

Summer 1965

The 1965 Faculty Lecture

Myron D. Goldsmith

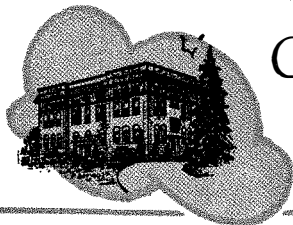
Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc_journal

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goldsmith, Myron D., "The 1965 Faculty Lecture" (1965). *George Fox College Journal, 1952-1966*. Paper 4.
http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gfc_journal/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in George Fox College Journal, 1952-1966 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.



George Fox College

JOURNAL

VOL IX

SUMMER, 1965

NO. 1

The 1965 Faculty Lecture

BY MYRON D. GOLDSMITH, PH.D.
PROFESSOR OF RELIGION, LANGUAGE ARTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The death of revivalism has been frequently announced in the obituary columns of the religious press for the past half century. From time to time, solemn funerals have been conducted, processions formed and the corpse decently laid away. Often, a marker has been duly raised to indicate the final resting place of a feature of American religious life which was once vibrantly useful. All the while, there have been a few observers standing to one side who have viewed these obsequies with reservations. To them, there seemed a disquieting aspect about the corpse, an aspect which suggested that burial should not be proceeded with hastily—signs of life which called for therapy, rather than interment.

As was the case with Lazarus, revivalism has sometimes been called out of the tomb, and has been released and let go by its friends. The trouble has been that after short periods of vitality its old difficulty has recurred and it was again in a moribund state, requiring expensive hospitalization and treatment. All too often, it has proven ineffective as an instrument of spiritual awakening. Consequently, its friends in the evangelical churches have been busy fashioning other instruments for precipitating conversions, albeit, unwilling to grant that the day of revivalism was really past.

On the other hand, there are those today with unbounded confidence in revivalism as an answer to the need for spiritual awakening in America. They point to such mid-

twentieth century evangelists as Billy Graham, Armin Gesswein, Merv Rosell, Oral Roberts and J. Edwin Orr, declaring that a fourth great awakening is upon us. The statistics these optimists present are convincing to some and shrugged off by others. The figures do appear compelling with respect to large city campaigns, but to struggling pastors and concerned lay people in the churches, the awakening often seems to be in some distant city or some other part of the world. It remains as difficult and unpredictable as ever to experience the spiritual awakening which secular American society needs.

By way of definition, it should perhaps be mentioned that revivalism and awakening are not the same thing. From a purely historical standpoint, an awakening is a complex social event in which persons become aroused and concerned regarding their religious state, and who, in time, profess a satisfying resolution of their concern and exhibit worthwhile social changes in their lives. Such a definition is admittedly theologically obscure, which fault the lecturer will attempt to relieve, below. Revivalism is the application of human means and techniques in a given social setting under highly personalized conditions, with the object of promoting conversions. This definition will, perhaps, also be objected to on theological grounds, but clarification will be attempted later.

The present study has been entered upon with the hope that the three great awakenings of the past may furnish some clues as to the prospects of revivalism as a means of contemporary Protestant renewal and awakening. American revivals and awakenings are chosen for investigation, although it is acknowledged that the church has experienced awakenings during the centuries before America became religiously significant. That important awakenings have occurred and are occurring in other parts of the world is also acknowledged. Further, only the major figures involved in American revivalism are dealt with in this study, since they were responsible for many of the minor movements and manifestations which can be described as revivalistic. Finally, a total answer to the problem of contemporary renewal and awakening is not attempted. The question with which we are herein primarily concerned is whether or not, as many believe, the use-

fulness of revivalism is really past as a means of meeting America's religious needs.

The difficulty of the problem is acknowledged at the outset. Spiritual awakenings are complex and their causation is never easy to detect. The difficulty is heightened by the fact that the statistics are often unstable, providing a footing which may appear dependable, but when tested, sometimes collapses. On the other hand, real awakenings have occurred so widely and frequently in American history that a vast amount of source material does exist from which generalizations may be offered, providing the data is handled critically. One evidence of this fact is the large number of doctoral dissertations that have been accepted by leading universities of the nation in recent years on the subject. Lacking access to many of the primary sources, this study makes use of some of these published dissertations, as the footnotes will acknowledge. Particular indebtedness is due to the eminent American church historian who inspired many of these doctoral studies, the late William Warren Sweet.

