (1785–1873), astutely cautioned against any facsimile generated by human design.

With the obvious signs of the times in view, who does not see that this artful foe [Satan] would enjoy his malignant triumph, if he could prejudice the minds of good men against all *revivals of religion*? This he does, not so much by opposing them, as by counterfeiting the genuine coin, and by *getting up* revivals that are spurious and to his liking. Revivals are always spurious when they are *got up* by man’s device, and not *brought down* by the

theology as a means of wedding Enlightenment rationalism with revivalism in America (“Benevolent Calvinism and the Moral Government of God: The Influence of Nathaniel W. Taylor on Revivalism in the Second Great Awakening,” *Religion and American Culture* 2 [Winter 1992]: 23–47).

²⁵*They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 271.

²⁶For examples of Cartwright and Beecher’s views on man’s ability, see William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800–1900: An Anthology* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976), pp. 41–85.

²⁷Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, p. 83.

Spirit of God.²⁸

What I have said thus far should not be construed as a repudiation of human means in revival. It is the use of proper versus improper means that constitutes (3) another difference between revival and revivalism. God has determined the *instrumental* means of spiritual renewal: they are proclamation of the gospel (Rom 10:15–17) and fervent prayer in the Spirit (James 5:16). As a result of these legitimate human methods, God may see fit to save souls in an unusually dramatic way which we call revival. In witnessing and preaching, we may expect that a powerful gospel will produce powerful results in saving the lost (Rom 1:16; Acts 4:31–33; 5:42; 6:7). Likewise, importunate supplication may be the means God will use to send revival. History reveals that God has often sent revival in answer to the prayers of His saints who wait upon Him for it. Yet, always, our prayer for revival, as for anything else, should be conditioned by “Thy will be done.”²⁹ The prayer of faith is primarily the prayer that wants God’s will to be accomplished and His name to be glorified above all else. Revivalism makes methodology, rather than God alone, the *effectual* cause of spiritual results. Revivalism misplaces reliance—upon a strategy, a formula, or a program, rather than upon the Holy Spirit. However, programs will not produce spiritual results any more than they can replace them. Even prayer and preaching will not compel God to produce revival, but God has chosen to use these scripturally ordained means to bring it about. Therefore, we may, and indeed *should*, pray for the conversion of sinners and sanctification of our brothers and sisters in Christ; we *should* earnestly speak the words of life to a lost world and admonish one another in the faith. Hopefully, God will use such means to send revival.

Finally, (4) revival produces genuine scriptural and lasting results, such as continuance in the faith; revivalism produces superficial commitment that soon abates with time and trials. As Gardiner Spring said, “There is one grace you cannot counterfeit...the grace of *perseverance*.”³⁰ The sincere Christian, even in the midst of severe trials and an ungodly environment, will endure to the end.

Revival and revivalism bear something of an analogy to real

²⁸*Personal Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Gardiner Spring*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1866), 1:217–18.

²⁹1 John 5:14–15; James 5:16–18.

³⁰Spring, *Personal Reminiscences*, 1: 51. A common criticism of new measures revivalism was failure of continuance in the faith. A Presbyterian reviewer wrote in 1835, “It is now generally understood that the numerous converts of the new measures have been, in most cases, like the morning cloud and the early dew. In some places, not a half, a fifth, or even a tenth part of them remain” (*The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 7 [1835]: 482, 663).

Christianity and historic Christendom. While the terms are often used synonymously, nevertheless, there is a difference between them. Revival is a divine means of producing distinctly biblical Christians. Revivalism, like Christendom, is practically inclusive, culturally adaptive, and doctrinally heterogeneous. As authentic Christianity exists within the realm of professing Christendom, so genuine spiritual decisions may occur within revivalism.³¹

A Theological Summary

By simple definition, revival is a dramatic movement of God that conforms lives to His will. As Arthur Wallis describes it, revival is more than big meetings or religious enthusiasm. "There is a wealth of difference between missions or campaigns at their best and genuine revival. In the former man takes the initiative, . . . in the latter the initiative is God's. With the one the organization is human; with the other it is divine."³² Revival is a doctrinal movement. That is, revival will conform to Christian doctrine as found in the Bible. Thus, revival is biblical salvation and sanctification, not merely moral amendment, although godly reformation of behavior will be the inevitable result of true revival. In summary, then, we may define *revival as an extraordinarily intensive and usually extensive work of God in powerfully applying His gospel to people, which results in the salvation of sinners and renewed obedience of saints.*

A HISTORICAL PARADIGM FOR REVIVAL: JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

At the beginning of the eighteenth century in colonial America certain factors highlighted the need for revival: institutionalized religion, liberalism in Harvard and latitudinarianism in several churches, pharisaical self-righteousness and complacency, a largely unregenerate church membership due to the Half-Way Covenant, and pronounced worldli-

³¹Perhaps one of the better examples of this analogy would be related to the famous "burned over" district of western New York State. Saturating the area in the early 1800s was, in the words of Philip Schaff, a motley sampler of various types of sects: Mormons, spiritualists, Shakers, Millerites, abolitionists, Freemasons, social perfectionists and utopians (e.g., the Oneida communitarians) and, of course, Finneyite revivalism. Yet statistics indicate an unusual degree of religious fervor within legitimate evangelical denominations, such as the Baptists. Cf. Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 10; Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, p. 14; and Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818* (Albany, NY: G. J. Loomis, 1819), pp. vi-x.

³²*In the Day of Thy Power: The Scriptural Principles of Revival* (London: Christian Literature Crusade, 1956), p. 20.

ness among a generally unchurched population.³³ Boston pastor Increase Mather (1639–1723) lamented toward the end of his life that New England had become degenerate: “Oh, . . . what art thou come to at this day? How are those sins become common in thee that once were not so much as heard of in this land!”³⁴ Those sins had been identified and enumerated at a synod of Congregational pastors over which Mather had presided in 1679. These were a visible decay of godliness, “pride that doth abound,” a neglect of covenant discipline, pollution of God’s name by oaths and imprecation, Sabbath-breaking, failure of family religion, immoderate passions, intemperance, promise-breaking, an “inordinate affection unto the world,” opposition to reform, selfishness, and the all-comprehensive sin of unbelief.³⁵ Into this spiritually dark scene God sent the marvelous light of the gospel that resulted in a spiritual awakening of hundreds of people between 1734 and 1741.