II. THE FIRST AWAKENING

While religious fervency and zeal was certainly present in the settlement of the first colonies in America, a revivalistic atmosphere was by no means present. Economic requirements were such that settlers could not be excluded simply because lacking in divine grace, and a mixed society existed in all the colonies from the beginning. In Massachusetts Bay Colony, membership in the established churches was rigorously restricted to the elect and their baptized infants, with the hope that children would grow up and give evidence in due time of election. It was also thought that the unconverted in the colony would, under the pressures of an ironclad theocracy, also show signs of election. However, the stubborn settlers manifested more interest in voting rights than religion, and the children did not grow up into saints. In time, the famous Half-Way Covenant of 1662 was resorted to, providing for the baptism of infants of second generation members of the church, despite the failure of those second-generation members ever to have been really converted. The churches thus came to be composed of many whose religion

was more formal than fervent. Other factors contributing to the spiritual decline were the political distractions created by the restoration of the crown in England in 1660, the frequent threat of Indians on the frontiers, and the beginning in 1689 of the bitterly fought wars between England and France for control of the Mississippi Valley. All this while, the Puritan hierarchy was mishandling its religious opportunities due, as Clifton E. Olmstead has well put it, to a "vague discontent over sin in general and enthusiasm in particular."¹ Sweet has analyzed the situation as one in which

The religion of the Puritans had become unemotional, with a type of preaching uncondusive to revivals and conversion. . . . The Puritan fathers had held that conversion was solely the work of God, but with the second and third generations, as the members of conversions decreased, gradually the idea began to emerge that there were certain 'means' which might be used in putting the soul in a position to receive the regenerating influence of the Spirit.²

It was Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, a young Dutch Reformed pastor in New Jersey who sparked and later fanned the flames of the first revival on the American continent.³ Frelinghuysen, thoroughly imbued with pietistic principles from his German background, had come to be the new pastor of three congregations in New Jersey in 1720. His preaching shocked his comfortable congregations out of their formal, routine orthodoxy, because it included an incisive requirement of reformation, delivered in tones highly impassioned and individualistic. His demand for conversion outraged some of his members, but among others it bore fruit. The young people and the poorer classes responded and supported Frelinghuysen warmly, so that an awakening developed and began to spread to other churches of the region. Opposition grew at a corresponding rate, and within three years the Dutch Reformed churches were split over the implication and

1. Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), 156.
2. William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 64-65.
3. William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 26.

methods of revivalism. After a long controversy, the youthful revivalistic element won the battle, and as history has demonstrated, thus saved the Dutch Church from complete extinction in America.⁴

Of special importance was the spread of this revival to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. A Presbyterian minister, William Tennent, had moved to Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, and built a log cabin in his yard which he used to train his three sons and fifteen other young men for the ministry, instructing them in languages, logic and theology—meanwhile imbuing them with evangelical passion.⁵ The young men who graduated from his Log College were all revivalistically minded, and none more so than young Gilbert Tennent. Frelinghuysen gave all possible encouragement to Tennent, and it was not long until his youthful enthusiasm, unconventional methods and fiery zeal aroused the same resentment among the older Presbyterian clergymen that had occurred among the Dutch churches. The young revivalists formed the New Brunswick Presbytery in 1738 composed of five of their group, a strategy which the conservatives immediately recognized as a ploy whereby the revivalists might ordain men of their own disposition. The Old Side conservatives, as they were called, countered by acting at synod in 1738 to require that ordination be limited to those graduated from a New England or European college. Whereupon, the New Side Presbytery coolly proceeded to ordain one of its own men, John Rowland, a Log College graduate. The Old Side then countered by declaring young Rowland's licensure illegal, and tempers of all were now at white heat. Gilbert Tennent then preached in March of 1740 a sermon which, depending upon one's viewpoint, can be called one of the most famous, or ill-famed, sermons of the colonial era. It was entitled "On the Dangers of an Unconverted ministry," and it lashed out against the "ungodly" ministry of the Old Side, referring to them as "caterpillars" which "devour every green thing."⁶ The sermon was widely published and possibly was received so disagreeably because,

4. *Ibid.*, 27.

5. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 140.

6. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, 159.

as Olmstead has observed, it was painfully true.

. . . it did point up an issue of considerable importance. Should a vital experience of regeneration be prerequisite to church membership and should ministers be required to affirm some inward call to preach before receiving ordination? . . . The conservatives were scarcely in a position to agree. Many had entered the ministry without ever undergoing a spiritual crisis; some had been guilty of immoral practices.⁷

The synod of 1741, still having an Old Side majority, thereupon acted to expell the revivalistic New Brunswick Presbytery. American Presbyterianism was thus split until 1758, when the patient good will of the revivalistic party succeeded in securing a reunion, principally because all of the growth, life and future prospects of Presbyterianism was with the New Side, and because the conservatives were heading for eventual death.⁸

The New England phase of America's first revival began in the church at Northampton, Massachusetts, pastored by Jonathan Edwards, a young man with one of the finest minds America has produced. He had assumed the full duties of that pastorate in 1729, at which time it appeared to him that the town was "very insensible of the things of religion."⁹ By 1733, however, the youth of the town were beginning to respond to Edwards' pastoral advice and preaching. The next year he detected a general anxiety about religion, and in consequence of some sermons on the subject of justification by faith, there followed, as he put it, "a very remarkable blessing of heaven to the souls of the people of this town."¹⁰ The conversion of a youthful sinner of some reputation heightened the tempo of religious fervor and Edwards declared:

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: it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy; and yet so full of distress as it

7. *Ibid.*, 160.

8. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 142-43.

9. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 17.

10. *Ibid.*, 18.

was then. . . . Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, every one earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister¹¹

In 1738, Edwards described the revival in a treatise entitled, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* The brochure was widely read, in England as well as New England, and undoubtedly contributed to the spread of the revival from mere ripples in the frontier community of Northampton until it reached all of New England and particularly, Boston.

In his scholarly study entitled, *The Great Awakening in New England*, Edwin Scott Gaustad describes the practical invasion of the churches of the standing order in New England by George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport. Whitefield was the first of the itinerants to arrive there and was by far the greatest. A friend of the Wesleys in England and an Anglican of Calvinistic bent, Whitefield was very broad in his sympathies and addressed himself to those of all denominations. New England was ripe for the appearance of just such a revivalist. "Into an atmosphere electrified with expectancy and emotion Whitefield came, bristling, crackling, and thundering," according to Gaustad's vivid description of the scene and the evangelist.¹² It is true that Whitefield was unprepossessing in appearance, but he had a magnificent speaking voice, one which Benjamin Franklin calculated was capable of reaching a crowd of 25,000 out of doors.¹³ The amazing success of Whitefield in New England is doubtless partly due to the contrast which his preaching presented to that of the stolidly reasoned, dull preaching New England was used to. In Whitefield, one heard the free-flowing eloquence of a young and impassioned orator. His sermons were simple and logical and their strong emotional appeal singled out the hearer. He arrived in Boston during September, 1740 and preached first at King's Chapel, the Anglican meeting-house, next in the South Church

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 25.

13. Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, 107.

and before the week was out, he addressed 8,000 gathered on Boston Common. After a short trip to towns north of Boston, he was back in the Bay city on October 12th, when a crowd of 30,000 heard him. An observer commented, "great numbers in this town were so happily concerned about their souls, as we had never seen anything like it before, except at the time of the general earthquake."¹⁴

The next weekend, Whitefield visited Jonathan Edwards' church, preaching several times there, about which he wrote:

Dear Mr. Edwards wept during the whole Time of Exercise.—The People were equally, if not more affected, and my own soul was much lifted up towards God. In the Afternoon the Power encreased yet more and more. Our Lord seem'd to keep the good Wine till the last. I have not seen four such gracious meetings together since my Arrival. My Soul was much knit to these dear People of God, and, tho' I had not Time to converse with them about their Experiences, yet one might see, that for the most Part, they were a gracious tender People¹⁵

Whitefield was not as complimentary about other ministers in New England, most of whom, he had decided, were unconverted. These sentiments became known, and he left both friends and enemies behind him. A few months later, Gilbert Tennent spent three months on a preaching tour of New England, covering much more territory than Whitefield. Great crowds greeted him everywhere, especially at Boston, but Charles Chauncey, minister of the First Church, was developing a strenuous dislike of revivalism and he began to move heavy guns in place to fight the revivalists. Many of the other ministers were also annoyed by Tennent's mannerisms and his habit of thrusting "the Nail of Terror into Sleeping Souls," as he called it.¹⁶ That itinerant preachers should presume to come to New England so that people there might have the gospel seemed to Chauncey and his friends an insult to their own ministry. They especially disliked the emotional excesses which were developing. "Physical demonstrations were common in many communities;

14. Gaustad, *op. cit.*, 27-28.

15. *Ibid.*, 28.

16. *Ibid.*, 36.

strong men fell as though shot, and women became hysterical," according to Willaim Warren Sweet.¹⁷ The itinerant evangelists were inclined to encourage this sort of thing, especially James Davenport of Long Island, who was so extreme that he was finally arrested and ejected.¹⁸ There seems no doubt that Davenport was actually psychotic, and friends of the awakening in Boston were most anxious to disassociate the revival from him.