Contextual factors reveal that the Great Awakening was surely a work of God. First, the revival proceeded in the context of strong doctrinal preaching of the gracious gospel, against sin, and specifically, as a result of that transforming truth upon “which the church stands or falls”—justification through faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone. Jonathan Edwards³⁶ wrote of the Northampton revival of 1734 that “at its commencement, it appears to have been, to an unusual degree, a silent, powerful, and glorious work of the Spirit of God—the simple effect of truth applied to the conscience, and accompanied by his converting grace.”³⁷ Edwards regarded the Great Awakening as caused, not by appeals to the emotions, but by the truth of God impressed upon

³³Cf. A Skevington Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze: Spiritual Renewal and Advance in the Eighteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 53–60; William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965), pp. 271–73; Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of Religion in the time of Edwards and Whitefield* (1842; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), pp. 1–11; Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 14.

³⁴From J. Gillies, *Historical Collections*, 2:18, quoted in Wood, *The Inextinguishable Blaze*, p. 54.

³⁵Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, From Its First Planting, in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), 2:320.

³⁶Of the many biographies about Edwards, the finest is Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987). Particularly helpful is Murray’s defense of Edwards as primarily a biblical theologian rather than a philosopher (cf. pp. xix–xxxi). His evaluation of Edwards’ treatises on the Great Awakening in chapters 12 and 13 is most insightful.

³⁷“Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards,” ed. Sereno E. Dwight, in *Works*, 1:lxix; cf. Edwards, “Thoughts on the Revival” in *Works*, 1:366, 373, 390, 397.

the mind by the preaching of the gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit. It was “the simple effect of a practical attention to truth, on the conscience and the heart”³⁸ One of Edwards’ biographers describes his preaching as stern, “warning the people of their sins and of the great displeasure of God. The sovereignty of God’s grace in the salvation of sinners through justification by faith in Jesus Christ was the central theme about which all else revolved. God was present and did a mighty work in their [Northampton’s] midst.”³⁹

Edwards called the revival a “remarkable testimony of God’s approbation of the forensic doctrine” of justification by faith alone. This message was prompted by the threat of Arminianism in New England. Its progress had become so manifest as to cause alarm among staunch Calvinists like Edwards.⁴⁰ Edwards regarded doctrinal confusion as the chief sore to be healed.⁴¹ The remedy, he believed, was strong preaching on the doctrines of gracious redemption.⁴² In addition to forensic justification (God declaring man righteous in Christ), Edwards preached and defended the traditional Reformed doctrines of original sin, including innate sinful depravity inherited from Adam and the imputation of his guilt to the human race; the necessity of man to willfully sin because of constitutional depravity; the vicarious atonement of Christ; and divine monergism in regeneration. As a result, persons were brought

to a conviction of their *absolute dependence* on His [God’s] sovereign power and grace, and an universal necessity of a mediator. This has been effected by leading them more and more to a sense of their exceeding wickedness and guiltiness in his sight; their pollution, and the insufficiency of their own righteousness; that they can in no wise help themselves, and that God

³⁸“Memoirs” in *Works*, 1:lxxi.

³⁹Elgin Moyer, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1951), p. 451.

⁴⁰Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 8.

⁴¹Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, p. 22.

⁴²Edwards expounded his doctrinal views in such classic statements as the sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” (1741), and treatises, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1757) and *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of Will* (1757). Cf. Randall E. Otto, “The Solidarity of Mankind in Jonathan Edwards’ Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (July 1990): 205–21; C. Samuel Storms, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” *Trinity Journal* 3ns (Fall 1992): 131–69; John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1987), esp. chs. 4–8; and Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 90–106.

would be wholly just and righteous in rejecting them and all that they do, and in casting them off for ever.⁴³

A second contextual factor demonstrating that this early stage of the Great Awakening was a divine work is that what happened took the people by *surprise*. The townspeople did not seek out salvation at first, but were, in Edwards' words, "wrought upon in a very remarkable manner."⁴⁴ Edwards' first record of the revival characterized it as a surprising work of God.⁴⁵ "The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work among us; and there were very suddenly, one after another, five or six persons, who were, to all appearances, savingly converted."⁴⁶

The awakening was surprising as to the extent of it. Beginning in Northampton and Hatfield, the revival moved up and down the Connecticut River, affecting about forty-two towns or parishes in western Massachusetts and Connecticut, from the area of Deerfield (MA) in the north to Middletown (CT) in the south.⁴⁷ The effects of it were also astonishing. Individuals from all classes of people were transformed. Edwards stated,

Presently upon this [the conversion of several people], a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees, and all ages. The noise among the dry bones waxed louder and louder; all other

⁴³"Faithful Narrative" in *Works*, 1:351. How foreign is the contemporary gospel of self-esteemism to this biblical message!

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 1:348.

⁴⁵Edwards record, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and Neighboring Towns and Villages* (London, 1737 and Boston, 1738), went through 3 editions and 20 printings by 1739. A hundred years later, Perry Miller stated that it was still a handbook for revivalism in such diverse places as Illinois and Wales (cf. *Jonathan Edwards* [Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1949], p. 137). It was originally a letter to Boston pastor Benjamin Colman, but was revised and published by the great hymn writer Isaac Watts and an associate in London. The American edition included an affirmation by six Hampshire ministers, confirming Edwards' description of the revival. The London edition preface read in part: "Never did we hear or read, since the first ages of Christianity, any event of this kind so surprising as the present Narrative hath set before us."

⁴⁶"Faithful Narrative" in *Works*, 1:348. The revival began in the latter part of December, 1734.