By 1741, New England Congregationalism was splitting into two camps over the question of revivalism and its theological implications. Edwards preached a sermon at Yale in that year, entitled, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God," which called for the awakening to be recognized as divine in origin. Chauncey countered by printing in 1742 a work entitled, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*. The two opposing parties soon made the air reverberate with controversy, and the revival was in this atmosphere being rapidly quenched.

In 1746, Jonathan Edwards wrote a brilliant defense of the necessity of emotion in religion entitled, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, which contended that "true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections."¹⁹ I am bold to assert (he declared) that there never was any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any person . . . that had not his affections moved."²⁰

By 1746, all of the excitement of the awakening had subsided, but the friends of revivalism could point to a greatly changed religious character in New England:

Everywhere there were evidences of concern and repentance. There were more people in attendance at church services than before and more were remaining afterward to discuss personal anxieties with the minister. Numerous meetings for prayer and discussion were being held in private homes; such meetings often led to some renewed evangelistic effort in the community. Young people in particular were eager to participate in lay preaching and personal evangelism. . . . Public morals also showed signs of elevation.²¹

17. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 133.

18. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, 169-70.

19. Gaustad, *op. cit.*, 97.

20. *Ibid.*, 98.

21. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, 168.

In the doctrinal discussion that followed the revival, Chauncey and his followers veered more and more into Arminian viewpoints, emphasizing human freedom and responsibility to an extreme which ended in Unitarianism. Edwards and his school valiantly defended Calvinism against the thrust of Arminian views, while at the same time making room for the use of means in revivalism. Edwards' great work, *The Freedom of the Will*, left some room for moral responsibility and human choice, which, although it appeared infinitesimal, constituted a modification of historic Calvinism, giving larger recognition to man's responsibility and led to what was called the new Divinity, or Edwardianism. The revival had thus stimulated thought, which, carried on in some bitterness, quenched the awakening. A fifty year period of dullness ensued before America experienced another lift in its religious life.

III. THE SECOND AWAKENING

To understand the second period of awakening, it must be remembered that it was not only a boisterous frontier revival of the West, but also an awakening which profoundly moved cultured sophisticates of the East. It was first seen among the latter, as rippings of spiritual renewal began to appear in Atlantic seaboard colleges. By 1795, the returning tide of spiritual concern was also seen at Yale College, where in that year Timothy Dwight assumed the presidency. Lyman Beecher, a student there, found his classmates openly profane, intemperate and affected by Deism and other forms of infidelity.²² Meeting the students on their own grounds, Dwight launched a series of sermons and lectures which touched upon the serious questions of religion and life. His sermons were based both upon philosophy and scripture, and they were of the type that stirred both the mind and the heart. By 1802, a third of the student body was professing conversion, and moral conditions on the campus were much improved.²³

The figure which emerges most clearly as the leader of the frontier revival is a rough-hewn Scotch-Irish Presbyterian

22. Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 5.

23. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 226.

named James McGready. As a young licensed minister just out of a log college, he was successful in stirring up a revival in the Carolinas. He also aroused bitter opposition, being accused of "running people distracted" and of "diverting them from their occupations."²⁴ When his opponents ripped the pulpit out of his church and burned it, and later sent him a threatening letter written in blood, he left the region and settled across the mountains in Logan County, Kentucky. There he was the pastor of three Presbyterian churches in which his energetic preaching and pastoral care led to the appearance of the Cumberland Revival. Zealous Methodist and Presbyterian preachers joined McGready in his efforts to awaken the rough frontiersman, and the revival they sponsored gathered inexorable strength in the years from 1797 to 1800. A meeting in one of McGready's churches in June of 1800 produced great excitement, after a Methodist preacher had shouted and exhorted so that many were led to profess conversion.²⁵ News of this meeting spread surprisingly, so that when the next was announced, settlers assembled from far and wide, bringing provisions for several days' stay. That meeting, in 1800, is usually pointed to as the birth of the camp meeting. It led directly the next year to the colossus of camp meetings, the famous Cane Ridge meeting, in Bourbon County, Kentucky, where from ten to twenty thousand persons were in attendance. Although this meeting was originally set up by the Presbyterians, it actually proved to be an interdenominational work in which both Methodist and Baptist preachers joined. Hundreds are said to have been converted at this meeting in a few day's time.²⁶

Camp meetings were effective because they so satisfactorily met a dual need of people. "Going to camp meeting was a high point in the social, as well as the religious life of the pioneer, and no one wanted to miss it," as Sweet has observed.²⁷ Hordes of curiosity seekers and scoffers also felt

24. *Ibid.*, 227.

25. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 35.

26. Olmstead, *op. cit.*, 259.

27. William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture 1765-1840* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 149-50.

its power, finding themselves captivated by the emotion-packed scene, the stern exhortations of the preachers and the camp meeting songs.

Due to the emotional excesses and physical seizures which beset so many at the Cane Ridge meeting, the Presbyterians thereafter began to withdraw their support. Baptists and Methodists found emotionalism no impediment, however, since camp meetings were proving so powerful a means of conversion. The impressiveness of some of the night camp meetings can be judged from the following contemporary description :

The glare of the blazing camp-fires falling on a dense assemblage . . . and reflected back from long ranges of tents upon every side; hundreds of candles and lamps suspended among the trees, together with numerous torches flashing to and fro, throwing an uncertain light upon the tremulous foliage, and giving an appearance of dim and indefinite extent to the depth of the forest; the solemn chanting of hymns swelling and falling on the night wind; the impassioned exhortations; the earnest prayers; the sobs, shrieks, or shouts, bursting from persons under intense agitation of mind; the sudden spasms which seize upon scores, and unexpectedly dashed them to the ground; all conspired to invest the scene with terrific interest, and to work up the feelings to the highest pitch of excitement.²⁸

The Methodists deliberately set about to tame and organize the camp meeting, however, as a means of building the church. How they did this, Charles A. Johnson has clearly and sympathetically described in a scholarly work published in 1955, entitled, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time*.

Familiar objections were soon raised against frontier revivalism. The evangelists were accused of deliberately exciting people in order to convert them. Old School Presbyterians opposed such human efforts as being a presumptuous interference with the Holy Spirit's prerogatives, whose sovereign work it was to accomplish conversion as a response to cool, rational proclamation of gospel truth. The New School

28. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 229.

Presbyterians, under constant fire from their brethren, were forced therefore to justify themselves in some degree for the measures they allowed. In doing so, they made more concessions which amounted to the erosion of classic Calvinism, particularly with respect to the doctrines of divine election and atonement. The great revisionists of Calvinism, however, were Nathaniel W. Taylor and Charles G. Finney.

Taylor, a Congregationalist and first Professor of Theology at Yale Divinity School in 1822, worked out an intricate system of theology which affirmed man's ability to repent and practically guaranteed his salvation if he would.²⁹ Taylor's position fully emphasized man's responsibility for his own sin, and made his salvation depend upon free agency to reject or accept.³⁰ For these unorthodox views, Taylor came under attack in 1825, the same year that Charles G. Finney began his spectacular rise from local to national fame as an evangelist.

Finney had been ordained as a Presbyterian minister, despite his reservations about the Westminster Confession. He was so successful as an evangelist that few could long hold out against the theological impropriety of the new measures he was using, measures which seemed to make salvation almost as much a matter of human agency as of the divine. Lyman Beecher attacked him at first for his use of the so-called "anxious bench," the inquiry room and his protracted meetings. Others objected to Finney's custom of allowing woman to pray aloud in meeting, an innovation which their usefulness in converting souls.

these revivalistic means Finney justified on the basis of often resulted in sinners being prayed for publicly. All of

As a revivalist, there have been few greater than Finney. His striking appearance, the inescapable grip of his piercing eyes, and his powerful combination of logic and emotion in preaching seemed to spellbind the congregations who heard him. Finney was especially significant, however, in that he caused his hearers to realize their volitional responsibility toward gospel truth. In doing so, he was constantly liberalizing theology and developing a higher doctrine of man. Mc-

29. Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 84.

30. Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture*, 200.

Loughlin has perceptively described, while perhaps slightly overemphasizing, what had happened in the first century of revivalism:

The essence of the old revival tradition can be seen in Jonathan Edwards' almost incredulous wonderment in 1735 at the 'surprising work of God' which brought about 'the conversoin of many hundred souls in Northampton' in the opening phase of the First Great Awakening. Exactly one hundred years later Charles Finney wrote quite matter of factly after the stirring awakenings in which he had participated from 1825 to 1835 that a revival 'is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.' The difference between Edwards and Finney is essentially the difference between the medieval and the modern temper. One saw God as the center of the universe, the other saw man. One believed that revivals were 'prayed down' and the other that they were 'worked up.'³¹

This is a bit unfair to Finney, as it practically impales him as a Pelagian. It is true, nonetheless, that revivalism became a perennial feature of much of American church life as a result of Finney's successes.