⁴⁷Towns Edwards mentioned as being affected by revival were Pascommuck, Northampton, South Hadley, Suffield, Sunderland, Deerfield, Green River, Hatfield, Hill, West Springfield, Long Meadow, Enfield, Westfield, Springfield, Hadley, Northfield, Windsor, East Windsor, Coventry, Lebanon, Durham, Stratford, Ripton, Newhaven, Guilford, Mansfield, Tolland, Hebron, Bolton, Preston, and Woodbury.

talk but about spiritual and eternal things, was soon thrown by; all the conversation, in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people carrying on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than of the things of religion would scarcely be tolerated in any company. The minds of the people were wonderfully taken off from the world.... The only thing in their view was to get the Kingdom of heaven, and every one appeared pressing into it. The engagedness of their hearts in this great concern could not be hid, it appeared in their very countenances. It then was a dreadful thing amongst us to lie out of Christ, in danger every day of dropping into hell; and what persons' minds were intent upon, was to escape for their lives, and to fly from wrath to come. All would eagerly lay hold of opportunities for their souls, and were wont very often to meet together in private houses for religious purposes: and such meetings when appointed were greatly thronged. There was scarcely a single person in the town, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those who were wont to be the vainest and loosest,...were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more: souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvelous light, and delivered out of an horrible pit, and from the miry clay, and set upon a rock, with a new song of praise to God in their mouths. This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town, so that in the spring and summer following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God.⁴⁸

The lives of children and teenagers especially were amazingly altered. Young people were seen and heard speaking of spiritual matters, praying together, as well as with adults. Altogether, about 200 families in Northampton experienced revival in the 1730s. Of 620 communicants, 300 made professions of faith in six months. Fifty of these were above forty years of age; thirty converts were between ten and fourteen years of age. In the spring of 1735, an average of thirty people per week were saved. Almost immediately the new converts quit their sinful practices, dreading their former vices. Backbitings and quarrels stopped. The tavern was left empty, and people generally stayed at home or were in church. Many began reading, praying, meditating, worshipping, and discussing the things of God with great joy. Edwards recorded, "Our public assemblies were then beautiful: the congregation was *alive* in God's service.... Our public *praises* were then greatly enlivened."⁴⁹ The effect of changed lives appeared permanent. "I know of no one young person in the town," Edwards reported, "who has returned to former

⁴⁸"Faithful Narrative" in *Works*, 1:348.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

ways of *looseness* and *extravagance* in any respect; but we still remain a *reformed* people, and God has evidently made us a new people.”⁵⁰ Yet, in 1751, a more mature, reflective Edwards recognized that, even in so great an awakening there were undoubtedly spurious decisions. Shortly after being dismissed from his church for refusing to offer communion to the unregenerate, Edwards wrote a friend to say that the “calamities” that befell Northampton were due in part to the people establishing “certain wrong notions and ways in religion,” i.e., resting their conversion on impressions, rather than a “lively spiritual experience.” Edwards took the blame: “One thing that has contributed to bring things to such a pass at Northampton was my youth and want of more judgment and experience at the time of that extraordinary awakening about sixteen years ago.”⁵¹

All in all, however, the character of the Connecticut River Valley revival evidenced the divine stamp. For one thing, God’s sovereignty and righteousness were exalted. Edwards could write, “I think I have found that no discourses have been more *remarkably blessed*, than those in which the doctrine of God’s *absolute sovereignty*, with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his *just liberty*, with regard to answering the prayers...of natural men...have been insisted upon.”⁵² Also, those “wrought upon” by the Spirit of God were convicted by the justice of God in condemning their “exceedingly vile” sinfulness. Their salvation appeared too good for them; many felt worthy of nothing but judgment.⁵³ There was no question that God Himself moved upon penitent sinners to produce a definite change and that salvation was wholly of the Lord.⁵⁴ Edwards asserted that “conversion is a great and glorious work of God’s power, at once changing the heart, and infusing life into the dead soul.”⁵⁵ Affections once set on the world “are [now] truly spiritual and gracious, [and] do arise from those influences and operations on the

⁵⁰Ibid., 1:364.

⁵¹Edwards’ letter to Gillespie of Carnock, 1751, quoted in Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, p. 403.

⁵²“Faithful Narrative” in *Works*, 1:353.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴In commenting on the Awakening as being solely a work of God, Tracy writes, “It would seem that in every case, the happy change came upon the sinner’s mind, instead of being wrought by him. In no case, it seems, did the sinner first form to himself an idea of some volition to be put forth by himself, and then, by direct effort, put it forth, and thus become a convert (*The Great Awakening*, p. 14).

⁵⁵“Faithful Narrative” in *Works*, 1:355.

heart, which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine.”⁵⁶ According to him, the instrument of that power was God’s Word.

Persons commonly at...conversion, and afterwards, have had many texts of Scripture brought to their minds, which are exceeding suitable to their circumstances, often come with great power, as the word of God or of *Christ* indeed.... Some are thus convinced of the truth of the *gospel* in general, and that the Scriptures are the word of God: others have their minds more especially fixed on some particular *great doctrine* of the gospel, some particular truths that they are *meditating* on, or *reading* of, in some portion of Scripture.... While God was so remarkably present amongst us by his Spirit, there was no book so delightful as the Bible.⁵⁷

This revival, witnessed by Jonathan Edwards, had every appearance of being a divine work, spiritually, doctrinally, and biblically. It characteristically bore those marks associated with the first revival in church history as recorded in Acts. As a genuine revival, admittedly tainted at times by the extravagances of revivalism,⁵⁸ it was nevertheless a prelude to the major upsurge of awakening, beginning in 1740, under the preaching of George Whitefield.⁵⁹

A HISTORICAL PARADIGM FOR REVIVALISM: CHARLES G. FINNEY AND THE NEW MEASURES

The First Great Awakening came unexpectedly by God’s mercy on a sinful people and in the context of God-centered doctrinal proclamations from Spirit-empowered preachers such as Theodorus Frelinghuysen, Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. Their messages centered on the holiness of God, condemnation of sin, justification by faith, and the new birth produced solely by the power of God through the instrumentality of His Word. In a pro-

⁵⁶Edwards, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections” in *Works*, 1:264.

⁵⁷“Faithful Narrative” in *Works*, 1:355–57.

⁵⁸James Davenport’s antics bear this out. Davenport (1716–1757), great-grandson of New Haven’s founder, John Davenport, was an emotionally unstable revivalist who created disorder wherever he preached. He was arrested, pronounced insane, but eventually confessed his errors. See Richard L. Bushman, ed. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745* (Williamsburg, VA: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1969), pp. 45–55.

⁵⁹Thomas Prince (1687–1758), pastor of Boston’s Third (Old South) Church, stated that it “seemed to prepare the way in diverse places for that more extensive revival of religion which in five years after followed” (*An Account of the Revival of Religion in Boston* [reprint ed., Boston: S. T. Armstrong, 1823], p. 7). It was Prince who started the first religious magazine in America, *The Christian History*, in which he reported on local revivals in America and Europe.

found way, *biblical theology produced genuine revival*. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century, a theological change took place that was to have enormous consequences on the way Americans would come to view revival. Briefly, old line Edwardsian orthodoxy gradually gave way to what some historians have incorrectly called a modified Calvinism, but in actuality was the revival of an old heresy unlike anything John Calvin or Jonathan Edwards would have taught. This “new” New England Theology was an attempt to regain the revival spirit in America but at the expense of the very doctrines God used to produce the Great Awakening in the first place. Centered in Yale College, this theology was, in Stephen Berk’s words, an adjustment of “Calvinism to [the] prevailing conditions” of infidelity.⁶⁰ A concern for the eradication of Deism from the student body had led president Timothy Dwight (1752–1817) to assume a natural ability in man to accept the gospel. This assumption was based on the faulty assertion that the posterity of Adam are not guilty of his transgression. Each man is solely responsible for his own sin, not Adam’s.⁶¹ Dwight advanced the “divine constitution” view of inherent sin, which says that Adam’s sin is the “instrumental cause” of man’s but not the direct nor the penal cause; man therefore has a “propensity” but not an inherent necessity to sin.⁶² John Hannah sums up the unorthodox theological consequences of Dwight’s doctrine:

With Adam’s headship merely parental, not causative, all sins are voluntary sins and innate depravity is consequently moral [or relative] depravity. With the change in the basic nature and condition of man came also a reevaluation of the nature of the work of Christ. Since man’s liability was in his choices, not his nature, the governmental theory of the atonement became an accepted explanation of Christ’s death. Christ’s death was viewed as effecting a virtuous environment and not as constituting a penal substitution.⁶³

Dwight’s best pupil and theological successor, Nathaniel William Taylor (1786–1858), modified his mentor’s views to produce a new teaching known as Taylorism or the New Haven Theology.⁶⁴ Taylor

⁶⁰Calvinism Versus Democracy (New York: Archon Books, 1971), p. 74.

⁶¹Timothy Dwight, *Theology: Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons*, 4 vols. (New Haven: S. Converse, 1825), 1:478.

⁶²Dwight, *Theology*, 1:479, and Hannah, “The Doctrine of Original Sin in Postrevolutionary America,” p. 246, note 34.

⁶³Hannah, “The Doctrine of Original Sin in Postrevolutionary America,” p. 247.

⁶⁴Taylor developed his theology (1) as a response to Unitarianism, (2) in opposition to Old School Calvinism represented at Andover Seminary, and (3) as a means of promoting revival. It is the third concern which is of major importance for our study be-

said that man's will is not corrupted by the sin of Adam, that he is not inherently nor constitutionally depraved but has total freedom of choice for or against God. Sin, he said, resides in the unrighteous acts, not in the nature, of man.⁶⁵ "He thought that Edwards' doctrine of the will paralyzed revival preaching and scandalized the average person in democratic, freedom-loving America."⁶⁶ Edwards had taught the inevitable necessity of man's sin because of imputed natural sinfulness; Dwight had said man was partially depraved; Taylor now taught that man has "power to the contrary" not to sin.⁶⁷ Taylor was teaching Pelagianism.⁶⁸

New Haven Theology provided the garden in which Arminianism would prosper, and the Social Gospel would take root and eventually bear the fruit of theological liberalism in America. A biographer of Taylor stated that many of the 768 graduates from Taylor's classes "became the leaders in the great surge of liberal thought that dominated Congregationalism during the next generation."⁶⁹ It was Taylorism that provided the impetus for much of nineteenth century revivalism.⁷⁰ This theology fit quite well into the new euphoric climate of American independence and man's ability to shape his "manifest destiny." A bold expression of human achievement by a Jacksonian politician prophesied the virtual deification of the American people.

cause of its impact on the revivalism of Finney. Cf. James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History* 38 (September 1969): 339.

⁶⁵Nathaniel Taylor, *Concio ad Clerum: A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828*, cited in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, ed. *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), p. 215. See also, Taylor's *Lectures on the Moral Government of God*, ed. Noah Porter, 2 vols. (New York: Austin & Smith, 1859).

⁶⁶Ahlstrom, *Theology in America*, p. 212.

⁶⁷Sidney E. Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786–1858, A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 189.

⁶⁸Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), who unrelentingly battled Taylorism as an extreme departure from biblical theology, remarked that "in the teaching of [Taylor]...the downward movement of the New Divinity ran out into a system which turned...upon the Pelagianizing doctrines of...the plenary ability of the sinner to renovate his own soul, and self-love or the desire for happiness as the spring of all voluntary action" (*Biblical and Theological Studies* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1952], p. 536).

⁶⁹Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor*, p. 163.

⁷⁰As one writer put it, referring to an 1831 Finney sermon: "The voice was Finney's, the thinking Taylor's" (Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, p. 261). Another historian noted that Finney was "Taylor's true successor" (Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology*, p. 453).

I believe man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.⁷¹

The New Haven Theology appeared to emulate characteristics of Jacksonian democracy. Self-determination and a romantic belief in self-worth and prosperity displaced the old Puritan view of man's natural moral corruption and absolute dependence on a sovereign God.⁷²

A product of Jacksonian democracy and popularizer of New Haven Theology, Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875)⁷³ translated Taylorism into a system of revivalism advocating unblushingly that *revival may be and should be generated by human means*. This is a dangerous and false presumption. Such a course replaces principle with pragmatism upon the throne of praxis. The Holy Spirit becomes an agent at man's disposal and revival is reduced to methodology and manipulation calculated to produce moral results. As America's religious Andrew Jackson, Finney spread the democratic gospel of Taylorism along the eastern seaboard and western New York State from 1825 to 1835.⁷⁴

⁷¹Quoted in Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (reprint ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 22. Tyler appears to be quoting Jackson himself, but the origin of the speech is unknown. Dixon Wecter credits the statement to President Andrew Johnson (cf. *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration, 1607–1937* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937], p. 100). See also, Jay E. Smith, "The Theology of Charles Finney: A System of Self-Reformation," *Trinity Journal* 13ns (Spring 1992): 64, note 15.