IV. THE THIRD AWAKENING

In 1857, a layman's prayer movement in New York City suddenly burgeoned, until by early 1858, twenty prayer groups were being crowded out with concerned people. Various denominations took up the method, and the churches began to be filled almost spontaneously with seekers and converts. The movement was especially significant in igniting groups of young Quakers who had earlier begun meeting in small Bible study circles. Although Quakers in America had remained coolly aloof from the first two awakenings, they thus began to be profoundly affected after 1860, as spiritual life grew out of the small circles to affect the denomination as a whole.

This third awakening was outstanding as a layman's movement, and significantly, the great revivalist of the era

31. William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), 11.

was a lay preacher, Dwight L. Moody. The decided changes that were taking place in American life were not lost upon Moody, and he set about to capitalize upon them for the salvation of souls. Among the more obvious of these were the vast growth of capitalist economy, the increasing mobility of the population, the expansion of communications, the progress of science, and especially the transition from an agrarian to an industrial form of life, resulting in the amassing of population in great urban centers. Thus, while Finney spoke to his ten thousands, Moody saw the need and opportunity of speaking to millions. After initial success in England, he returned to America in 1875 and began the great campaigns for which he was famous in the following two decades. Vast sums of money were required, especially to erect the tabernacles capable of seating huge crowds, but there seemed no lack of wealthy business entrepreneurs who were anxious to back the Moody campaigns, among whom were J. Pierpont Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, John Wanamaker, Cyrus McCormick, George Armour and Jay Cooke.³²

The emotional excesses typical of earlier revivals were absent from Moody's vastly successful campaigns. He and Sankey distinctly discouraged all hysterical excitements and noise, yet both of them knew how to use emotion in warming up a meeting or in drawing seekers to the inquiry room. Moody's era was a sentimental one in which audiences enjoyed a good cry, and Sankey's famous solo, "Where is My Wandering Boy Tonight," was representative of others which touched tender spots in parents' lives as well as the wandering boy.³³ Moody himself seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of heart-rending stories illustrating the softening effects of conversion upon the hardened and wayward. His impassioned, biblically-oriented preaching utilized such stories with telling effect as his crowded inquiry rooms bore witness.³⁴

Moody made no attempt to theologize about revivals as Finney had, mainly because it was unnecessary. By the 1870's

32. *Ibid.*, 224-25.

33. *Ibid.*, 234-36.

34. *Ibid.*, 239.

and 1880's the terms Calvinist and Arminian were becoming so blurred that few were inclined to quarrel with Moody's statement, "I am an Arminian up to the Cross; after the Cross, a Calvinist."³⁵ The fact that multitudes were responding to Moody's dramatic call for a "change of mind" or an "about face" seemed to make theological quibbling irrelevant. But his habit of comparing repentance to a voter's decision also tended to make revivalism seem somewhat like electioneering for God's party, and thus the door was opened wider to the technique of such a barnstorming campaigner as Billy Sunday.

The use of means, catch-devices and specialized techniques had been steadily developing since the days of Finney, but it was Billy Sunday who frankly added showmanship to the revivalist's repertory. Unquestionably a sincere man, he began his rise to prominence about 1895 as a lay preacher with no theological training and no formal schooling beyond the twelfth grade. Nonetheless, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Chicago in 1903 after a few perfunctory questions by an examining board, which passed him on the ground that God had obviously ordained him.³⁶ By 1905, he was developing a coatless, tieless, rolled-up-sleeves, pulpit-pounding, highly dramatic form of evangelism which seemed just to suit the naive age to which he preached. His gross improprieties of speech, theatricalities and his stage impersonations made his audiences laugh, cry, cheer and applaud as at a master showman, which indeed he was and of course, more.

Sunday claimed to have converted over a million people,³⁷ and by his definition of the term, the number is probably true. He carried the secularization of the salvation process further than any previous revivalist by his nonchalant equating of salvation with decency, manliness and patriotism as well as by his tendency to depreciate a personal crisis experience in favor of simple decision.³⁸ In this he had departed far from the deep pietism which was involved in the conversions that

35. *Ibid.*, 246.

36. *Ibid.*, 408.

37. *Ibid.*, 415.

38. Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 253-54.