⁷²William McLoughlin writes that the generation of settlers to which Finney belonged had "faith in man's ability to solve life's problems by himself, and their growing optimism about the future, made the pessimistic religion which their parents had found strangely satisfying seem singularly unattractive and unreasonable" (*Modern Revivalism*, p. 21).

⁷³A critical yet well-balanced biography of Finney is Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792–1875: Reformer and Revivalist* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). Lewis A. Drummond's popular biography is another example of the failure to make a difference between revival and revivalism (cf. *A Fresh Look at The Life and Ministry of Charles G. Finney* [Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985]). With Billy Graham's help (see foreword, p. 6), Drummond portrays Finney as the model revivalist and foremost precursor of modern evangelism. Among the many treatments of Finney's revivalist theology, two excellent discussions are available which include significant influences as well as descriptions of doctrine. These are Jay E. Smith, "The Theology of Charles Finney," and David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985), especially pp. 114–231.

⁷⁴Cf. Sean Michael Lucas, "Charles Finney's Theology of Revival: Moral Depravity," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 6 (Fall 1995): 212–15; Hardman, *Charles*

This law student turned evangelist would fan the flames of controversy as well as revivalism.

Unquestionably, Finney provided a refreshing alternative to Yankee divines in shoe buckles and powdered wigs. His gospel was a radical switch from the dead Unitarian lecture but also from the Calvinist message of Edwards⁷⁵ and Whitefield. Ordained by the Presbyterians, he soon denied their doctrines as contained in the Westminster Confession, and eventually left their denomination. Indeed, he had much in common with the Methodists and helped launch the perfectionist and holiness movements often associated with them. Finney is credited with the conversion of 500,000 people to the gospel, using evangelistic methods still popular today. However, as one examines the gospel Finney preached, he must consider whether it is not in actuality *another* gospel than what the New Testament teaches. For, as one historian stated, the popular revivalist's "great talent was to make the complicated doctrines of Nathaniel Taylor's 'New Divinity' as clear and as sensible as the multiplication table"⁷⁶ Well-intentioned advocates of revival have noted Finney's hard preaching against sin, his impassioned entreaties to the unsaved, and the amazing numerical and moral results generated by his

Grandison Finney, p. 151. There is no question among historians that Taylorism played a direct role in "preparing the way theologically for the acceptance of Finney's 'new measures' in the promotion of revivals" (*The Law as Gospel*, p. 147, note 19). Cf. Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor*, pp. 177–87; McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, pp. 44–46; and especially the treatment of Taylorism by Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of The New England Theology* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), pp. 252–56, 266–80.

⁷⁵It is difficult to take Allen Guelzo seriously when he writes that Finney was only furthering Jonathan Edwards' views of revival (cf. "The Making of a Revivalist: Finney and the Heritage of Jonathan Edwards" 7 *Christian History* [Issue 20, no. 4]: 28–30). John Stanley Mattson, in attempting to draw doctrinal similarities between Edwards and Finney, completely mistakes Edwards' teaching on free will as innate ability. He is correct in saying, however, that "Finney's principal objective was to overthrow the Calvinist emphasis upon inability" (cf. "Charles Grandison Finney and the Emerging Tradition of 'New Measure' Revivalism" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1970], pp. 280–81, 291).

⁷⁶Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 143. Historical scholars are in virtual agreement that Taylorism did play a role in shaping Finney's thought. The disagreement comes in trying to determine the extent of that influence. Cf. Foster, *A Genetic History of New England Theology*, pp. 453, 467; Garth M. Rosell, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971), pp. 100–101; David L. Turner, "A Critique of Charles G. Finney's Theology," (unpublished paper, Baptist Bible College, 1977), pp. 25–36; Smith, "Theology of Charles Finney," pp. 68–69; Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," pp. 339–42. After sifting the data, Johnson presents perhaps the most reasonable view: Finney's "theology derived both from the New England group [principally Taylor] and from his own independent reflection," p. 342.

campaigns and have concluded that he is a paragon of evangelism.⁷⁷ However, an examination of his theological writings and sermons reveals that his ministry was based on faulty methodology and theology. Any so-called spiritual successes he enjoyed have to be weighed in light of this.

Finney Was a Pragmatist

Finney asserted that “a revival is the result of the *right* use of the appropriate means.”⁷⁸ Those means included the adoption of controversial new measures which were calculated to produce conversions. (1) His egalitarian gospel permitted and encouraged women to pray and preach in public. (2) His use of the anxious bench at the front of the meeting house was a tactic to pressure sinners to come forward and “pray through” until they found Christ. The assumption was that if a person came to the bench he *would* be converted. (3) Finney’s use of publicity and protracted meetings sensationalized evangelism. Again, his philosophy was that revivals could be and should be promoted by any method that worked. (4) Last and perhaps most offensive was Finney’s belief that revival was not a miracle, but the right use of proper means. If men followed a prescribed list of moral criteria for revival, it *would* occur.⁷⁹ Finney repeatedly argued that results were the infallible proof that what he preached was correct: “The results justify my methods.”⁸⁰ When crit-

⁷⁷Jerry Falwell’s *Fundamentalist Journal* carried articles in the mid 1980s promoting this image of Finney. See Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr., “Charles Grandison Finney Preached for a Verdict,” 3 (June 1984): 41–43; Charles Grandison Finney, “When to Expect a Revival,” 4 (September 1985): 28–29, 31.

⁷⁸This statement was the premise of Finney’s controversial *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1868); see p. 13. Leonard Sweet reminds us that Finney’s “penchant for trying on doctrinal garb to suit the climate of the sinner was paralleled by his eagerness to exploit a full range of measures on a trial and error basis, discarding those that failed and devising new ones until he hit upon ‘something that will succeed in the salvation of souls’....The test of the veracity and validity of a measure or message was its performance” (“The View of Man Inherent in New Measures Revivalism,” *Church History* 45 [June 1976]: 211, 212). Cf. Johnson, “Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism,” pp. 342–43. For comments on the disrupting effects of Finney’s new measures doctrine, see Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965), pp. 29–33.

⁷⁹Jay Smith writes, “Salvation no longer requires divine intervention. Moral effort, which can be induced through human engineering and coercion, is all that is necessary. Individuals are in absolute control of their destinies. Thus people are, for all practical purposes, omnipotent in effecting their conversions, creating revivals, and growing holiness” (“Theology of Charles Finney,” p. 90).

⁸⁰*Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1876), p. 83.

ics referred to the impropriety and unscripturalness of his “new measures,” he boasted that “when the blessing evidently follows the introduction of the measure itself, the proof is unanswerable that the measure is wise”⁸¹ He convinced his followers that opponents were arguing with God when they questioned him: “It is evident that much fault has been found with measures which have been *pre-eminently and continually* blessed of God for the promotion of revivals. If a measure is *continually or unusually* blessed, let the man who thinks he is wiser than God, call it in question.”⁸² Such confident optimism intimidated the critics and bolstered Finney’s popularity as something of a modern prophet.

Finney Was a Pelagianist

Like Nathaniel Taylor, Finney denied original sin and man’s constitutional depravity because, he said, total depravity is unreasonable.⁸³ He considered nothing sinful but voluntary action which is contrary to the moral law of God. He wrote, “All sin is actual, and...no other than actual transgression can justly be called sin.”⁸⁴ He left no room for doubt about the matter:

We deny that the human constitution is morally depraved, 1. Because there is not proof of it. 2. Because it is impossible that sin should be an attribute of the substance of soul or body. It is and must be an attribute of choice or intention and not of substance. 3. To make sin an attribute or quality of substance is contrary to God’s definition of sin. “Sin,” says the apostle, “is anomia,” a “transgression of, or a want of conformity to the moral law.”⁸⁵

This self-assured revivalist never tired of inveighing against “thousands of...grave theologians [who] have gravely taught this monstrous dogma [of man’s natural depravity].” His blood must have approached the boiling point when he thundered: “There never was a more infamous libel on Jehovah! It would be hard to name another dogma which more violently outrages common sense. It is

⁸¹*Lectures on Revivals*, p. 211. Jay Smith writes, “Finney’s self-confidence and ability had taught him that success was a question of natural ability and determination. Now as a young theologian, his self-confidence and natural talent convinced him that the gospel was also a matter of one’s ability and effort” (“Theology of Charles Finney,” p. 73).

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁸³Finney pronounced Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will* “an injurious monstrosity and misnomer” (*Lectures on Systematic Theology* [Oberlin, OH: James M. Fitch, 1847], p. 30).

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 478. Cf. Smith, “Theology of Charles Finney,” p. 109, n. 76, and Lucas, “Charles Finney’s Theology of Revival,” p. 203.

⁸⁵Charles Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 248 (cf. p. 333).

nonsense—absurd and utter NONSENSE!”⁸⁶ To Finney, moral sinfulness consists only in selfishness, a state of voluntary committal of the will to self-gratification. Sin is the bad habit of self-indulgence learned from youth.⁸⁷ But such views do violence to the clear teaching of Scripture and are diametrically opposed to what Paul declares in Romans 5:12–21. The Apostle emphatically states that “through one transgression (Adam’s sin) there resulted condemnation to all men” (v. 18), and it was through the disobedience of one man (Adam) that “the many were made sinners” (v. 19). As the *New England Primer* of 1688 put it, “In Adam’s fall We sinned all.”⁸⁸

Finney Was a Moralist

Finney taught that man was an autonomously free moral agent, and is therefore expected to change his own heart from a course of disobedience to God to obedience.⁸⁹ According to him, man does not need a new faculty to love and serve God. The Christian receives no new nature, Finney claimed, “but only consecrates to God those [faculties] he had from the commencement of his being.”⁹⁰ His idea of regeneration is

⁸⁶Charles Finney, “The Excuses of Sinners,” sermon in *God’s Love for a Sinning World* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1966), p. 57. Those who still persist in drawing parallels between Edward’s revival and Finney’s revivalism should note an irony that perhaps Finney himself did not consider. It is true that both men wrote and preached against Unitarianism. In fact, it was the work of John Taylor (1694–1761), an English Unitarian (*The Scriptural Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 1740), that prompted Edwards to counter with his work on original sin in 1757. Yet Finney’s statement on human nature cited above is remarkably similar to that of Taylor, who represents the Unitarian position: “A representative of moral action is what I can by no means digest. A representative, the guilt of whose conduct shall be imputed to us, and whose sins shall corrupt and debauch our nature, is one of the greatest absurdities in all the system of corrupt religion” (*Original Sin* [London, 1845], pp. 177–78, cited in Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology*, p. 82). These two statements—the one by Finney and the other by Taylor—give us a partial explanation of why New England, inundated with revivalism, could so easily and in a relatively brief period of time succumb to apostasy. Both Taylor the Unitarian and Finney the revivalist were promoting falsehood!

⁸⁷Cf. Lucas, “Charles Finney’s Theology of Revival,” pp. 205–09.

⁸⁸“New England ABC” in *The Annals of America*, 18 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1976), 1:276.

⁸⁹David L. Weddle writes, “The key to this theology is the unshakable conviction, gained in the study of law, . . . that conversion is reasoned decision to submit to God’s moral government, as an act entirely within the sinner’s natural powers” (*The Law as Gospel*, p. 6).

⁹⁰Charles Finney, “Making a New Heart,” sermon based on Ezekiel 38:31, reproduced in *Revival Theology Resources* [document on-line] (Lovejoy, GA: Trumpet of

a self-initiated change of natural moral condition, and not the supernatural impartation of spiritual life to a spiritually dead person by the Holy Spirit.⁹¹ Finney wrote,

It is not a change in the substance of soul or body. If it were, sinners could not be required to effect it. Such a change would not constitute a change of moral character. No such change is needed, as the sinner has all the faculties and natural abilities requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought. The words conversion and regeneration do not imply any change of substance but only a change of moral state or of moral character. The terms are not used to express a physical, but a moral change. Regeneration does not express or imply the creation of any new faculties or attributes of nature, nor any change whatever in the constitution of body or mind.⁹²

Finney's view of the atonement was likewise influenced by moralism. To him, God was the moral ruler of a universe in which man has the totally free choice to either accept divine regulations on his conduct and be rewarded with salvation or reject them and be cursed. Christ's atonement, therefore, became merely a moral "persuasion" of enlightening man's mind to accept God's rule. In endorsing the governmental view of the atonement, Finney deliberately repudiated the penal substitutionary death of Christ:

In the atonement God has given us the influence of his own example, has exhibited his own love, his own compassion, his own self-denial, his own patience, his own long-suffering, under abuse from enemies.... This is the highest possible moral influence.... The influence of the Atonement, when apprehended by the mind, will accomplish whatever is an object of moral power.... To suppose...that Christ suffered in amount all that was due to the elect, is to suppose that he suffered an eternal punishment multiplied by the whole number of the elect.⁹³

The legal mind of the revivalist failed to see that the value of Christ's suffering was not in its amount or quantity but its quality: the

Zion Revival Ministries International, 1995, accessed 12 June 1996); available from <http://www.xmission.com/%7Eegastown/revival>; Internet.