Jonathan Edwards sought. Sunday declared, "What I want and preach is the fact that a man can be converted without any fuss."³⁹ He agreed that the work of the Holy Spirit was required in the transformation of a sinner, but unlike his predecessors, Moody and Finney, Sunday saw no use for the inquiry room with its anguished contrition and prayer. His technique of conversion was epitomized by the famous slogan, "hitting the sawdust trail," by which swarms of slightly mesmerized people were exhorted to come down, shake the great spellbinder's hand, and sign the decision card. That many did go beyond this superficial beginning to the reality of faith and dependence upon God for a gracious experience of conversion there can be little doubt, but the method does seem to have opened an easy door into the kingdom of God, and it is little wonder that many began to ask if Billy Sunday's hugely expensive city campaigns were worth their cost when their permanent results were soberly reckoned up. By the early 1920's, there was mounting criticism of Sunday's shallowness, his attacks upon ministers and church members, his superficial handling of inquirers, his over-emphasis upon statistics and his high pressure method of obtaining large free-will offerings. By the close of his life in 1935, big-city evangelism had been dead for a decade, for it had been that long since ministers could be found who would back Sunday's mass revivalism.

V. THE FOURTH AWAKENING?

Historians as widely diverging in theological viewpoints as William G. McLoughlin, Jr. and J. Edwin Orr now declare that another great awakening is in process.⁴⁰ Orr accounts for the signs of awakening that have marked Billy Graham's efforts in Edwardean terms, i.e., he recognizes them as primarily operations of the Spirit of God, although he acknowledges human leadership involved.⁴¹ McLoughlin sees awakenings as developments following "the re-examination and redefinition of the nation's social and intellectual

39. McLoughlin, *op. cit.*, 433.

40. *Ibid.*, 10, and J. Edwin Orr, *Good News in Bad Times: Signs of Revival*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), Introduction.

41. Orr, *op. cit.*, 250-51.

values which must take place from time to time in order to maintain a balance between tradition and change."⁴² Thus, "the essential characteristics of modern revivalism since 1825 has been its effort to adjust the theological, ethical, and institutional structure of Protestantism to the changes in American culture."⁴³ This explanation applies more closely to revivalism than it does to a spiritual awakening, which McLoughlin was not really concerned with in his study of modern revivalism. Both the terms revivalism and awakening seem applicable to Graham's work. He has managed to utilize many of the mass evangelism mechanics developed by Billy Sunday, but Graham has used them with a becoming dependence upon grace in which he as the evangelist has remained determinedly modest. He has rigorously avoided theatrics and succeeded in keeping his message foremost while still presenting a personable image to the public. To this observer, he appears to have arrested the drift toward secularization which Billy Sunday seems not to have recognized in his own ministry. Moreover, Graham has avoided the near-Pelagianism of Sunday by providing machinery in which the inquirer is seriously counselled with and followed-up by referrals to the churches. While Graham's campaigns are as expensive as any of Sunday's, by organizing the Billy Graham Evangelistic Crusade and putting himself under salary, it is unlikely that Graham will ever be suspected of being a millionaire, as was Billy Sunday.⁴⁴

VI. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF REVIVALISM

At this point it would appear timely to suggest that America's great awakenings cannot be explained solely in terms of social history and psychology. Past efforts to do so have always fallen short, and it is necessary to acknowledge that gracious operations of the Spirit of God upon society and upon individuals were involved. It is this truth that exposes the chief weakness of nineteenth and twentieth century revivalism. The emphasis upon the "right use of means" and Finney's opinion that revivals were not miraculous

42. McLoughlin, *op. cit.*, 7.

43. *Ibid.*, 523.

44. *Ibid.*, 447.

in any sense made it appear that an evangelist could almost produce awakenings at will. Theoretically, this put God at the revivalist's command, and it surely left men exposed to the temptation of pride. This is not to charge Finney or Moody with the wrong use of means, but it does appear to indicate the route by which later professional revivalists went astray and brought the movement into disrepute.

A second weakness in revivalism can be seen in the fact that as it grew more and more difficult to produce conversions, the professional revivalists resorted to a decision ritual of hand-shaking and card-signing. The law of diminishing returns was working against them, forcing such men as Billy Sunday to ever more feverish activity in order to stimulate a society rapidly becoming habituated to revivalistic routines.

A third weakness which has characterized all periods of American revivalism was the temptation to operate under the proposition that the end justifies the means. Novel and extreme techniques imposed upon eighteenth century Presbyterians and nineteenth century Quakers provoked alarm, embarrassment, shock and schisms. Probably there will always be defenders of extreme means where the conversion of sinners is concerned, but C. E. Autrey, Professor of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, appears to be upon the ground of truth in his declaration that "the soul winner must respect the rights of others, even the right to die in their sins if they persist."⁴⁵

A fourth fault which has no *necessary* connection with revivalism but which has marked the twentieth century variety is a curious blindness to Christian social responsibility. In his scholarly volume, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 1957, Timothy L. Smith has carefully documented an array of social concerns and activities which developed immediately out of Finney's revivalism and the perfectionist evangelism of the mid-nineteenth century. But revivalism in the early twentieth century contented itself with reacting against modernism and the social gospel as though there was no hope for Christianizing society, or relieving the hurt of humanity.