⁹¹Finney defined regeneration as "a radical change of ultimate intention." It "must consist in a change in the attitude of the will, or a change in its ultimate choice, intention, or preference." But man himself effects this change. Cf. Finney, *Systematic Theology*, p. 223.

⁹²Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 494.

⁹³Finney, *Skeletons on a Course of Theological Lectures by the Rev. Charles G. Finney* (Oberlin, OH: Steele, 1840), pp. 259, 255. Cf. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis, eds., *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 51; Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 334–35.

provision of a perfectly righteous and obedient substitute who propitiated the wrath of God on behalf of absolutely helpless sinners.

Ironically, the legal-minded Finney rejected the biblical teaching of an essentially judicial act— justification. It was Nathaniel Taylor’s aim to overthrow forensic justification, and Finney was the self-appointed agent to carry out the mission.⁹⁴ To him, justification by faith is not “a forensic...proceeding,” but “a governmental decree or amnesty based upon the infinite love of God.... For sinners to be forensically pronounced just is impossible and absurd.”⁹⁵ The ground of justification, then, is not the vicarious sacrifice of Christ for the sinner but divine benevolence.⁹⁶ It was the sinner’s own obedience, not Christ’s, that precipitated the divine pronouncement of pardon. Consequently, to Finney, there is no need for the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers. Indeed, he wrote,

The doctrine of an imputed righteousness...is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption.... [Christ’s obedience] can never be imputed to us. He was bound to love God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbor as Himself. He did no more than this. He could do no more. It was naturally impossible, then, for Him to obey in our behalf.⁹⁷

It is easy to see that, for Finney, the active and passive obedience of Christ did nothing to secure the sinner’s righteous standing before God. All that is left is man’s own righteousness which God accepts as sufficient. Conversion then is by man’s initiative. Finney insisted “that the actual turning, or change, is the sinner’s own act.”⁹⁸ “It is apparent that the change..., effected by the simple volition of the sinner through the influence of motives, is a sufficient change; all that the Bible requires. It is all that is necessary to make a sinner a Christian.”⁹⁹ In responding to Finney’s theology of moral determinism that “all holiness [consists in] the right exercises of our own will or agency,” Benjamin B.

⁹⁴Yet Edwards’ preaching of this very doctrine of forensic justification was evidently the divine means of initiating the Great Awakening in New England.

⁹⁵Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 382, 401, 395, 384.

⁹⁶Cf. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, p. 401; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980), pp. 153–55.

⁹⁷Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Bethany House Publishers reprint edition (1994), pp. 362–63, cited in Lucas, “Charles Finney’s Theology of Revival, pp. 209–10. Cf. Charles G. Finney, “Justification by Faith” in *True and False Repentance: Evangelistic Messages* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1966), pp. 54–55, 59, 60.

⁹⁸*Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York: Taylor, 1836), p. 20.

⁹⁹“Making a New Heart,” n.p.

Warfield wrote, “It is quite clear that what Finney gives us is less a theology than a system of morals. God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character. All virtue, all holiness, is made to consist in an ethical determination of will.”¹⁰⁰

Finney Was a Rationalist.

What should be abundantly clear from Finney’s own comments is that he refused to accept anything that contradicted his understanding.¹⁰¹ His conclusions were not based on a careful exegesis of Scripture, but were derived from his own empirical reasoning. For example, in defending his view that God would never command anything beyond our ability, he writes,

A gracious [God-given] ability to do our duty is absurd. It is a dictate of reason, of conscience, of common sense, and of our natural sense of justice, that if God require of us the performance of any duty or act, he is bound in justice to give us *power* to obey; i.e., he must give us the faculties and strength to perform the act.¹⁰²

Finney would not accept the Calvinist view that God requires of men what is above their ability for the very purpose of convincing them of their sinfulness, and divesting them of all pride.¹⁰³ In reality, Finney’s own logical authority preempted the authority of Scripture.¹⁰⁴ Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1797–1878) assessed accurately Finney’s rationalistic approach when he wrote,

The system of Professor Finney is a remarkable product of relentless logic. It is valuable as a warning. It shows to what extremes the human mind may be carried when abandoned to its own guidance. He begins with certain axioms, or, as he calls them, truths of reason, and from these he draws conclusions which are indeed logical deductions, but which shock the moral

¹⁰⁰Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p. 193.

¹⁰¹A younger contemporary of Finney, Albert Temple Swing, called him “the most rational theologian and evangelist America has ever produced” (“President Finney and an Oberlin Theology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 57 [1900]: 469). According to Weddle, foundational to Finney’s theology was his belief “that God rules by the rational principles of moral law; therefore, any theological statement must satisfy the demands of reason and conscience” (*The Law as Gospel*, p. 113).

¹⁰²*Sermons on Important Subjects*, p. 25. Cf. Smith, “Theology of Charles Finney,” p. 83.

¹⁰³John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), Bk II:7:8, II:8:3.

¹⁰⁴Cf. Smith, “Theology of Charles Finney,” p. 74.

sense, and prove nothing but that his premises are false.¹⁰⁵

Faith in man's autonomous plenary ability to respond to God's moral laws of righteousness was the heart of Finney's revivalism. Atonement was only a government transaction; regeneration is simply a change of attitude.¹⁰⁶ No wonder that Charles Hodge remonstrated that "a very slight modification in the form of statement, would bring the doctrine of Mr. Finney into exact conformity to the doctrine of the modern German school [of rationalism], which makes God but a name for the moral law or order of the universe."¹⁰⁷

CONCLUSION

Seven years after the beginning of revival in Northampton, Jonathan Edwards had had time to soberly reflect on the subject. He came to the firm conclusion that the Great Awakening, in spite of some emotional outbursts and strident criticisms, was a movement of God. At a Yale commencement in 1741, he preached on 1 John 4:1–7, encouraging the hesitant to support the revival,¹⁰⁸ because it bore what he believed were the scriptural indications of divine activity. His address was soon after published as *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*. Those marks can still be used as valid criteria for recognizing a God-sent revival. Genuine revival, Edwards said, will

- (1) Produce a greater esteem for Christ (1 John 4:2–3);
- (2) Operate against the interests of Satan's kingdom (1 John 4:4–5);
- (3) Cause a greater regard for the Holy Scriptures, "and establishes them more in their truth and divinity" (1 John 4:6);
- (4) Lead persons to truth, convincing them of those things that are true (1 John 4:6); and
- (5) Be an evidence that the "spirit that is at work among a people...as a spirit of love to God and man...is...the Spirit of God" (1 John

¹⁰⁵Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 3:8–9.

¹⁰⁶Cf. Hannah, "The Doctrine of Original Sin in Postrevolutionary America," p. 252.

¹⁰⁷*Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19 (1847): 239.

¹⁰⁸Edwards was not adverse to promoting revival; in fact, he used every available legitimate means to do so. The problem is not in the promotion but *what* is being promoted. Finney publicized anthropocentric revivalism using questionable and even unscriptural methods; Edwards enthusiastically endorsed what he considered a heaven-sent movement by the use of means in accord with Scripture. Moreover, there is a difference in the *kind* of promotion involved: Finney promoted revival in the sense of producing it; Edwards promoted what he believed God had already initiated.

4:7).¹⁰⁹

An inference that Edwards draws from these scriptural marks of revival is

that the extraordinary influence that has lately appeared, causing an uncommon concern and engagedness of mind about the things of religion, is undoubtedly, in the general, from the Spirit of God.... And certainly we must throw by all talk of conversion and Christian experience; and not only so, but we must throw by our Bibles, and give up revealed religion; if this be not in general the work of God.¹¹⁰

Another inference we may draw from this study is that doctrine determines direction. It has not been my intention to discuss at length the "Finneyan formula," i.e., Finney's measures for generating revival, and I have mentioned only two clearly legitimate means God may use to beget genuine revival: prayer and gospel proclamation. I have centered on the doctrine behind the means in order to demonstrate that the kind of theology a person owns (to borrow a Puritan expression) will determine the kind of methods he will espouse. Edwards was a Calvinist whose regard for God's sovereignty and holiness and man's utter sinfulness appears to have governed his theology and hence his view of revival and his means of promoting it. While Finney gave lip service to divine sovereignty, he was by doctrine and practice an Arminian. His brand of New Haven theology popularized revival and reduced it to a program of social betterment and improved self-esteem. "If," as J. F. Thornbury writes, "Charles G. Finney's evangelism rode the waves of confidence in man's abilities," Edwardsian preachers, like Asahel Nettleton, "clung tenaciously to the rock of the older view that man is totally corrupt and cannot save himself. The symbol of the one type of evangelism is the anxious seat, to which men were publicly pressured to repair. The symbol of the other is an inquiry meeting, where trembling sinners were pointed to Christ."¹¹¹

The theological difference between revival and revivalism must be realized but often can only be appreciated by contrast, which has been the attempt of this essay. To summarize this contrast, consider the comment by a new measures revivalist, Horatio Foote: "Man's hope ain't worth a groat [piece of grain] that isn't founded on obedience." This sounds viable until we consider its more biblical counterpart by an advocate of genuine revival, Josephus Brockway: "Man's hope is good for nothing that is not founded on the merits of Christ, and evinced by

¹⁰⁹"Distinguishing Marks" in *Works*, 2:269.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹J. F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and The Second Great Awakening* (Grand Rapids: Evangelical Press, 1977), p. 204.

obedience.”¹¹² Such a seemingly paltry difference is immense when we consider its implications. Finney’s rationalism convinced him that man is independently capable of obedience, and the revivalist’s desire for converts drove him to preach a pragmatic gospel corrupted by heretical doctrine regarding the gospel of Christ. Such a gospel will not produce genuine revival if Paul’s warning in Galatians 1:8–9 has any meaning. If conversions resulted from Finney’s meetings, it was not because of, but in spite of, his message. Certainly, Jonathan Edwards had theological inconsistencies, but what concerned him was careful adherence to the orthodox Bible doctrines of Adamically inherited, innate depravity of the human heart; man’s total inability to save himself from the effects and punishment of sin; forensic justification and the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness through faith; gracious redemption on the basis of the vicarious atonement of a sinless Savior; and regeneration of believers by the Holy Spirit. The preaching of *these* doctrines God has used to save souls and bring spiritual awakening.

We may long for and fervently pray for revival, but accompanying heaven-sent petition must be a clarion proclamation of the message of Edwards, delivered in the power of God. In such a holy enterprise, we would not be preaching sensational sermons of self-improvement, but scriptural ultimatums that denounce sin, divest sinners of any pretense of righteousness, demand repentance, and declare the gospel of Christ in clarity and purity. Our motive would not be personal success, but scriptural obedience; our aim, not numbers, but the glory of God. As Doug McLachlan reminds us, “That’s why the concern for revival, it’s [*sic*] central burden and most impassioned obsession is the restoration of God’s name to the exalted position which it deserves in our lives and culture. In revival there is no room for self-centered motivations, only hunger for divine exaltation!”¹¹³ As we exalt Christ and zealously evangelize with His doctrine, may we not then hope that God would awaken many from darkness to His marvelous light by sending revival to our communities and churches?

¹¹²Josephus Brockway (*A Delineation*, n.p., 1827, pp. 57–58), cited in Warfield, *Perfectionism*, p. 28, note 70.

¹¹³Douglas R. McLachlan, *Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism* (Independence, MO: American Association of Christian Schools, 1993), p. 147.