45. C. E. Autrey, *Basic Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 133.

A fifth weakness of revivalism is often pointed to, in that from the days of Moody onward, it was the church people who crowded out the huge city auditoriums, rather than the non-churched masses. Billy Graham's own follow-up experts have admitted that an average of sixty percent of decisions made at his meetings were by church members.⁴⁶ If even forty per cent of those making decisions at Graham's meetings are from outside the churches, however, it would seem that he has made significant gains. His critics point to surveys which show that many of these converts never appear in the churches, but the conclusions drawn from the surveys are faulty, as is apparent to anyone who looks at them closely.⁴⁷

The strengths of revivalism can be pointed out in several areas:

Its chief power lies in its individual approach, laying the Christian message before men with the necessity of a personal response. European religion had been principally institutional, but that method proved ineffective in America. As democratic individualism grew in the colonies during the eighteenth century, so grew also the power of personalized religion. A corollary of this pietistic approach has been pointed out in Sweet's observation that "to personalize religion is to emotionalize it."⁴⁸ Every awakening has been attacked because it was emotional, but emotion cannot be separated from a personal relationship with God. Jonathan Edwards put this entire matter on firm theological and intellectual ground in his treatise on *Religious Affections*. Revivalism proved effective in bringing men into warm and satisfying relationship with God.

Secondly, revivalism which has issued in a spiritual awakening has again and again produced a corresponding moral improvement of society. There is evidence of a moral revolution in New England following the first awakening, and the power of revivalistic religion against the moral barbarism of the American frontier has been documented again and again by critical historians.

46. McLoughlin, *op. cit.*, 515.

47. *Ibid.*, 516-519.

48. Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, xii.

Thirdly, revivalism was useful in meeting the need of American churches for members. In colonial Virginia, one settler in twenty was a church member,⁴⁹ and in Massachusetts, the ratio was only one to eight.⁵⁰ In the nineteenth century, also, the population curve was often soaring beyond that of church membership. Revivalism proved a potent means of ushering large segments of these masses into church fellowship. Declining returns were observed among the laboring classes during the third awakening, however, and by 1920, big-city evangelism was producing very small gains.

Yet, it can be said that revivalism has been potent in the quiet growth of a number of small denominations in America in the past half century. Such revivalism has not exhibited the brassy mechanics, the showmanship and specialized techniques of the professional evangelists; it has sought to deal very seriously with the spiritual problems of inquirers; it has kept ends and means in the right relationship, and in the past decade it has shown an increasing social awareness. Most important of all, it has retained the impact of a personalized presentation of the Word of God. As long as such conditions exist, the potential of a great awakening exists. The potential lies not in dazzling techniques, but in the power of truth to awaken individuals. God's method is men, and it is altogether unpredictable how far the flame of one awakened individual may expand.

VII. CONCLUSION

Meanwhile, the Church stands seriously in need of renewal, if it is to make a significant impact upon America's massively indifferent, materialistically preoccupied society. Revivalism alone merely represents a chipping away at the secular monolith. The entire church must become engaged in the task, and the most hopeful sign toward that end is to be seen in what is happening in small, private gatherings for fellowship and study of the Scriptures. Actually, the first spiritual awakening in America can be traced to just such groups in Germany, where the seventeenth century Pietist,

49. Sweet, *Story of Religion in America*, 5.

50. Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, 18.

Phillip Jacob Spener, formed small groups he designated as *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. In these tiny groups, prayer, Bible study and fellowship had a magnified impact which produced spiritual renewal and power. Elton Trueblood has long urged this type of redemptive fellowship. More recently, a provocative volume by Robert A. Raines entitled, *New Life in the Church*, 1961, relates how the establishment of such Koinonia Groups in his church led to religious awakening, conversion, discipline and the emergence of a lay ministry anxious to share its new life with those outside the church. What is especially attractive as one views these Koinonia Groups is the obvious working of the Holy Spirit, producing warmth, spiritual insight, and tenderness of soul which cannot be accounted for by any mere psychological or social rationale. It is a form of pietism out of which revivalism sprang, but its special virtue is that it emphasizes personalized religion in a context of fellowship. It is new life in the church and therefore is encouraging, for separated believers have little hope of making headway in the spiritual recovery of America.